

Roland Hardenberg (Ed.)

APPROACHING RITUAL ECONOMY

Socio-Cosmic Fields in Globalised Contexts



RESSOURCENKULTUREN Band 4

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ROLAND HARDENBERG

Introduction

The Study of Socio-Cosmic Fields¹

Keywords: Religion, economy, values, India, Kyrgyzstan, globalisation

‘Certainly, there are more values of things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your market philosophy’ (Sahlins 2013, 170, emphasis by author).

‘The office of the chief held a nodal position, since it stood between the living, who were considered the existing guardians of the chieftom, and the ancestral spirits, who had absolute power over the former. [...] Thus the prosperity and welfare of the living were believed to depend directly on good relations with the ancestors’ (Kallinen 2014, 156).

The Argument

This introduction addresses certain problems in studying ritual economies and introduces a concept that may help to overcome the classical distinction between two domains, religion and economy. Anthropology offers a long tradition of studying societies, which apparently do not separate a religious from an economic domain. The classical example stems from Elsdon Best (1909, 438–440) and concerns the Maori *hau* that circulates in various transactions and pervades peoples and objects. On the one hand, anthropologists such as Louis Dumont (1977) and more recently David Graeber (2011) have shown that our commonsensical (as well as scientific) distinction of religion

¹ Most papers in this volume are the outcome of an international summer school on ‘Religion as Resource – Local and Global Discourses’ (18.–20.07.2014) organised by Dr. Vibha Joshi and Dr. Andrea Luithle-Hardenberg at the University of Tübingen. We are grateful to the Collaborative Research Centre 1070 RESSOURCECULTURES and to the German Research Council (DFG) for the financial support of research, writing and publishing the scientific results of our joint work in this volume.

and economy has come into being through specific historical developments in the West. On the other hand, Western societies are not unique in separating different domains of action. The most well-studied concepts in this regard are perhaps the Indian notions of *artha* and *dharma*. These show certain similarities with economy and religion yet also imply various other meanings and values (Dumont 1980a, 196). Furthermore, through the global spread of Western modes of thought, the distinction between religion and economy as well as the very contents of these categories are continuously interacting with local ideas thereby creating various hybrid notions. It is therefore often impossible to distinguish an outsider's from an insider's conception of religion and economy or to define these concepts from any elevated, non-involved point of view.

These obstacles obviously also stand in the way when studying the relationship between religious and economic actions, i.e. ritual economies. In recent years, different approaches to study these phenomena variously called 'ritual economy', 'moral economy' or 'human economy' have been proposed, yet all of them seem to face the problems mentioned above, i.e. that religion and economy are categories used in science as well as everyday life and are lacking any precise definition.

As an attempt to overcome some of these difficulties I here develop an approach that starts from the following assumptions. Ritual economy deals with exchange² (reciprocity) and provisioning³ (production, [re-]distribution and consumption). These modes of action show cultural variations and involve the use of various resources, i.e. tangible and intangible means that create, maintain or change relationships (Bartelheim et al. 2015). These actions thus derive their meaning from the valued relationships they create, reproduce or alter. I therefore avoid the classification of actions as either 'economic' or 'ritual' because from a comparative perspective actions receive their meaning

2 Exchange as defined here refers to a whole corpus of literature dealing with 'reciprocity' of gifts in the widest sense. Chris Gregory for example writes: 'The concept of 'reciprocity' was an answer to Mauss' question about the obligation to repay to a gift. The word itself gains popular currency with the theories of Polanyi and Lévi-Strauss, but it is in Sahlins's (1972) that the theory of reciprocity reaches its highest point' (Gregory 2009, 287). For Marshall Sahlins, '(r)eciprocity is a between relation, the action and reaction of two parties' (Sahlins 1972, 188). He distinguishes the reciprocity of exchange from the processes of pooling and re-distribution that often require some social centrality and occur 'within' groups (Sahlins 1972, 188).

3 See for example the definition of provisioning offered by Susana Narotsky: 'I want to stress the fact that provisioning is a complex process where production, distribution, appropriation and consumption relations all have to be taken into account' (Narotsky 2012, 77). Here 'distribution' refers to all forms of circulation, including 'exchange'. In my paper, however, distribution rather refers to forms of re-distribution in processes of provisioning.

from realms of valued relationships. Firstly, exchange and provisioning concern the relationships between men and in this case I speak of the social field. Within this social field, exchange and provisioning can be defined as differently valued 'social' actions involving 'social' resources. Secondly, if exchange and provisioning concern the relationships between men and non-men (i.e. all kinds of culturally recognised cosmic forces), they belong to what I call the cosmic field. They can be designated as differently valued 'cosmic' actions involving 'cosmic' resources. What connects these 'social' or 'cosmic' actions with their specific fields are certain values as understood by Louis Dumont (1980b). These values may differ in their cultural content, yet from a comparative perspective they may have a similar social form, i.e. pertain either to individuals (what Louis Dumont calls 'modern' society) or to holistic social entities ('non-modern' society in Louis Dumont's terms; see Dumont 1986).

These two valued fields of action are often not entirely separate but interact and create what I call socio-cosmic fields. The term 'cosmic' is preferred to the word 'religious', partly in order to escape debates about true or wrong beliefs and practices (see below). Presently, on the basis of my own ethnographic experiences in India and Kyrgyzstan, I see two variants of the socio-cosmic field. Firstly, it may be largely undifferentiated, for instance when social and cosmic relationships are intimately linked by actions and can hardly be separated in terms of values and categories, as in the case of my first example from India. Secondly, the socio-cosmic field may be divided into largely autonomous, only partly inter-lapping sub-fields, as in my example from Kyrgyzstan.

Nowadays, these variants are subject to the forces of globalisation. In order to generalise different forms of interaction between a specific socio-cosmic field and externally imposed values I find it helpful to use Andre Gingrich's distinction of three types of reaction (Gingrich 2005, 23): 'foreclosure', 'acceptance' and 'participation'. My Indian example illustrates foreclosure, while in Kyrgyzstan people react towards globalisation with acceptance and participation.

Hau, or the Unity of Religion and Economy

One of the most extended debates about the relationship between religion and economy in anthropology goes back to a Maori informant named Tamati Ranapiri. His knowledge was recorded by Elsdon Best and inspired Marcel Mauss (1966) to put forward his particular theory of the gift based on

the concept of *hau*, a kind of soul or force that seeks to return to its origins. Distinguished anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1987), Raymond Firth (1959), Marshall Sahlins (1972), Annette B. Weiner (1992), Maurice Godelier (1999) and André Iteanu (2004) discussed Marcel Mauss' interpretation. Each of them offered his or her own interpretation of Tamati Ranapiri's statement, yet all seem to agree that the Maori informant intended to explain to Elsdon Best a particular principle of exchange. While Marcel Mauss restricted himself to understand the logic of reciprocity in gift exchange, later commentators pointed out that the text actually connects two different activities: sacrifice by men to the spirit of the forest and exchange of material valuables between men. Marshall Sahlins (1972, 168), for example, holds the view that Tamati Ranapiri intended to exemplify the logic of spiritual exchange in the language of secular transactions. To him, the Maori consider *hau* as a general principle of productiveness or fecundity, a principle that pervades all relations.

While Western people ascribe these relations to two different domains, the religious on the one hand, and the material and economic on the other, the Maori, according to Marshall Sahlins, stress unity: 'It [*hau*] was a category that made no distinctions, of itself belonging neither to the domain we call 'spiritual' nor that of the 'material', yet applicable to either' (Sahlins 1972, 168). This interpretation is certainly appealing to many anthropologists who work in societies where similar concepts (like *barakat*, see Kicherer, this volume) connect domains whose separation Western common (and often scientific) sense takes for granted.

The Creation of the Economic Domain

Karl Polanyi, Marshall Sahlins, Maurice Godelier, Louis Dumont and others have shown how in Western societies economic life was progressively disembedded from social life and turned into a separate realm of thought and action. Louis Dumont (1977), for example, argues that one can discern in the writings of Bernard Mandeville, Smith and Marx how the economic domain became autonomous. He writes: 'Thus, mercantilist literature clearly shows that if a separate domain was to be recognised as economic, it must be carved out of the political domain: the economic point of view demanded to be emancipated from the political. Subsequent history tells us that there was another side to this 'emancipation': economy had to emancipate itself from morality'

(Dumont 1977, 36). Bernard Mandeville's fable of bees is, of course, a good example for the latter form of emancipation.

Concerning the separation of economy from religion, David Graeber (2011) hints at even earlier developments. To him, this separation occurred already in the axial age, i.e. the time roughly between 600 BC and 200 AD. During this time, he argues, a new expansionist war complex developed based on the invention of coinage, the employment of raiding mercenaries, the exploitation of slaves and the rise of impersonal markets born of war. In this atmosphere, two new ideologies developed. On the one hand, the war-slavery complex turned people into strangers and stimulated 'a radical simplification of motives that made it possible to begin speaking of concepts like 'profit' and 'advantage' – and imagining that this is what people are *really* pursuing' (Graeber 2011, 239, orig. emphasis). On the other hand, this inhuman war machinery caused opposition culminating into social movements that put into question the pursuit of material gains and instead developed those influential ideas of transcendence that gave birth to major world religions. 'The ultimate effect', David Graeber writes, 'was a kind of ideal division of spheres of human activity that endures to this day: on the one hand the market, on the other, religion' (Graeber 2011, 249).

Recent ethnographies have shown that such a differentiation of a holistic, non-modern ideology into separate domains ('politics' or 'economy') may occur in an abrupt way as a result of colonial or post-colonial developments and missionary activities. For example, the above quote at the beginning of my introduction comes from a paper by Timo Kallinen in which he describes how the Protestant missionaries in Ghana deliberately tried 'to separate in detail the religious from the political and thus secularize the Asante chieftaincy' (Kallinen 2014, 163). 'Political' in the pre-colonial area includes everything, from divination, rain-making and controlling of witchcraft, that guaranteed the well-being of the people (Kallinen 2014, 155). In my view, the missionaries made an attempt to break up the socio-cosmic field in which the chief held a 'nodal position' (Kallinen 2014, 155) insofar as he connected the living with the ancestors. In Dumontian terms, his relations with the ancestors, who had absolute power, encompassed his relations with people and he was therefore essential for the wealth of the people. According to Timo Kallinen, the disruption had some effect and at present the separation between the chief's 'religious' and 'political' (and in my view also 'economic') functions introduced during colonial times continues to influence the debates about the role of the chief in the modern state.

Another example derives from my own ethnographic work on the king of Odisha in India (Hardenberg 2011). The kings of the Gajapati dynasty used to derive their legitimacy from their close relationships with god Jagannatha ('Ruler of the Universe'), a form of the all-Indian god Vishnu (see Züfle, this volume). The kings controlled the land and the wealth of the temple, performed important ritual services, were the patrons of sacrifice (*yajmana*) for their domain and derived their superiority in the regional structure of rulers from their close relationships with the cosmic realm. In the 19th cent., while the king and his courtly priests disseminated the ideology of the 'Great King' (*maharaja*) as the walking representative of god Vishnu (*calanti Vishnu*) the British never regarded him as a divine being, rather perceiving him as the superintendent of the temple. After the independence of India, the new government officially separated the hereditary ritual and the acquired administrative and economic functions of the king. It was argued that on the one hand his ritual service (*seba*) in the temple is a private or family property, which cannot be dispossessed. On the other hand it was claimed that the temple with its vast properties is not the private possession of the former rulers but a public property, which is entrusted to the king. Since this time the kings are active as managers in a state committee responsible for the finances and administration of the Jagannatha temple. This position is part of an elected government and in case of misconduct the king can be released from his functions (Hardenberg 2011, 153–159). Like in Ghana, a holistic socio-cosmic field was dissected by introducing separate, yet interrelated domains of action.

The Cultural Side of Economics

A major problem when discussing the relation between market or economy on the one hand and religion on the other is that these terms also have a long scientific history and were the subject of various debates. Thus, in anthropology there is no way to ignore the distinction between two radically different perspectives on economy. Without wanting to continue the old battle between formalists and substantivists, I think that many of our arguments – especially in interdisciplinary contexts – are based on the distinction between economy as an embedded process and economy as a universal principle of thought and action.

Relativistic approaches define economy as the social (Sahlins 1972) or culturally (Gudeman 1986) embedded provision of people through production, (re-)distribution and consumption. In the universalist sense, economy can be

understood as a rational allocation of resources to meet needs (Firth 1967) or as a mode of production in the Marxist sense (Terray 1972; Marx 1867). For most anthropologists, I guess, economy is the complex process related to exchange and to provisioning through production, (re-)distribution and consumption. Some anthropologists, and perhaps even a larger number of scholars in economics, political science and sociology, apply economy to that field of activity that is related to the fulfilment of human needs through rational allocation of resources by individuals who strive for at the maximisation of their – however defined – aims.

While it is useful to distinguish these assumptions for the sake of clarity in academic debates, most of our ethnographic descriptions bring to the fore that in daily life these approaches are a matter of perspective and may be combined when analysing concrete cases. Thus, the activities at a shrine in Iran (see Müller, this volume) or a temple in Orissa (see Züfle, this volume) may be interpreted as a process of production, (re-)distribution and consumption, as a rational allocation of resources or as a conversion of different forms of capital.

Cosmic Relations and Rituals

In the cases just mentioned, Iran and India, these activities occur in the framework of a shrine or a temple, concern the relationship with god and could therefore be also studied under the labels of ‘religion’ and ‘ritual activities’.

For comparative purposes, I personally prefer to substitute the term religion by ‘cosmic relations’ because the latter expression also encompasses world-views lacking an established priesthood and elaborate theologies. The term ‘cosmic’ also grasps a view where society is not seen as something distinct and unique to humans but part of a larger cosmos with which people entertain various relations in different contexts of life. We may call this ‘environment’ like Tim Ingold (2000), yet to my mind the expression ‘cosmic’ hints at the wider dimensions of such a worldview. Furthermore, ‘religion’ is a concept used by people themselves to demarcate what is ‘truly’ religious from what is considered to be ‘superstitious’ or ‘false religion’. From an anthropological point of view, however, the ‘religious’ and the ‘superstitious’ both fall into the ‘cosmic’ domain as they regulate the relations between humans and non-humans.

In anthropology, the word ‘ritual’ is used for various types of actions, for example those involving mythical creatures or forces (Turner 1982, 79) that

are based on symbolic communication (Tambiah 1979, 119; Kertzer 1988, 9), that appear as planned or impromptu performances (Alexander 1997, 139), and which have an efficiency (Schechner 1994). Nowadays, mostly polythetic ritual definitions are used, as they allow for the recognition of several features without restricting our understanding of rituals to a uniform set of characteristics (Brosius et al. 2013, 13). To me, not the type of action itself defines a ritual. In my view (see below), any action that concerns the relationship with cosmic forces may be referred to as ritual.

Different Approaches to the Relationship between Religion and Economy

For some time, anthropologists have been trying to overcome the sub-disciplinary boundaries between studies of ‘religion’ (or cosmic field) and ‘economy’ (or social field). This endeavour seems to confront us with two challenges: first, there are those societies in which such ‘realms’ or ‘domains’ are not clearly demarcated or separated; second, we face situations in which people do distinguish activities according to different domains of thought and action we may call ‘religion’ and ‘economy’, yet define them in their own way (e.g. *artha* and *dharma*) and overcome their own distinctions in many contexts. How can we theoretically grasp all these cases that are nowadays studied under the label ‘ritual economy’?

In this context, Max Weber (1922) has been an important reference, as he was among the first to study the relationships between professional status groups (‘Stände’), economic classes (‘Klassen’) and religion. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, refers to Max Weber when he relates elaborate systems of religious beliefs and practices to the strategies of different groups of specialists who compete for clients and access to goods of salvation (Bourdieu 2000, 47).

Another important thinker who paved the way intellectually is the economic historian Karl Polanyi (1944). He showed how economic relations are often embedded in specific socio-cultural institutions. Applying this idea to religious phenomena, Simon Coleman (2005, 340) for example identifies the ‘embeddedness of religion and economy’ in different examples from Africa and India. One of the first who explicitly spoke of ritual economy was Peter Metcalf (1981) in an article of the journal *Man*. In this paper he argues on the one hand that rituals are symbolic meaning systems that cannot be reduced to economic benefits; on the other hand he shows that the variations of certain

rituals are often an expression of the unequal access to economic resources: those who can afford it sacrifice a buffalo instead of a chicken.

More recent discussions on the relationship between religious and economic activities take place under the headings of ‘moral economy’ or ‘human economy’. The term moral economy was coined by the Marxist historian Edward P. Thompson (1971) and popularised by James C. Scott (1976) and Chris Hann (2010) in anthropology. It refers to the relationship between the economy and the specific beliefs, practices and emotions of a community (Hann 2010, 195).⁴ With ‘human economy’ Keith Hart and others (Hart et al. 2010, 5) denote an economy that meets certain criteria of humanity. For our discussion of ritual economy even more significant is David Graeber’s definition of ‘human economy’. To him, this term applies to systems of exchange in which ‘social currencies’ – such as the famous bride price – are used to create, maintain or dissolve relationships between people (Graeber 2011, 158). David Graeber’s reflections on the role of debt in the development of religious systems are therefore extensively quoted in Thomas Widlok’s (2013) recent contribution to ritual economics.

Another current trend in this field looks at the so-called ‘religious commodifications’ (Kitiarsa 2008), i.e. the economic competition between religions and their change under the influence of the market economy.

Further recent contributions to ritual economies are produced within archaeology. Katherine Spielmann (2002), for example, speaks about the ‘ritual mode of production’ when economic activities are caused by ritual obligations, while McAnany/Wells (2008) in their work ‘Dimensions of Ritual Economy’ use the term to denote the reciprocal relations between religious ideas, generalised economic supply and the materialisation of worldviews in rituals.

Ritual Economy as the Study of ‘Socio-Cosmic Fields’

The term ‘ritual economy’ refers to the interaction between a particular definition of ‘ritual’ and a certain understanding of ‘economy’. This, however, implies that ‘ritual’ and ‘economy’ are not defined in themselves, i.e.

⁴ While this book went into final proof reading, a new book on economy and ritual edited by Stephen Gudeman and Chris Hann (2015) came to my notice. It contains many new theoretical considerations and dense ethnographic description. However, given the pressure to publish our own findings the insights of this important new volume could neither be included in my introduction nor in the cases studies discussed by the various authors in this book.

independently of each other, but as two aspects of a whole, so to say as two sides of a coin. This raises the question, what ritual and economy have in common and what distinguishes them. In my view, any answer to this question has to take into consideration all three aspects, i.e. actions, types of relations and values implied by these two analytical terms. To me, it is hardly possible to distinguish ritual from economy on the basis of actions alone. To the contrary, ritual and economic actions often appear quite similar: people are involved in exchange and provisioning, i.e. they produce something (objects, designs, knowledge etc.), which they exchange, distribute and/or consume. These modes of action, exchange and provisioning, show cultural variations and involve the use of various resources, i.e. tangible and intangible means that create, maintain or change relationships (Bartelheim et al. 2015).

To designate one type of action as ritual and the other as economic thus depends on the frame of reference. The most common frame of reference in comparative studies is the distinction between two domains, religion and economy. Certain actions observed in other parts of the world are defined as either religious or economic because they share certain similarities with phenomena that for us define the domains of religion (e.g., praying, priests, churches) or economy (e.g., bargaining, workers, industries). Another frame of reference, which will be used here, comes from the social sciences and is based on the idea that action derives meaning from certain relationships and value systems (Dumont 1980a). From a comparative perspective, these relationships as well as the social form values take can be generalised.

Let me apply this approach to ritual economy. In my view, 'social' actions involving 'social' resources are socially embedded and concern valued relationships between people; I call this the social field. 'Cosmic' actions on the other hand concern the valued relationships between people and cosmic forces and involve 'cosmic' resources; I call this the cosmic field. The term 'field' here is not used in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (2000) as a specialised field of competition, but refers to a realm of action, where exchange (reciprocity) and provisioning (production, [re-]distribution and consumption) are embedded in social and/or cosmic relationships and based on culture-specific values. In other words, in my view the field of valued relationships defines whether something may be called 'social' or 'cosmic' action or resource. On the other hand, the classic topics of economy, i.e. exchange and provisioning are extended to the study of all relationships, social and cosmic.

In my understanding then, actions apply to certain relations (or fields) which are informed by sets of values. In any specific ethnographic context, particular cultural values may initiate, guide or judge actions in each field. For

example, Carolin Maertens (this volume) quotes a speech of the spiritual leader of the global Ismaili community, Aga Khan IV., in which he explains to his audience the importance of opening a new bridge connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In his view, the bridge creates new opportunities for market exchange and social meetings and may thus promote wealth as well as happiness and wisdom. The bridge, in his view, has economic, symbolic and moral value.

From a cross-cultural perspective, not only the cultural contents, but also the social forms of these values can be compared. By 'social form' I mean that values may apply either to individuals or to holistic social entities. Inspired by Stephen Gudeman (2001, 5), one can argue for example that action in each field takes place in two value domains: individualistic market and holistic community. Thus, cosmic action directed at maintaining good relationships with god can be subject to market forces (e.g., demand and supply) linking free individuals or to inherited communal rights and duties. Similarly, taking up Louis Dumont's (1980a; 1980b) and Joel Robbins' and Jukka Siikala's (2014) distinction between modern and non-modern ideologies, action in each field may take the individual or the community as the highest value. For example, in the social field action may be an expression of social obligations or of individual autonomy; in the cosmic field action may serve the realisation of collective well-being or individual salvation. And finally, using Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch's (1989, 24–25) concept of short- and long-term cycles of exchange one can study whether certain actions in each field aim at individual (short-term) or collective reproduction (long-term).

Based on these definitions, a ritual economy approach in my view deals with the dynamic interplay of the social and cosmic relationships, i.e. with socio-cosmic fields. Formulated in general terms, I see two variants of the socio-cosmic field. On the one hand, it may be largely undifferentiated, for instance when social and cosmic relationships are intimately linked by actions and can hardly be separated in terms of values and categories, as in the case of my first example from India described below. On the other hand, the socio-cosmic field may be divided into largely autonomous, only partly inter-lapping sub-fields, for instance when in the context of transformation processes new social and cosmic values gain acceptance, as in my second example from Kyrgyzstan. In the first variant, the cosmic field encompasses the social field in the sense that action between men is ultimately valued in relation to action between men and non-men. The cosmic and the social relations are intimately connected through cycles of exchange. In the second variant, there are competing social and cosmic values. In this case, the social field may be partly autonomous from the cosmic field and both fields may be

subdivided due to different ideas about the 'right' values and relationships. In such a situation, a socio-cosmic field can best be described as a kind of intersection in which various activities continue to connect the social and the cosmic fields.

In my view, both variants are subject to outside influences yet they represent different reactions towards them. My own studies on the subject reveal that Andre Gingrich's (2005, 23) distinction in three types of interaction (foreclosure, acceptance and participation) between local identities with more supra-local influences is helpful. In my Indian example (see below), this interaction leads to 'foreclosure' because faced with the values of globally operating institutions local people try hard to exclude these external influences from their lives. In other cases, as in Kyrgyzstan, we rather observe 'acceptance', sometimes also active 'participation', because in reaction to fundamental transformations people engage with these influences and form new, still fluid constellations of holistic and more individualistic values (see below).

I will now illustrate these general considerations with some observations from my long-term field researches in India and Kyrgyzstan.

The Undivided Socio-Cosmic Field: the Case of the Dongria

My first example introduces the Dongria, an ethnic group in the highlands of Odisha, India, who in many ways serve as an example for millions of Indian tribesmen (Hardenberg 2005). In recent years, the Dongria have come into the international headlines because they have successfully fought against the advance of the British Indian mining company Vedanta with the help of various NGOs. Vedanta intended to exploit the rich bauxite deposits in the mountains of the Dongria. These mountains (*fig. 1*) are the seat of cosmic forces and source of life for the Dongria. They invest a lot of work in the production of exchange values with which they maintain relations with these cosmic forces. Thus, they work in family groups as swidden farmers in their fields belonging to the village as a whole.

There they grow different crops like millet, dry rice, peas, beans, castor bean, pineapple, turmeric and many more. The family consumes part of the products, while most serves the sale or exchange of goods. For example, a Dongria barter castor seeds directly for rice, while delivering turmeric to set prices to state dealers. He sells the self-produced brooms or pineapple harvest to intermediaries from the lower caste of Dombo, who also act as traders in



Fig. 1. Dongria Kond village with hill slopes used for swidden cultivation (Photo by author).

the opposite direction, i.e. they purchase sacrificial animals on the local markets and sell them to the Dongria.

Although the Dongria officially fall below the so-called ‘poverty line’ and therefore are supplied by the State with free rice rations, one can hardly say that they lack exchange values. They use their money and their products on the one hand for ‘short-term individualistic transactions’ (Parry/Bloch 1989, 24), as for the purchase of alcohol and tobacco, jewellery or metal devices. It may also happen that several families pool their money to buy a water buffalo that is slaughtered, cooked and eaten together. The individual value of joy, *rasa*, is central to these transactions.

Most of the money, however, is used for ‘long-term restorative cycles’ (Parry/Bloch 1989, 25), first for creating and maintaining relations with affinal partners, and second for keeping good relations with the cosmic forces. When a Dongria wants to marry, he can either kidnap a woman or reach an agreement with the bride donors in a long-term, often conflict-ridden process. In the latter case, his family must often provide the family members of the bride with considerable amounts of money, grain and animals. Alternatively, the groom may also work one to two years in the fields of his in-laws.



Fig. 2. Head of a buffalo offered to the earth goddess inside the sacrificial house (Photo by author).

The majority of the values produced, however, are circulated in the exchange with the cosmic forces. This ranges from small rituals during illness through consecrations of the house up to costly sacrifices of the whole village for the success of the harvest (fig. 2). The sacrificial animals for the great feasts have to be bought, because one should never sacrifice one's own animals. On these occasions huge amounts of cooked meat and rice as well as alcoholic beverages are provided for the numerous guests. Some festivals are so complex that they are carried out only in large time cycles of several years. Central to these occasions are values such as general well-being (*nehi ane*), fertility (*lahi*) and life (*jiu, jella*), for whose realisation people depend on the cosmic forces.

These examples illustrate the mutual relations in the socio-cosmic field. Work and exchange are a prerequisite for successful harvests and the accumulation of money. The exchange values produced in this way are used in short-term investments for individual consumption, but especially in long-term relationships as offerings to the cosmic forces and as bride gifts to the affines. Maintaining good relationships with the affines is again a prerequisite for keeping up cosmic relationships: the affines are responsible for the great

sacrifices, which are supposed to guarantee the fertility of men and land and thus, – in a circular logic – form the basis of the production of exchange values.

Since some time external institutions have been penetrating this socio-cosmic field. The most important state institution acting in the mountains is the Dongria Kond Development Agency (DKDA). Its aim is to improve the living conditions of the Dongria. In order to develop the economy mainly cash crops like potatoes, pineapple and turmeric have been introduced. However, this did not have the desired effect, because the Dongria did not increase their consumption, but began to circulate the extra money in social and cosmic relations. In particular, the proceeds from the sale of turmeric are spent on ever increasing bride wealth, for fines in cases of conflict and for the large sacrifices.

Cosmic institutions that penetrate into the tribal areas for decades are on the one hand Hindu temples, on the other Christian missions. Hindu temples have their own celebrations, which bring together people in large numbers. Many Dongria come down to the valley in March each year, where they celebrate the night of Shiva (*Shiva Yatri*) in the Devagiri temple. However, the real attraction for them is the festive market at the foot of the temple hill. There they buy sweets, pots and clothes or watch Hindi movies in the cinema tent. Individual cosmic relationships (devotee-deity) and short-term consumer relationships (seller-buyer) determine these brief excursions into the socio-cosmic field of the valley inhabitants.

The Christian missions that in recent decades increasingly penetrate into the tribal areas are completely rejected by the Dongria. As elsewhere, the first who convert to Christianity in this region are the members of low artisan castes and the Dombo. At the foot of the mountains churches have been built and Dombo proselytise actively in the valleys. In a Dongria village I met Dombo who described themselves as Lutheran Christians. The Dongria observed their activities with great suspicion. For example, the Dombo of that village told me that a Dongria filed a case because they had shown a film about the life of Jesus in the village.

In summary one can say that the Dongria have created a scale of values with which they are confronted in a globalised world. The highest values in the socio-cosmic field of the highlanders apply to the whole community and are addressed in long-term exchange relations with men and cosmic forces. This socio-cosmic field encompasses lower values linked to individual interests and realised in short-term exchanges with various human actors as well as with the cosmic forces of the valleys. Excluded from this socio-cosmic field are the values and ideas of large global companies such as Vedanta or

Christian missions, with whom relations are avoided. This 'foreclosure' succeeds only partially, because the Dongria have to work closely with national and international organisations in their fight against Vedanta, and faced in this process with hitherto unknown actors, media and institutions they automatically learn about the values of these. It would be an interesting field of research to examine this relationship between 'foreclosure' and 'participation' in the Dongria's attempt to resist globalisation.

The Divided Socio-Cosmic Field: the Case of the Kyrgyz

A completely different field of tension between local holistic values, locally operating institutions and global forces of the market is reflected in my second research area in the north of Kyrgyzstan. The majority of people living in this region consider themselves to be ethnic Kyrgyz who speak a Turkic language and claim descent from the so-called '40 tribes' of this region.

This area got under the influence of Russian statehood already in the late 19th cent. In the early 20th cent. the nomads, who used to live in the mountains, were forced to settle in villages, then organised in collective economic units at the beginning of the Soviet era and later on trained in kindergartens, schools and universities. Mosques and holy places were destroyed, religious specialists driven out or murdered. The region was divided into new political and administrative units and modernised according to Soviet ideas of progress and development.

With the independence of Kyrgyzstan in 1991, the state-directed economy was replaced by entirely new economic developments. Kyrgyzstan's first president Askar Akayev initiated a rapid privatisation and introduced a free market economy. In the area of my research at the lake Issyk Köl, this meant the dissolution of the collective farms, and since 1994 the privatisation of extensive lands.

Nowadays, many people are engaged in growing cereals or potatoes and in cultivating apricots and apples. Some of the crops are used for subsistence, yet most of it is sold to traders. In August and September Kyrgyz or Russian traders come with 25-ton trucks to the plantations and within a few days buy the whole harvest, which they transport to markets up to Russia. In addition to the production of cash crops, many individual herders continue to drive the horses, sheep and goats of the whole village to the mountain pastures in spring, and back to the villages in fall. During the summer months, tourism provides an additional source of income. Many Kyrgyz who work in Russia

mostly in the construction or services sector send considerable sums of money ('remittances') back home to their family members in the villages. Since the 90s, the Kyrgyz-Canadian Kumtor Company operates one of the largest gold mines in the world in the nearby mountains and offers residents of the region employment and income opportunities.

The values produced in agriculture, tourism, migrant labour and work in the gold mine are nowadays used for various forms of exchange and consumption. The number of shops is growing and supply and equipment have changed significantly. Today all things of everyday necessities can be bought in the villages, from batteries to clothes to mobile units. In cities like Karakol large markets have developed. On Sundays, one of the largest live-stock markets in the country is held in Karakol. Open daily, the trade market abounds in containers, where everything is sold, from fishing equipment to cement (*fig. 3*). These changes are also visible in the villages. Within the villages one immediately notices the new houses with their architectural innovations, coloured roofs and high walls which stand out clearly from the standard grey houses of Soviet times. Inside these houses one increasingly finds products from around the world, not only cheap Chinese goods, but also refrigerators and microwaves from Turkey or TVs from Korea and Japan.



Fig. 3. New container market in Karakol, Kyrgyzstan (Photo by author).

Income from agriculture, private enterprise and wage work is not only used for individual consumption, but also for renewing communal relations, especially at feasts (*toi* or *ash*), which can be of varying degrees: from hosting individual guests to a banquet for hundreds or even thousands of people at a wedding or a memorial service. Such events are based on work and exchange within a dense social network that consists of agnates, matrilineal relatives, affines, neighbours, countrymen, colleagues and former classmates. For all concerned, the feast means a heavy financial burden and often days of work.

While foreign aid workers as well as some local politicians or neo-orthodox Muslims reject such feasts as waste, the organisers emphasise community values: they create peace (*tynchtyk*), generate good relations (*yntymak*), contribute to satisfaction (*yraazy*), and bring honour (*namys*) and prosperity (*kut*) to the people. On many occasions, the participants express their wishes (*kaaloo*), give blessings (*bata*), recite suras of the Quran (*Quran okuu*), and sacrifice animals (*mal soyuu*) in the name of Allah or the deceased. These sacrifices point to the cosmic dimension of feasting. Especially the funeral and commemoration feasts are seen as the fulfilment of obligations (*pars*) towards God, the souls of the dead and the community. *Soop tiisin* – ‘may it bring merit’, is a common wish people express towards the socio-cosmic forces during feasts.

In summary, for over 100 years the people in this part of Central Asia have experienced rapid and often radical changes of their forms of exchange and provisioning. During the Soviet era the cosmic field was ousted from the public realm and subordinated to the social field. For a long time, cosmic relationships could only be maintained secretly in the private realm, for example during funeral feasts performed on behalf of God, the ancestors and the whole community. At present, the situation is changing again due to the activities of external cosmic institutions, particularly various Islamic reform movements as well as Christian denominations. In the following, I want to limit myself to the former, since they are currently being investigated by Louise Bechtold, Yanti Hölzchen and Baktygül Tulebaeva (this volume).

A large number of rural ethnic Kyrgyz understand ‘being Muslim’ as part of their ethnic identity. For some time, however, various actors from Kyrgyzstan and abroad demand reforms of the present religious practices. On the one hand, reformers give importance to the individual’s own desire to turn towards Allah, on the other hand they often propagate specific values, ideas and practices that shape Islam in Arabia or Turkey. These directives, however, often imply a rejection of the main features of Kyrgyz feasting, such as the extensive use of alcohol and meat or the socialising between the sexes. Those

who turn towards reformed Islam often put a strain on their relationships with those relatives and neighbours who do not want to follow the new way of life (see Tulebaeva, this volume). These reformers, however, build up new local communities that are sometimes connected with wider Islamic networks. For example, currently everywhere in the north of Kyrgyzstan internationally active foundations are building magnificent mosques (see Hölzchen, this volume). Religious specialists are trained in universities which are controlled by official institutions such as the Muftiate and Kaziat. Members of the movement *Tabligi Jamaat*, which was originally created in British India, roam the country and invite people to the mosques in order to familiarise them with what they consider to be basic tenets of Islam. The pilgrimage to Mecca, – which had not been feasible during the Soviet era due to travel restrictions – is becoming increasingly popular (see Bechtold, this volume).

These supra-local institutions and movements engage massively in the socio-cosmic field. Being Muslim now implies a departure from local traditions and a personal re-orientation towards reformed Islamic practices. New communities are formed based on the observance of certain rules and restrictions, not on kinship or commensality. Initial observations indicate that the rejection of alcohol and extensive animal sacrifices, the emphasis on discipline, righteousness, generosity and a simple lifestyle as well as the new expectations concerning gender roles have an impact on relations in the social field. In markets, schools, universities and government agencies one can see more and more people whose clothing is interpreted as ‘Islamic’ and associated with honesty and ethical behaviour. The turn towards Islam is thought to bring professional success and wealth because ‘Allah will reward the faithful’. Some of the reformed practices combine with local forms of socialisation. For example, Louise Bechtold observed during her fieldwork in the Ferghana hills of southern Kyrgyzstan that pilgrims after their return from Mecca distributed the holy water to their relatives and co-villagers in a grand feast and thus allowed the whole community to share with them the merits they had acquired individually.

For the time being one can note that state-imposed privatisation and Islamic reform institutions introduce new social and cosmic values. In the social field, local communities and local markets meet, because exchange and provisioning offer besides inclusion in the social networks also opportunities for participating in the consumer market with its growing choice of products. In the cosmic field, local (or ‘traditional’) ideas, values and practices often exist – more or less in competition – with reforms introduced by new Islamic institutions and movements. In the socio-cosmic field these value domains

meet. Income acquired by actions in the social field are, for example, invested in the construction of madrassas or mosques, which provide a local experience of community, but at the same time also access to national and even international Islamic networks. It remains to be seen what cosmic institutions and movements prevail and how their values affect the social field in the long run.

In a very similar situation studied by Ismaël Moya in Dakar, Senegal, the values of Islam – ‘a universal and transcendent order that defines the relationship between the individual and God, without whose blessing (*baraka*) no action or relationship is possible’ (Moya 2015, 167) – have become dominant and define in this society what people should strive for. Yet, on a lower level of the ideology, the continuity of ceremonial exchanges by women shows according to Ismaël Moya the persistence of an ‘unavowed’ value linked to kinship relations. Like in Kyrgyzstan, the locals of Dakar criticise these ceremonial exchanges but continue to practice them, because in the context of community – or kinship – relationships these actions realise a local social value.

This volume

The concept of socio-cosmic fields can help to identify certain dynamics arising from the confrontation of local and global values. This becomes evident in the contributions to this volume, which include case studies from Georgia, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Each paper is based on intensive ethnographic fieldwork and discusses the relationship between social and cosmic fields by focusing on particular forms of exchange and provisioning: preparation of sacred food (*mahaprasad*) in Puri (India), local forms of healing child diseases (*kirene*) in Kyrgyzstan, religious endowments (*vaqf*) in Mashhad (Iran), building new religious schools (*madrassa*) in northern Kyrgyzstan, the distribution of God’s blessing (*baraka*) in Tajikistan, trading and debt relations (*karis*) in Tajikistan, renewal of deities (*nabakalebara*) in Odisha (India), feasting after making a pilgrimage (*hajj*) in southern Kyrgyzstan and forms of consumption and morality (*zneoba*) in orthodox Georgian families. Every contributor to this volume raises the question how these forms of exchange and provisioning establish relations in the social and the cosmic field, how these fields relate to each other and how these relationships are valued.

Louise Bechtold, for example, shows how villagers in southern Kyrgyzstan conduct lavish feasts for their relatives who have returned from a pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca. On this occasion, large numbers of guests are invited and

people exchange various tangible objects, such as clothes, water, animals and food, as well as intangible things, like blessings and religious merits. In her interpretation, the pilgrimage to Mecca represents a movement into a socio-cosmic field that is very different from daily village life in Kyrgyzstan. In Mecca, the pilgrim acquires merits that she or he upon return to the village transfers in various forms to his or her social field, i.e. the various relatives and guests who join the feast. Moreover, feasting and gift giving at a hajji feast is also analysed as a way of sharing the sacredness acquired during the hajj, because through the giving of gifts from Mecca (e.g. Zamzam water) the guests can establish a relationship with God. Louise Bechtold therefore argues that the feast itself turns into a socio-cosmic field in which the same resource can create social as well as cosmic relations. On this occasion, local values become explicit through gift giving and the exchange of blessings (*bata*). The ultimate source of value is the pilgrimage to Mecca, yet economic success, caring, respect, and in general having good relations with many people are similarly values that provide meaning to this lavishing feasting.

In another paper dealing with Kyrgyzstan, Baktygül Tulebaeva shows how such community practices become the focus of critique on the basis of norms and values expressed by followers of the new Islam reform movements that sweep the country. Due to their influence, Islam becomes a 'resource' through which one can follow the 'right way of living'. Islamic scriptures turn into a source of norms (*musulmanchylyk*) for how to behave correctly both in the 'social' and 'cosmic' fields, while traditional practices (*Kyrgyz salt*) are increasingly criticised and de-valued. In Baktygül Tulebaeva's view, 'old' and 'new' Islam have their own socio-cosmic fields that only partly overlap and cause a number of disputes and differences of opinion. She illustrates this with ethnographic data concerning health related rituals and ideas about a healthy lifestyle and comes to the conclusion that in this part of Kyrgyzstan people experience a huge turn-over of their value system.

A third paper addressing the value dynamics in Kyrgyzstan derives from Yanti Hölzchen's fieldwork on religious schools or madrassas (*kirg. medresse*) in urban and rural areas. In her view, such religious schools are paramount examples for socio-cosmic fields because the activities in a madrassa refer to relations between men and between people and god. On the one hand, a madrassa is established and maintained through people's interactions and social networks as well as through people's personal efforts in terms of time, work, and financial means. On the other hand, a madrassa is the place where people acquire the knowledge of how to create relationships with god. The paramount value in this socio-cosmic field is *soop* or merits, which influence

people's life in this world and at the same time determine a person's fate after death. These merits have their ultimate source in an individual relationship with god but are also used – as in the case of the hajj feasts studied by Louise Bechtold – to maintain social relationships. Furthermore, the religious schools provide moral education to the young people and thus contribute from a local point of view to the maintenance of overall prosperity and good community relations. As institutions of wide importance, the newly evolving madrassas are shaped by various national and transnational actors who form – and at times also restrict – the socio-cosmic field. Furthermore, as also described in Tulebaeva's paper, the religious schools penetrate into another socio-cosmic field shaped by Kyrgyz 'traditions' (*salt*). In Yanti Hölzchen's view, the new forms of Islam spread among others by religious schools do, however, not substitute communal values deriving from *salt* but rather subordinate them to the higher relationship between an individual person and god.

The social and cosmic relationships created by endowments to the shrine of Emām Rezā in Mashhad, Iran, form the focus of a paper written by Katharina Müller. According to her observations, people come to Mashhad because of the holy shrine, yet they stay for economic reasons since the city offers many business opportunities. A key player of the city's economic system is the non-governmental organisation named Astān Qods Razavi, which administrates the shrine of Emām Rezā and, perhaps even more importantly, the numerous donations (*vaqf*) of mobile and immobile endowments to the shrine. In her interpretation, the giving of *vaqf* constitutes cosmic relationships: as a right, it was originally granted by god, as an action it is considered to be a form of worship and 'sacred work'. In order to be able to make an endowment, people need to engage in various kinds of activities in the social field in order to accumulate property that can then be handed over in a formal contract. This sets into motion a variety of activities by the endowment administration in order to grow and develop the worth of the donation so that it can be used for various purposes, such as supporting pilgrims, enlarging the shrine or fostering theological and religious education. According to Katharina Müller, the making of an endowment refers to two levels of value. In the social field, endowments are linked to collective values such as social justice, welfare or social security, while on the level of cosmic relations, the situation is reversed: endowments are seen as investments into the individual relationship of a person with cosmic agents who influence their life here and in the afterworld. In her final analysis, she comes to the conclusion that the values pertaining to the cosmic field encompass the values governing the social field.

In her paper on doing business in a remote mountain region of Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan, Carolin Maertens discusses the moral and economic dimensions of debt. She argues that the widespread practice of retail traders and consumers to enter into debt relations is a response to contradictory demands of life in situations of material scarcity: on the one hand, people want to make ends meet, make profits and engage in consumption; on the other hand, they want to be good, moral persons. In a situation where income sources are meagre, many people have turned to retail trade in order to generate income. For various reasons, this retail trade has become largely dependent on debts: clients lack money, things have to be sold before they fall out of fashion and traders have to compete for relatively few consumers. These debt relations often involve kinship relations in the widest sense and thus imply the consideration of various moral-religious values. While the provisioning schemes during the Soviet times did in principle not rest on personal relationships, present day local market relations have, according to the author, become highly personalised. On a macro level, the author identifies a similar conflation of moral-religious and economic ideas in the Ismaili doctrine of Aga Khan IV., to whom faith and world, religion and economy, are inextricably intertwined.

The importance of Aga Khan IV. for linking the social with the cosmic field in present-day Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan is also stressed by Stefanie Kicherer in her paper on the specific elaborations of the 'global Islamic' concept of *barakat* in Bartang, a valley in the Tajik Pamirs. In her view, ideas and values concerning the acquisition and distribution of *barakat* – which she defines as a tangible form of divine power that pervades everyday life – constitute a distinct kind of economy, which intimately connects the social with the cosmic field. As a resource, *barakat* originates in God and can be acquired and transmitted by and to people according to three different principles (intrinsic, proximic and meritic). Actions associated with this *barakat* economy consist in the dispersal of God's power, as well as in attempts to trigger the divine force to give more of its blessing to the mundane world. Recent socio-political changes such as the successive spread of market economy in this post-soviet setting, the author argues, had an impact on the particular modes of acquisition/transmission of *barakat*. However, these changes, according to Stefanie Kicherer, have not substantially destabilised the socio-cosmic field for two reasons. First, even in the past concepts and activities of the *barakat* economy have influenced the way people engaged in activities such as agricultural production and distribution. Under the increasing

influence of Aga Khan IV, who is himself considered to be a holder and genuine source of *barakat*, it became a religious imperative to engage in market economy as well. As a consequence, monetary transactions and market activities, which had before been perceived as contradicting the values of the *barakat* economy, are now pervaded by ideas about *barakat*. Secondly, even seemingly individual-centred efforts for profit maximisation are brought into accordance with the mostly community-oriented values of the *barakat* economy. People are nowadays encouraged to spend large parts of their profits in the name of community development, for example for the education of promising young people who in turn can trigger positive changes.

Another paper addressing a particular constellation of religious ('cosmic') and economic ('social') values is contributed by Annabell Körner who carried out fieldwork among orthodox Christians in the Georgian capital Tbilisi. She identifies 'life with God' as the paramount value of these orthodox Christians. This value refers to an eternal afterlife in paradise as well as to its precondition, i.e. a life according to God's rules in the here and now. For reaching this goal, parents provide their children with a moral education characterised by two aspects: on the one hand, the expectation that religious prescriptions concerning prayer, church attendance, fasting and confession are strictly observed; on the other hand, that they learn a comprehensive morality (*zneoba*) and thereby acquire moral strength and discipline. This paramount value, according to the author, is challenged by values related to Western modernity that make people strive for a lifestyle and the material standards of 'the West'. Annabell Körner argues that in these orthodox Christian families the paramount value of a 'life with God', which is part of a cosmic field and directed towards communication with God, subordinates the values connected with Western modernity that define a social field in which people pursue individual success and material wealth.

Cora Gäbel identifies both variants of the socio-cosmic field described in this introduction in a religious festival celebrated every 19 years in the temple town of Puri in Odisha, India. According to her, the first model of an undifferentiated socio-cosmic field appropriately describes the relationships between the priests of the temple and the many pilgrims who come to attend this festival. The priests renew the images of the main deities enshrined in the temple of Jagannatha and allow the pilgrims to have an auspicious sight (*darshan*) of the deities and partake of their food (*prasad*). For this, the priests receive a 'voluntary' gift (*dakyina*) of money, which enables them to accumulate substantial wealth during this religious event. At the same time, they acquire an elevated status due to their closeness to God, at least as long as they fulfil

their service to the Gods properly. According to Cora Gäbel, the second model of a partly overlapping socio-cosmic field captures well the relationships between the state and temple. Years and months before the effective start of the festival, the state initiated more than hundred different development projects and contributed almost two hundred million euros for the improvement of infrastructure. These measures allowed an estimated 5.8 million people to attend the festival and spend large amounts of money in hotels, restaurants, shops etc. They also improved the living conditions for the city dwellers in the long run. All these activities however, were not purely 'economic' or 'political' but directed towards the smooth conduct of a festival aimed at renewing the cosmic relations between gods and devotees. Furthermore, various conflicts occurred during the festival, which point to the superiority of the cosmic domain. Thus, according to Cora Gäbel criticism was voiced against the state representatives, as well as the ritual specialists for their self-interested behaviour, improper fulfilment of duties and the display of profits. People expressed their discontent when such behaviour occurred in the social field, yet when it concerned the cosmic relationships it was no longer tolerated and openly rejected. In other words, the festival combines social and cosmic relationships in a hierarchical fashion.

The temple of Jagannatha in Puri, Odisha, is also the focus of the Lisa Züfle's contribution. Her paper examines the different value dimensions of sacred food (*mahaprasad*) produced in one of the biggest temple kitchens of India. Every day large amounts of food are cooked in this kitchen as an offering to different gods. After the offering, the food is considered to be charged with divine qualities, which are believed to transform the physical and spiritual well-being of the consumer. The production, distribution and consumption of this sacred food is a complex process involving various categories of temple servitors who act in different places inside and outside the temple. A close examination of this process by Lisa Züfle reveals, that there are two differently valued types of *mahaprasad* most people are not aware of. The first type is produced by cooks who have an inherited right to use a special part of the temple kitchen for producing the food that is offered in an elaborate ritual inside the holy sanctum and later distributed to the temple servitors as a remuneration for their services. The second type is prepared in other sections of the temple kitchen by cooks who have leased the stoves for making large quantities of food to be given to the deities in a reduced ritual inside the hall of offering. This later type of *mahaprasad* is sold on the temple market, mainly to the many pilgrims who visit the temple every day. The shopkeepers on the market have to pay a fee to the temple administration, which

uses this revenue for buying the food materials necessary for making the first type of *mahaprasad*. Thus, the value of *mahaprasad* as a whole derives from the interplay of two different fields of action: on the one hand, the cosmic field in which the food acquires its divine qualities, on the other hand the social field, in which the food turns into a commodity. Both fields are inextricably linked, since the divine quality of food defines its spiritual as well as commercial value, while the tax income generated from its sale secures the material basis for further food production. In Lisa Züfle's analysis, the temple kitchen represents this particular structure of the socio-cosmic field: it is a whole divided into differently valued, yet mutually depend parts.

All these case studies show the complex relationships between activities concerning the social and the cosmic field in Muslim, Christian and Hindu contexts. The approach developed here allows us to study actions that concern certain relations (or fields) between various human and cosmic actors and are informed by sets of values. It deliberately dispenses with the a priori classification of human action as economic, ritual, political, aesthetic, scientific, etc. and instead concentrates on fields of relationships and their interaction only. The hope is that this holistic approach brings to the fore connections between people, their actions, relationships and values, which might not be noticed when organising the data according to conventional categories of action.

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Approaching the Ritual Economy of a Hajji Feast

Resources, Status, and Sharing in Southern Kyrgyzstan¹

Keywords: Zamzam water, feast, Islam, Central Asia, gift exchange, distribution

Introduction

In southern Kyrgyzstan lavish feasts are organised for pilgrims after they come back from their hajj. At these costly events the pilgrim and his relatives host up to a thousand guests and offer a sip of holy water and gifts brought from Mecca to all of them. This paper analyses the ritual economy of a hajji feast in rural southern Kyrgyzstan as a socio-cosmic field where resources are used to gaining social status in the local community and to connect with the divine.

Hajji Feasts in Southern Kyrgyzstan

In the village of Ak Terek² north of Jalal-Abad in southern Kyrgyzstan, where I lived for about a year in 2011 and 2012 to conduct my PhD-research, feasts are very frequent. Ak Terek is situated in an hilly area at the foot of the Fergana Mountains. This region is considered particularly conservative. The village and its surrounding villages are inhabited mainly by Kyrgyz. Its inhabitants

¹ First I would like to thank the hajjis that let me observe their hajji feasts and explained to me in detail their experience of the pilgrimage and the organisation and meaning of the feast that followed it. I am very grateful to the Volkswagen-Foundation for financing my PhD-research on which this paper is based. Thanks for comments, suggestions, and discussions go to (in alphabetical order): Benjamin Bechtold, Roland Hardenberg, Yanti Hölzchen, Stefanie Kicherer, Annabell Körner, Carolin Maertens, Tobias Marschall, Uwe Müller, Baktygül Tulebaeva, and Lisa Züfle.

² I have changed the name of the village to 'Ak Terek' in order to preserve the anonymity of the people described throughout this article.

mainly live from animal husbandry and from remittances of labour migrants working in Russia. Especially in autumn no week passed, when my host mother and I were not visiting a wedding or a commemoration feast for a deceased. These feasts are subsumed under the rubric of *ash-toylor*, which are organised at happy events (*jakshilik*) and sad events (*jamandik*). During autumn everybody is busy organising, preparing, finding money and shopping for these important feasts and celebrations. A feast that has gained special prominence in southern Kyrgyzstan since independence is the hajji feast.

In recent years, doing the hajj has become increasingly popular in Kyrgyzstan. This corresponds with the general tendency of an increasing interest in religion in Central Asia, described by Hardenberg, Hölzchen, and Tulebaeva regarding Kyrgyzstan in this volume. In 2011, 5060 citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic made the pilgrimage to Mecca (Payaz 2013). The hajj is considered as an obligation for every Muslim who has the possibility of performing it. It contributes to the pilgrim's accumulation of religious merits (*soop*)³ and transforms his personhood. Pilgrims from Kyrgyzstan usually travel and perform the pilgrimage in groups of 40 pilgrims, led by a spiritual leader. The pilgrims spend about one month in Saudi Arabia, where they perform the hajj and also visit places of religious significance, e.g. the tomb of Mohammad in Medina. The hajj is performed by millions of pilgrims in unison, who all do the same symbolically and emotionally charged rituals, creating a feeling of *communitas* (Bianchi 2004; Turner 1975).

During the 1930s performing the hajj was officially banned and the southern border of the USSR closed (Nurtazina 2013, 870). Even pilgrimage to holy sites (*ziyarat*) inside the territory of the Soviet Union was prohibited as part of the anti-religious policy. Along with the independence of the Central Asian states in the 1990s pilgrims started visiting holy places openly, and holy sites like Suleyman Too in Osh became popular places of pilgrimage (Zarcone 2012, 254).

When in rural southern Kyrgyzstan a pilgrim (*aji*, often a male elder *aksakal*⁴) returns from his hajj he is welcomed by his relatives with a big feast.⁵

3 The Kyrgyz concept '*soop*' originates from the Arabic '*tawāb*'. It may be translated as 'religious merits' or 'meritorious deeds'.

4 Female hajjis are not all treated similarly to male hajjis upon their return. Their status also depends on the question whether they performed the pilgrimage together with their husbands or not. A study of female hajjis and their position in society is an interesting topic that cannot be dealt with here. In this paper I will restrict my description and analysis of hajji feasts to the ones organised upon the return of male hajjis. Since I am discussing male hajjis only, I will use male forms in referring to them.

5 The hajji feast analysed in this paper is one of three hajji feasts that I was able to study in Ak Terek. In my descriptions I rely on my own participating observation, video material of the

Among the feasts organised in the village of Ak Terek *aji toys* (lit. ‘hajji feast’) were comparable to other big feasts conducted at weddings (*iylönüü toy*), or commemoration ceremonies (*ash*) in terms of the number of guests (up to 1000) and the animals sacrificed (a horse, or a cow). All persons to whom the pilgrim is related in the broadest sense may be invited to his hajji feast. They are offered hospitality, and all of them drink from the holy water from the well of Zamzam⁶ (*Zamzamdyn suusu*) brought by the pilgrim from Mecca. In addition, each guest receives a souvenir from the pilgrim, such as a scarf, a small prayer rug, or prayer necklace. At the hajji feast the hajji is treated with special veneration and respect, expressed through the association with the colour white, by gift giving, and in address. The guests show their respect by gifting white coat-like cloaks (*jelek*) to the pilgrim, and white headscarves to his wife. In this way he is honoured and his new status as a hajji is accepted. Both the hajji and his guests mutually exchange good wishes and blessings. For the hajji and his children the feast is on the one hand a social, moral, or religious obligation, on the other hand an opportunity to present the pilgrim as a pious Muslim, as economically successful, and surrounded and supported by his children.

Ritual Economy, Cosmic and Social Resources, and Socio-Cosmic Fields

Along with McAnany and Wells I understand ritual economy to be ‘the process of provisioning and consuming that materializes and substantiates worldview for managing meaning and shaping interpretation’ (Wells/McAnany 2008, 3). Central to this definition is the close connection between the ‘materiality’ or quality of the objects involved, and the way they are handled in economic and ritual processes. How can these objects that are central to ritual economy be conceptualised? Following Hardenberg, I will understand resources as tangible and intangible objects which ‘create, maintain or change relationships’ that take place ‘within the framework of culturally affected beliefs

feast, interviews with participants and organisers and background information collected in 2011 and 2012.

⁶ The origin of the well of Zamzam is related to the ancient story of how Hagar (Ibrahim’s wife) was searching for water for her newly born son Ismail after her husband Ibrahim had followed God’s command to leave her to the desert, where now Mecca is located. God intervened creating a spring under Ismail’s feet. When returning from her search Hagar was afraid her son would drown in the water and therefore exclaimed ‘Zamzam’, which means ‘stop, stop’.

and practices' (Hardenberg, this volume).⁷ In the case of the hajji feast these resources comprise tangible objects, such as clothes, water, animals and food, and intangible objects, like blessings and religious merits. According to Hardenberg, resources have an impact on relations in two 'fields', the 'social field' and the 'cosmic field', which, when overlapping, form the 'socio-cosmic field' (Hardenberg, this volume). He defines the 'social field' as a field of activities that is dominated by relations between people; the resources central to this field are defined as social resources. A 'cosmic field' is constituted by relations between people and cosmic forces, be it ancestors, God(s), or other non-human actors. In the cosmic field these relations are changed and maintained using cosmic resources. In some societies the social and the cosmic fields are distinct and overlap only partly, in other societies they are indistinguishable (Hardenberg, this volume).

Similar to Wells (Wells/McAnany 2008, 3) Hardenberg understands ritual economy as exchange and provisioning, which in turn comprises production, distribution, and consumption (Hardenberg, this volume). I propose to extend the concept of ritual economy to also include sacrifice and sharing. These activities cannot be subsumed under the heading of 'exchange', since they presuppose and create relations that differ from the ones involved in exchange. While exchange necessitates separate entities that are understood as equal in principle (Graeber 2011, 103; Sahlins 1972), sharing is practised by members of a group, which form a single unit (Bird-David 1994; Woodburn 1998). Sharing underlines community and the togetherness of the participants. Sacrifice on the other hand (at least in the case of the hajj and the Muslim feast of sacrifice) symbolises submission to God. According to Werbner, who analyses the transformations achieved through sacrifice at a saint's lodge in Pakistan, sacrifice is not a simple sacred exchange between God and humans, during which the victim acts as a mediator, like in Hubert and Mauss's famous work on sacrifice (Hubert/Mauss 1964, cited in Werbner 1998, 96). Sacrifice follows much more complex patterns of transformation and relations between 'sacrifier', the objects of sacrifice, other cosmic agents like saints and God (Werbner 1998, 96). I suggest using a broader concept of what constitutes ritual economy, which accommodates all activities that are central to the 'material' life of society.⁸

7 See also Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, 18, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 26.10.2016).

8 Sahlins considered economy to be 'not the need-serving activities of individuals, but the material life of society' (Sahlins 1972, xii). In this paper I will treat the properties central to tangible and intangible resources as their 'materiality'.

The Ritual Economy of Feasts in Central Asia

Feasts in Central Asia are known to be a means of claiming and legitimating power, of gaining and maintaining followers (Ismailbekova 2012; Jacquesson 2008). For the rich they are a way to present their status and gain prestige. As a consequence of the competition between households and the shame associated with not being able to organise an appropriate feast, the poor take on debts in order to fulfil their obligations for contributing resources to the feasts, and for organising feasts themselves (Bellér-Hann 2008, 205; Werner 1999). During the difficult times of the transition period after independence, people rather chose to spend their few resources on feasting and gift exchange than to lose their social network that was necessary for survival (Kuehnast 2004; Werner 1999). Reciprocal obligations of contributing to feasts are seen as signs of membership in the local community (Yoshida 2005). Analysis of local customary law and the ritual economy in Kyrgyzstan point to the importance of feasts for maintaining solidarity among the local community through processes of commensality and the exchange of food and other gifts (Bellér-Hann 2008; Beyer 2009; Hann 2013; Hardenberg 2010; 2015; Light 2015). Feasting and gift exchange at feasts are valued highly as acts of cooperative sociality during which hosts and guests express mutual recognition (Light 2015). Feasts at life cycle rituals have also been discussed as part of religious life in Central Asia (Kehl-Bodrogi 2008; Privratsky 2001; Rasanayagam 2011). Recent research has shown that the increasing labour migration of the last decade has even contributed to the lavishness of feasts due to the remittances sent to the migrants' family members (Isabaeva 2011; Reeves 2012).

Central Asian feasts have been subjected to various policies over the last century. The current policy towards feasts in Kyrgyzstan has to be seen in light of the 'modernisation' project enforced during Soviet Rule, which aimed at curbing the importance of religion, and kinship ties in general (Jacquesson 2008; Koroteyeva/Makarova 1998). In pre-Soviet times, commemoration feasts (*ash*) were used by local rulers (*manap*) for gaining followers, showing their wealth and claiming power (Jacquesson 2008). During the first half of the 20th century these enormously big feasts, to which thousands of guests would come, disappeared along with the local rulers, who were persecuted by the Soviets. The Soviet modernisation campaigns targeted both the influence of Muslim 'clergy'⁹ in their anti-religious policies, and so called 'patri-

9 Soviet policy makers mapped their anti-religious policy in Central Asia to their counterpart in Eastern Europe, targeted at the orthodox churches. They fundamentally misunderstood the

archal' and 'feudal' social relations. Concrete anti-religious policies strongly varied throughout the decades of the last century, and across regions in Central Asia, their implementation also strongly depended on local structures and procedures. Many of them were hardly efficient, and not taken serious by the local population (Dadabaev 2014). However, ethnographic studies on religion in Central Asia that depicted the religion of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz as a 'superficially Islamised version' of shamanism or totemism had a strong impact on the self-understanding and discourses of the new national states. Soviet academic literature displayed feasts that can also be considered as central to Islamic practice in Central Asia (see e.g. Kehl-Bodrogi 2008) not as part of local religious life but rather as national tradition or custom (Deweese 2002; Privratsky 2001).

This view of feasts as not connected to Islam, but rather as a national tradition had a strong impact on the self-understanding of local elites, who were educated in Soviet institutions. Today in Kyrgyzstan local custom (*salt*), under which feasts are subsumed, is often contrasted with Islam both by locals and scholars (see Hardenberg, Hölzchen, and Tulebaeva, this volume). In the village of Ak-Terek, however, I have encountered many people who understand organising feasts as central to their Muslimness.

During Soviet times feasts were criticised not for their religious importance, but as economically wasteful, and leading to unwanted hierarchies of status. Starting from the 1960s, with growing prosperity, feasting and gift exchange experienced efflorescence, also due to unintended consequences of the Soviet command economy that facilitated 'traditional' patterns of consumption, namely feasting and gift exchange (Koroteyeva/Makarova 1998).¹⁰ In recent years the lavishness of feasts has again been criticised in Central Asian countries both by politicians and religious officials for being wasteful and against Sharia, some governments have even passed laws limiting the number of guests and sacrificed animals (Jacquesson 2008). In Kyrgyzstan especially businessmen and officials are criticised for organising 'big show funerals' for their parents that they use to show off their wealth and influence

way that religious life in Central Asia was organised and missed the lack of a hierarchically structured organisation and a clear cut profession of Muslim 'clergy' that mirrored the organisation and clergy of the orthodox churches (Deweese 2002, 306). In order to create a religious structure that could be easily controlled by the state, these kinds of structures and clergy were introduced, today still functioning as the Muftiat in many Central Asian republics, like in Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁰ Koroteyeva and Makarova claim that the planned economy and the unavailability of many goods (*defizit*) made 'investing' one's resources into relations a rational strategy. Through these relations scarce goods and access to good job positions could be attained (Koroteyeva/Makarova 1998).

by inviting thousands of guests and sacrificing many horses and other animals.

The ‘new religiosity’ that has spread in Kyrgyzstan since independence (see Hardenberg, Hölzchen, Tulebaeva, this volume) and practises of feasting that, according to the above mentioned elite-discourse, are understood as ‘custom’ (*salt*) rather than ‘religion’ (*din*), are both central to hajji feasts. Hajji feasts are therefore an interesting object of study. They show how in local practice the two competing socio-cosmic fields of *salt* and *din* as described by Hardenberg and Tulebaeva (this volume) are closely interconnected and constitute the ritual economy of feasts in Ak-Terek in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Outline of the Argument

Feasts in Central Asia have been discussed in the light of political, economic, social, legal and religious developments (see above). While describing and analysing the ritual economy of hajji feasts in Kyrgyzstan I encountered seemingly contradictory claims about feasts in Central Asia. These claims are each made from a distinctive perspective, that is able to elucidate some aspects of feasts, but can hardly lead to a holistic description and analysis of them. To give an example, the hajji feast, like other feasts, can be analysed from a socio-political perspective as raising the organisers’ social status, gaining prestige, and increasing his social network (like e.g. Werner does for feasts in Kazakhstan, Werner 1999). In terms of Hardenberg’s theory of socio-cosmic fields this amounts to describing feasts in terms of the pilgrim’s social field. Or it can be seen as an act of sacrifice and of sharing one’s fortune with the other members of the community, which as meritorious acts create more religious merit. This second perspective emphasising the connection to the divine that is explicitly or implicitly central to feasts of Kyrgyz Muslims in general, and to commemoration feasts (*bata*) and sacrificial feast (*kudayı, tülöö*) in specific. According to this perspective the hajji feast appears as a cosmic field, where the connection to the divine is dominant.

These two perspectives of the ritual economy of feasts highlight different aspects of the same reality. Experimenting with these two perspectives on the hajji feast I offer two descriptions of the same feast. I do so, in order to be able to highlight their interconnectedness, to synthesise them in the third part of this paper. The first two parts of this paper deal with the hajji feast from the two perspectives mentioned above. The first part asks how the hajji gains his new status in the local community. It focuses on processes of distribution and

ritual performance during which the hajji is presented as a pious Muslim who has a close link to the religious centre. The second part deals with the question of how the obligations of mutually sharing one's fortunes and participating in each other's lives through feasting and gift exchange are central to local concepts of morality and cosmic/religious practice.

As will become clearer through the rest of this paper the social and cosmic aspects of the hajji feast are closely connected by the value ascribed to the hajj (the connection to God) and to feasting (the connection with one's community) in Kyrgyzstan in general. Already in part one and two it is evident that the social and cosmic aspects of the hajji feast can hardly be distinguished. In the third part they will be brought together explicitly, in order to complement each other and facilitate a broader, holistic understanding of the ritual economy of feasts in Kyrgyzstan. The values and resources that are central to the hajji feasts are brought together and discussed in detail. What is valued in the resources involved in the feast and where does their value come from? The conclusion offers a brief summary of the paper.

Approaching the Ritual Economy of a Hajji Feast 1: Claiming Status

Hajjis do not simply return to their home communities empty handed, but bring with them precious gifts of holy water and paraphernalia from Mecca. The pilgrims' status remains attached to the completion of the pilgrimage throughout their lives (Delaney 1990, 520). Examples from different parts of the world show that gift giving, and the process of establishing the elevated status of a hajji are closely related to each other. This status can be useful in many ways. Building on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, Kenny claims that in upper Guinea the gifts bought from Mecca are used as 'spiritual capital' that links both the pilgrim and the receiver of the gift with the holy centre of Mecca (Bourdieu 1986 cited in Kenny 2007, 365). This spiritual capital changes the way the pilgrim is perceived by others, especially regarding his piety, which can be converted to other forms of capital (e.g. economic capital) on demand (Kenny 2007, 365).

In Senegal feasts are organised upon the return of the pilgrims from the hajj, at which holy water and gifts from Mecca are distributed (Buggenhagen 2012). According to Buggenhagen the gifts brought from Mecca by the hajji have to be seen in relation to other gifts given by the guests at the sacrificial meal before the departure of the pilgrim. Generous gift giving and feasting are

central in order to claim and maintain the status gain of a hajji (Buggenhagen 2012, 145).

According to Abashin (2006), the hajjis of an Uzbek border village in Tajikistan, who had performed their pilgrimage in the early 1990s, compete with other local figures for authority in religious matters. The latter claim descent from a saint, or from families of religious learning, while the hajjis began to form a new group with religious authority on the basis of their first-hand knowledge of other Muslims' lives. Pointing to their experiences during the hajj they present themselves as following the right direction of Islam.

In the village of Ak Terek a hajji is considered as transformed through his pilgrimage. Like in Guinea and Senegal, the pilgrim integrates himself with a newly elevated status into his community by distributing holy water and gifts from Mecca at his hajji feast after his return in an open and demonstrative manner. He symbolically claims closeness to the religious centre and is considered as purified from his sins, both symbolised by his white clothes and the gifts he brings back from Mecca. The most important of these gifts is holy water, which is distributed to all guests at the hajji feast. By inviting people to the feast and gifting holy water the hajji and his family are able to renew and improve their network of relations. However, the authority of the hajji is disputed in everyday gossip and discussions about religious obligations. In the following paragraphs these processes of claiming status through ritual and gift giving are described in detail.

Scene 1: Presenting the Hajji at the Hajji Feast

During the hajji feast all the newly renovated rooms in the hajji's house are occupied by guests sitting around tablecloths (*dastorkon*), where they are served by the hajji's children, grandchildren, the daughters in law (*kelins*) and his *uruk tuugandar* (members of the local 'segmentary line', related to each other through common descent from a chain of fathers).¹¹ Again and again guests arrive and leave. According to the (exaggerated) claim the hosts will

¹¹ In his article 'Reconsidering 'tribe', 'clan' and 'relatedness'. A comparison of social categorization in Central and South Asia' Hardenberg discusses the implications of the concepts '(conical) clan', 'tribe' and 'segmentary lineage' regarding Kyrgyz relatedness (Hardenberg 2009). His newly developed concept of a 'segmentary line' is especially useful for analysing the Kyrgyz case, because it does not presuppose that its members organise themselves in cooperative groups, practice exogamy, or denote their descent line with a distinct term (Hardenberg 2009).

make after the feast, between two and three thousand guests were served during the feast.

The hajji and his wife stand in the large hallway of their house clothed in white, the hajji wears an expensive cloak (*jelek*) that he received when returning home from the hajj. It is made from white felt decorated with traditional Kyrgyz patterns. From underneath his cloak a scarf is barely visible loosely hanging from his neck. Its small checked red and white patterns of the Middle Eastern headscarf called *shemagh* emphasise his recent return from Saudi-Arabia. His head is covered by an expensive fur hat. His wife wears a black fur coat, a white headscarf and on top of it a shiny new white scarf that she closed under her chin, in Kyrgyzstan a sign of ‘new’ religiosity (McBrien 2012). The hajji’s white clothes symbolise the status of the hajji as a pure and clean being. His wife became a hajji’s wife, who is also expected to be religious. Wearing white can also be interpreted as referring to the pilgrimage itself, during which the pilgrims only wear two sheets of white cloth, the *ihram*. In Kyrgyz the word ‘*ak*’ for the colour white also has the meaning of ‘clean, honest, innocent, truthful, and right’ (Judachin 1965).

The hajji and his wife spend most of the day welcoming guests in the hallway, sitting down on couches now and then, exhausted from their work. The room is decorated with visual representations of the pilgrimage; the couches have been covered with shiny white cloth. Opposite to the entrance a depiction of the Kaaba and its surroundings in gold on black velvet and two posters have been hung. The posters show the pilgrim in front of two scenes from the pilgrimage: mount Arafat (*Ġabal ar-Raĥmah*) where pilgrims ask God for the fulfilment of wishes for themselves and on behalf of their relatives and friends, and pilgrims praying in front of the Kaaba, the central shrine in Mecca. ‘These posters were not brought home by another hajji. I especially went to a shop, had a photo taken and ordered them’, the hajji proudly told me, while we were looking at his posters during the hajji feast.

New guests arrive, and welcome the hajji and his wife by presenting them with gifts of white cloth. Most of the guests present the hajji with a white *jelek* (cloak) and a white *kalpak* (Kyrgyz felt hat) and his wife is given a white headscarf. The gifts of cloth are not handed over, but presented by dressing the hajji and his wife in them, a customary procedure of gifting clothes that is called *sarpay* (or *kiyit*) *kiygizüü*.¹² In southern Kyrgyzstan all major celebrations are accompanied by this form of gift giving, which is considered as

¹² These clothes are usually not worn but stored in a chest or a wardrobe and often change hands during the many feasts at life-cycle rituals.

a way of honouring and showing respect (*cïy körsötüü*). By dressing somebody in clothes at a feast the status transformation of the respective person is recognised.

After receiving the gifts the hajji pronounces a long blessing (*bata*¹³), into which he weaves his own status of being a hajji:

‘You were also invited to go there [to Mecca]. Go there together with your wife and come back as a hajji. Be healthy and happy together with your children and your *tuugan uruk* [members of the same segmentary line]; may your work be successful. God is great.’¹⁴

While the hajji pronounces the *bata*, he himself, his wife and the guests to whom it is addressed keep their hands raised in front of them, with the palms turned upward as if they were waiting for the religious merits of the *bata* to settle in their hands. At the end of the blessing they join in, exclaiming ‘*Oomin*’ or ‘*Omin, Allah akbar*’ (‘Amen, God is great!’) and lift their hands, bringing his blessings to their faces by stroking it with their hands. Next to the usual good wishes of being united with one’s children and one’s kin, of health, happiness and success, the hajji’s *bata* explicitly presents his own pilgrimage as a good example that he wishes his guests to be able to follow.

The pilgrim brings holy water and other gifts from Mecca, which are distributed at the hajji feast. While the guests are feasting at the *dastorkon* in one of the many rooms, a daughter in law of the hajji presents each guest with a gift from Mecca. These gifts comprise: prayer chains, headscarves, makeup pencils, prayer necklaces, prayer rugs, and round hats for men. They connect the guests with the holy place of Mecca and are permanent reminders (*estelik*) of the hajji’s transformed status (for a similar argument see Kenny 2007, 363)¹⁵.

13 For a detailed discussion of the implications of Kyrgyz blessings (*bata*) see (Ryskulova 2009).

14 ‘*Seni dagı chakırıptır oshol jaktan. Baybicheng menen barıp, aji bolup kelgile. Bala-chakang, tuugan-urugung menen aman-esen bolup, ishinger igilik bolsun. Allah akbar.*’

15 Through the hajj the pilgrim’s personhood is transformed. The hajji has incorporated some of the sacred qualities of the holy place and is purified through his pilgrimage. A special way to welcome the hajji was therefore discussed by women waiting for him on the day of his return to the village. Instead of shaking hands with the hajji these women planned to welcome him by stroking both his arms with their hands downward. This gesture was later explained to me as a special sign of respect, since a hajji was said not to shake hands with women (see also Delaney 1990, 520). By stroking the hajji’s arms some of his saintly qualities rub off to the women’s hands, which they then bring to their faces in a gesture known as blessing or *bata*. The divine blessing is thus transferred to them. This way of welcoming the hajji resembles the way that believers are described in the hadith of Abu Juhaifa to have welcomed Prophet Mohammad himself (Maus 1954, 141; in Privratsky 2001, 132).



Fig. 1. Metal cups and pitcher brought from Mecca to distribute holy water during the hajji feast (Photo by author).

Zamzam in Mecca and its sacredness and healing powers are pointed out to the guests by the hajji himself and his sons, who distribute the water in expensive metal cups that were brought from Mecca (see *fig. 1*). In Central Asia the closeness to the source of water both along rivers and water channels is an indicator of status and therefore of political significance (Bunn 2013). By distributing holy water to the guests the hajji and his sons by distributing the holy water at the feast establish themselves as benefactors, who are closer to the origin of this water, the well of Zamzam in Mecca.

The Collective Gaining of Status

As we have seen in the scene described above, the hajji's elevated status, his piety and his generosity are demonstratively performed. Not only the pilgrim himself, but also his wife, his children, daughters in law, and his guests are involved in this process. In Kyrgyzstan providing an elderly person with authority is an endeavour in which other people are involved, such as children, daughters in law, officials etc. (Beyer 2010, 79). Authority cannot be claimed

by an elderly person alone, but is gained in a process, where others show their respect. Actively searching for these kinds of situations can be a way of claiming authority. The resources at the hajji feast, the pilgrim's networks of relations and his status elevation is not held by the pilgrim personally, but also by his wife, his children's families and even his whole local *uruk* (segmentary line, see footnote 11). By helping at the feast, especially by the distribution of the holy gifts, they participate in the process of presenting the pilgrim and his family as pious Muslims.

In Kyrgyzstan feasts are remembered in terms of their lavishness and size and are an object of pride for all people involved, especially for the hosts themselves. Besides the specificities of the hajji feast, it is later recounted also as one of the lavish feasts that especially rich people organise, next to big weddings and grand-children feasts.¹⁶ Spending money for religious purposes in general and feasts in particular is a point of discussion and pride. Thus, when recounting a hajji feast, the costs of the pilgrimage, as well as the additional costs for gifts and for the feast organised upon the Hajji's return are frequently discussed.¹⁷ The fact that the pilgrim is financially able to make the pilgrimage also shows his social and economic prosperity. The pilgrimage to Mecca is an activity which often requires support from the pilgrim's children. Therefore the hajji's authority rests upon his children, his wife and his *uruk*, who transform him into a respected pilgrim with authority. By making his hajj and the hajji feast possible, they themselves also gain status.

The hajji demonstrates that he is able to access scarce resources – the hajj, and through the hajj Mecca – and comes back with sacred gifts that also have the attribute of valuable, scarce resources. While during Soviet times many consumer goods represented scarce resources that were only accessible through networks of connections to influential people in the state apparatus, today all consumer goods can be bought on markets (Koroteyeva/Makarova 1998, 581; see Hardenberg, this volume). While in southern Kyrgyzstan consumer goods like expensive furniture, or 'modernised' rooms painted in the latest colours are also recent signs of success, the hajj is clearly one of the strongest signs of success and of a modernity that is oriented towards Mecca, not Moscow.

¹⁶ Grandparents or parents organise this feast for their male grandchildren or their sons. It represents a way of honouring them and simultaneously collecting blessings for them. Today only rich households give this kind of feast, since it is not considered as a mandatory affair.

¹⁷ The official price of the pilgrimage departing from Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan during the fall of 2011 was 1,200 US-dollars. The expenses for souvenirs and the hajji feast after the return home were said to cost at least as much as the pilgrimage itself.

Disputing the Hajji's Status

We have seen above how gift giving at the hajji feast is part of performing piety, and that it underlines the pilgrim's religious authority as well as his social and economic success. The status of hajjis, however, does not remain uncontested. The requirements for performing the hajj are debated and its value 'inflated' due to the fact that the hajj has become popular among people, who are not considered as especially 'religious' (for similar debates in Uzbekistan and Great Britain see Rasanayagam 2011, 61; McLoughlin 2009, 144). This is visible in the argumentation of a local *moldo* (mullah) and in women's gossip presented below. In Kyrgyzstan the authority of the *aksakal* (village elder) depends on being accepted as a person who has earned respect during his lifetime and who behaves accordingly. Among the factors that are central to being accepted as an authority are the moral conduct of the elderly person and the fulfilment of religious obligations such as the daily prayer (*namaz okuu*) or fasting (*orozo tutu*; Beyer 2010, 79–81). Thus, presenting oneself as a hajji is a way of claiming authority, which can be contested on grounds of inappropriate behaviour in everyday life and become a target of gossip.

In their everyday gossip women closely scrutinised the conduct of hajjis. According to them, a hajji should lead a pious life, praying five times a day and fulfilling other religious obligations. Hajjis are expected to be moral and religious examples for the whole community. Flirting with women in public or boasting in an openly manner were among the moral and social lapses that were criticised in the gossip. Also, the women argued, since all the previous sins are forgiven during the pilgrimage, ideally a hajji should not commit any new sins afterwards for his own sake. In one of the conversations about the moral and religious lapses of hajjis, the wife of a hajji intervened. She complained about the frequent talk on what a hajji was allowed to do, and what not. According to her, criticising his behaviour was not fair, since performing the hajj was one of the obligations (*mildet*) of all Muslims, not only of the especially pious or virtuous.

The question of whether the hajj should be performed by as many Kyrgyz as possible is not answered by all religious specialists in the same way. An especially critical *moldo* from a neighbouring village explained to me that performing the hajj was the last of the religious obligations and should only be fulfilled after all other obligations are met. One should not spend one's resources on the pilgrimage while one's neighbours are hungry. The moral obligations towards one's neighbours and relatives are considered to be central to leading a virtuous and pious life by many villagers. Taking this train

of thought even further one could argue that the increasing number of hajjis might even be interpreted as a sign of excessive individualism striving for one's own religious profit in times of 'wild capitalism' dominating life since independence, where everybody only aims at his or her own benefit (Louw 2013, 516)¹⁸.

Summary

The presentation of the hajji at his feast includes several markers of prestige and superior status, notably the association with sacredness in the 'whiteness' of his clothes, and in the connection to the pilgrimage represented in the posters. Through distributing resources, such as holy water from the well of Zamzam, during the feast and its rituals the pilgrim becomes the benefactor of all his guests. Central to the ritual economy of the hajji feast are the hajji's close relatives, who collectively work in order to establish the hajji's authority also gaining status on the run. The discussions in the village that question the religious authority of hajjis' leads us to the second aspect of hajji feasts. Hajji feasts serve to legitimise the 'selfish' accumulation of religious merits, *soop*, by turning the individual hajj into a matter of the whole community. The next part of this paper will describe how guests of the hajji feasts are able to have a share of the hajji's fortune by tasting holy water brought from Mecca by the pilgrim.

Approaching the Ritual Economy of a Hajji Feast 2: Sharing Fortune

In Kyrgyzstan feasts are organised for important points of transition in the life-course of a person, when a new aspect of personhood is established. The feasts marking a happy occasion (*jakshilik*) are called *toy*¹⁹. They are organised by parents or grandparents for their (grand-) children at different important points in their life, the most common ones being: when they are tied into the cradle (*bashik toy*), when they start to walk (*tusho toy*), when boys are circumcised (*sünnöt toy*) and finally when children marry (*kiz toy*, *üylönüü*

¹⁸ Similarly, Anderson discusses the role of 'social' and 'selfish virtue' in the context of contemporary piety movements in Egypt (Anderson 2011).

¹⁹ 'Toy' is also the verb stem of the verb '*toyuu*', which translates as 'eating enough', or 'being satisfied'.

toy). They feature animal sacrifice, offering food to guests, gift exchange, games, and ritual practises that establish and maintain abundance, life, health and good fortune for the people undergoing initiation.²⁰ Hajji feasts (*aji toylor*) fall into this category of feasts. Food and drink figure as important cosmic and social resources at hajji feasts and at feasts in general in Central Asia. They are central to acts of commensality and sharing, through which equality and community are established (Hann 2013, 175; Rasanayagam 2011). Food at feasts is also used to transmit and incorporate the sacredness created through reciting the Quran (Hardenberg 2015; Privratsky 2001). Organising feasts and participating in them as helpers and guests are seen as moral obligations that are related to concepts of shame and honour (Bellér-Hann 2008, 205; Rasanayagam 2011).

Transforming the Hajji

The hajj is considered as a liminal phase, a phase of danger, transition, associated even with death, during which the pilgrim sheds all his sins, ideally transforming his personhood (Werbner 1998, 97; Delaney 1990, 516). Not only is the trip itself difficult for elderly people, but also it is not clear from the outset, whether the hajj will be accepted by God. During the pilgrimage the sequence of historical events is symbolically reversed, so that the pilgrims follow the paths of Ibrahim, the ancient founder of monotheism, his second wife Hagar and their son Ismail backwards in time, each of the rites ritually enacting an event that tested the faith of Ibrahim and Hagar (Werbner 1998). Performing rites and praying collectively are believed to multiply the merits acquired: during the hajj they are multiplied by the millions of participants simultaneously praying to God (see also Werbner 1998, 97). The pilgrims start out in white cloth, which can be compared to the way a corpse is dressed, gradually shed their sins, until they become pure and innocent like a baby (Werbner 1998, 97).

In southern Kyrgyzstan the liminality of the pilgrim is recognised by his wife. She subjects herself to several restrictions while her husband performs the hajj, which directly run parallel to the restrictions that apply for women who mourn a recently deceased close relative. She is supposed to stay at home, is not allowed to visit social events like feasts and she should pray for

20 Kehl-Bodrogi describes similar life-cycle rituals in Uzbekistan (Kehl-Bodrogi 2008).

the safe transition of her husband. Thus, the pilgrim's wife participates in her husband's liminality.

Before their departure pilgrims invite close relatives and their neighbours to a sacrificial meal (*kudayı*), where they pray for a safe trip and a successful hajj. At the hajji feast upon their return the guests again pray for the acceptance of the pilgrimage by God. Although the transformation of the pilgrim's personhood is in its essentials accomplished during the pilgrimage, the sacrifice in preparation of the pilgrimage and the hajji-feast after the return of the pilgrim also contribute to the success of a hajj.

Sacrifice and Blessing

Some days before their departure, a sacrifice (*kudayı*)²¹ is performed for each pilgrim in his home, to which close relatives and neighbours are invited. A sheep is sacrificed, the *dastorkon* prepared and close relatives and the elders (*aksakal*) of the neighbourhood are invited. The guests are offered hospitality and receive part of the sacrificed sheep, they bring with them clothes as gifts for the hajji, e.g. a Kyrgyz hat (*kalpak*) and a shirt (*köynök*). The sacrifice is performed in order to satisfy God (*kuday ıraazi bolsun*), to collect religious merits (*soop*), and to invite guests that pray for the safe and successful return of the pilgrim by pronouncing blessings (*bata*), asking God for a safe trip (lit. 'May your road be 'open' or 'white', '*Jolunguz achik bolsun*', '*Ak jol*'). The guests also tell the pilgrim what wishes he should ask for on their behalf during his pilgrimage.

Similarly, while dressing the hajji in white clothes at the hajji feast after his return, the guests pronounce small prayers asking God to accept the pilgrimage of the hajji by saying '*Ajıngız kabil bolsun*' (lit. 'May your hajj be accepted') and other similar expressions. After receiving the gifts the hajji also blesses his guests by pronouncing a *bata* for each group of guests.

The blessings and prayers (*bata*) performed by the guests are indispensable in situations of liminality, such as during weddings, or at commemoration feasts. The guests' participation in the hajji feast, therefore, is not only a part of keeping one's network of relations in order to use it as a resource in times of need (Werner 1999), but can be viewed as a contribution to the well-being of both the hajji and his guests (Montgomery 2013). A Kyrgyz proverb

²¹ Light mentions another term for the sacrificial feast – '*kuday tamak*', lit. 'God's food' (Light 2015, 64).

underlines the importance of receiving blessings, '*Jamgır menen jer kögüröt, bata menen el kögüröt*' (lit. 'The land becomes green from the rain, people become green from *bata*'). Thus one aspect of giving a feast and inviting many people is that they will give a *bata* for the person the feast is organised for. For example, at a feast for a small child that learns to walk (*tusho toy*) *batas* are said for the well-being of the child, while at commemoration rituals the guests and hosts say *batas* for the well-being of the deceased. It is believed among Kyrgyz Muslims that these *batas* have an influence on fate and that God can be convinced to help through pronouncing a *bata*.

In the following scene the importance of sharing for collecting religious merits (*soop*) and receiving the *bata* of one's guests is illustrated.

Scene 2: Distributing Holy Gifts and Receiving Blessings

After the guests have dressed the hajji and his wife in new clothes at the hajji feast and received a *bata*, the hajji's son invites the guests to take one of the cups containing water from the holy well of Zamzam in Mecca. The water should be drunk sipping three times, each time pronouncing a wish. At the hajji feast the holy water is diluted by mixing it with plain water. The maximal dilution at which its special qualities are still preserved is a ratio of 1:10. This mixture is then distributed among the guests, who drink it out of small cups.

Two ancient events are understood as central to the pilgrimage, which are performed by commemorating the interaction of Ibrahim and Hagar with God. The first is the feast of sacrifice (*kurman ayt*), during which each pilgrim sacrifices a sheep. This is done commemorating Ibrahim's willingness to comply with God's demand to sacrifice his own son Ismail, at which God intervened in the last moment and permitted Ibrahim to sacrifice a sheep instead. It therefore symbolises unconditional obedience towards and submission to God (Delaney 1990, 519). This sacrifice is central to the process of shedding sins and moving towards a 'blessed innocence' during the hajj, embodied in the sacred water (Werbner 1998, 99). It represents a moment of ordeal and release, reminding the pilgrim of how Ibrahim and Hagar's faith was tested by God. Back in the village Ak Terek *kurman ayt* is celebrated at the same time in the name of the recently deceased with large feasts. The second event is Hagar's (Ibrahim's second wife) search for water in the desert plain where now Mecca is situated, where she and her small son had been left by Ibrahim upon God's orders. After desperately searching for water, Hagar discovered the sacred spring Zamzam under the feet of her son Ismail when returning

to him. The pilgrims literally follow in Hagar's footsteps by crossing the plain between the hills Safa and Marwah seven times, like Hagar in search of water. The Zamzam water is therefore 'water given by God himself', as the hajji explained to me at his feast. During their stay in Mecca the pilgrims frequently drink from the well of Zamzam. Pilgrims are allowed to take water (usually 10 litres) from this well on their journey back home.

Zamzam water is sacred (*iyik*), healing (*kasiyttüü*) and clean or pure (*taza*). Therefore, some of the guests bring an empty plastic bottle to the hajji feast and ask it to be filled with some holy water. Back at their home they want to give it to their children or a sick relative. Zamzam water is thus treated in the same way as sacred water from other sources like sacred springs (*mazar*) or water sacralised by reciting the Quran over it. It is filled into water bottles in order to contain, preserve and distribute it later (Bunn 2013, 131).

After retelling the story of Ibrahim, Hagar, Ismail and the well of Zamzam to an audience of some guests and me at his hajji feast, the hajji underlined both the sacredness and healing properties of Zamzam water, but also the multiplying effect its distribution has on a global scale. The hajji described Zamzam water in his own words:

'[...] For 60 different illnesses it [Zamzam water] is a medicine. The whole world population is tasting from it. The whole world population [...]. For example, are we distributing it only in amounts of one sip, or half a sip? How many people [do we give it to]? At our place you may count 2000–3000 people, it was enough for them. Counting every hajji [add up to] seven million people. From them the water is distributed to the people of the whole world. How many people drink it? Did you see? It is the holiest medicine. It is our first gift.'²²

After drinking the holy water the guests are led into one of the rooms where they sit down around a tablecloth (*dastorkon*) loaded with delicious food, from which the guests eat. Before leaving the guests are served a dish of *ash* (oily rice dish, lit. 'food'), as is the usual procedure at feasts in southern Kyrgyzstan. At the end of the meal each guest receives a gift from Mecca. After receiving the gifts the guests express a small prayer thanking the hosts and

22 '[...] Altımış türlü oruga darı bolot eken. Bütün dünölüü eli ushundan ooz tıye ata. Bütün dünölüü eli [...]. Mına, misal üçiün, bir urttan, jarım urttan gana bere atabızbi? Kancha el? Bizde 2000, 3000 esepeseng osholorgo jetti, ösü. Ar bir aji esepetep, jetti million adam. Ushunchadan suunu büttün dünöbüzdü tarkatıp, kancha adam ichet dep? Kördüngbü, kana? Minerde turat. Ötö iyik darı ushul da. Bizdin birinchi padarkabız ushul.'

expressing good wishes, then leave in order to make room for more guests. They take with them food and gifts from the feast that carry the qualities of the feast and the host's fortune in them. The food is then consumed by the people who did not participate in the feast (often children who are not taken to the feast). Thus, even the people who were not guests at the feast have a share of it by consuming the food from the feast. By letting the people at home taste the food from the feasts the number of people that the hosts relate to in terms of food is expanded even further (Hardenberg 2015).

The Hajji Feast as 'Offering a Taste'

Feasts are often organised at moments of transition, at important points between life stages. However, these turning points are also associated with acquiring something valuable, for example a house or a daughter in law, which is celebrated with a feast. The principle of organising a feast at a happy event, especially after receiving some kind of fortune, applies to feasts in general, whose sizes vary from giving some fried breads to neighbours as *jeti nan kudayı* (lit. 'seven bread sacrifice')²³ to sacrificing a horse and inviting several hundred or even a thousand guests to a hajji feast²⁴. The sacrifice, the offering of hospitality and the giving of gifts at feasts are central to satisfying the guests and having them pronounce a *bata* 'from their upright heart'. The proverb '*Kur ayakka bata jürböyt*' (lit. 'A *bata* does not go to an empty dish') engages with this topic.

Related people, members of one's community are given a share of the fortune, by 'offering them a taste' (*ooz tiygizüü*), the metaphor for sharing fortune, and fate in Kyrgyzstan. It literally means 'making somebody touch the mouth [with food]'. When a visitor is not able to become a guest by sitting down at the *dastorkon*, he or she is at least offered to accept the hospitality by tasting bread (Light 2015, 55). Offering a taste of food is a common practice through which people are connected to each other, letting each other 'taste' the life of the other. Examples of offering a taste can be found in everyday life, for example when migrants send sweets from Russia to their homes in Ak

23 In Kazakhstan *jeti nan kudayı* is performed in a similar way. It is called *jeti shelpek* and functions as a substitute to more elaborate forms of animal sacrifice that include offering hospitality to guests (Privratsky 2001, 132).

24 Sacrifice is also performed in order to ask for good fortune or specific wishes, among them also the *jeti nan kudayı* (Aitpaeva/Egemberdieva 2007).

Terek, in order to have their parents and children taste and incorporate the 'sweetness' of their success and wealth (Bunn 2010, 113).

At feasts 'offering a taste' is practised both in terms of sharing food, but also in the figurative form of sharing fortune and wealth. The centrality of the principle of 'offering a taste' and its implications for sharing fortune at feasts can be best understood when looking at practice of 'offering a taste' at the *kiz toy*, the wedding feast organised before the bride's departure on the wedding day in her parents' house. During the wedding feast the guests are offered a 'taste' in a metaphorical sense when they are given part of the bride price (*kaling*) called *toyana*. *Toyana*-money is given together with the bride price by the husband's parents to the bride's parents. This is then distributed among their guest at the *kiz toy* in small amounts of money.²⁵ Through receiving *toyana* the guests are said to 'have a taste' of the money that came from the in-laws ('*Alar da kudalardan kelgen akchadan ooz tiysin*', 'May they also taste the money that came from the in-laws'). In the same manner they literally taste the animals that were transferred as part of the *kaling*, when one of the 'big cattle', a horse or a cow, is sacrificed and its meat eaten by them.

Similarly, inviting guests to a hajji feast and distributing water from the well of Zamzam is central to coming home from the hajj. Thus, the pilgrimage is shared with all guests present by offering them to 'taste' it and to have a share in the spiritual qualities that were acquired. These processes of sharing good things with others through inviting guests to a feast, through sacrifice and gift giving integrate people into each other's lives and create a 'mutuality of being' (Sahlins 2012). However, 'offering a taste' at feasts can also be seen as an example of the strategy described by Weiner as 'keeping while giving'. Wealth, success and religious merits are not literally shared in the sense of dividing them into equal shares so that they are depleted, but only a small part of them, a 'taste', is given to everybody (Weiner 1992). These forms of sharing through offering a taste inhibit negative emotions like envy and greed, as my interlocutors told me. When seeing someone else's fortune, these potentially dangerous emotions that are also described as an 'inability to see' ('*körö albastik*') can easily develop. By 'tasting' fortune and consuming food at the feast the guests are 'satisfied' and recognised, which both serve to prevent the development of envy (Light 2015). The inability of poor people to host a feast also raises negative emotions of shame (*uyat*) (Werner 1999). These negative emotions of envy and shame are closely tied to obligations of sharing that are central to both the social and the cosmic fields in the village of Ak Terek.

25 in 2011 about 10 Kyrgyz som.

They also echo the importance that is given to acts of hospitality all across Central Asia (Bellér-Hann 2008, 205; Kochkunov 2010).

Sharing and Religious Merits

Sharing with others, participating in each other's lives is not only at the centre of sociality, but can also be understood as at the heart of religious life in Kyrgyzstan. More generally, producing and distributing food to others is considered as bringing religious merits (*soop*),²⁶ especially if done in a religious context marked by the recitation of the Quran (Borbieva 2013, 504–505; in Kicherer's terms 'meritic *barakat*', see Kicherer in this volume). For example, at funerals reciting the Quran over food and water 'permeates' (lit. 'touches') these substances, which can later be distributed and consumed (Hardenberg 2015, in Kicherer's terms 'contagious *barakat*'). In this way, the good effects of reciting the Quran are transferred to and incorporated by the people not present at the recital. According to Bunn the ability of water to absorb is central to its use in daily life and ritual (Bunn 2013, 133). It can absorb sacred qualities, which can be incorporated by drinking or bathing in it, and it can wash away impurity (like in the washing procedure before prayer, *daraat aluu*). In the context of the hajji feast Zamzam water itself is sacred (in Kicherer's terms it has 'intrinsic *barakat*'). Next to the well of Zamzam the Kaaba was built by Ibrahim and his son Ismail. But also in general, feeding guests produces religious merits (*soop*) that can be transferred to ancestor spirits and living persons. Thus, distributing holy water from Mecca is a meritorious act in itself.

I want to exemplify these points by drawing a parallel to the ritual of '*katmī kuran*'²⁷ that can be performed at different occasions, e.g. when moving into a new house, or at a commemoration feast in order to collect religious merits (*soop*). The ritual of reciting *katmī* is usually performed in the presence of the elders of a religious community (*jamaat*). They sit around a tablecloth, at which an elder with religious knowledge recites long passages

26 *Soop* can be acquired through all kinds of activities that are considered as good and as connected to the right way of living. These activities range from feeding others with home-made bread (Borbieva 2013, 504–505) to reciting the daily prayers (*namaz*). *Soop* is collected during a person's lifetime and helps him or her to enter paradise, but ultimately their acceptance by God is said to rest in his hands (Mittermaier 2013). It can be collected and transferred to others, e.g. a deceased, one of the main activities at commemoration ceremonies. For a detailed discussion of *savāb* (the Persian equivalent to the Kyrgyz *soop*) see Müller, this volume.

27 A similar procedure is called *katym kuran* in Kazakhstan and *xatmi Qur'on* in Tajikistan (see Privratsky 2001; Abashin 2014, 187).

from the Quran over a bowl containing salt and a bowl containing water. After the recitation first the bowl of salt is passed around, followed by the bowl of water, which have both absorbed the *soop* produced by reciting the Quran (*kuran okuu*). Each participant takes some salt and a sip from the water. Afterwards the bowls are also passed to people who were not present at the *dastorkon* at which *katmī* was recited. Thus, the women and children sitting in one of the other rooms also receive a ‘taste’ from the sacralised salt and water. Additionally, at the event of *katmī kuran* plastic bags containing gifts that were also ‘touched’ by the reciting of the Quran are given to each of the (sometimes hundreds of) participants. Each plastic bag contains a package of tea, a medium sized bowl like the one used during the *katmī kuran* ritual (*kardim*), and a flatbread.²⁸ Gifting these bags is considered as essential to collecting the *soop* that *katmī kuran* is organised for. The *soop* is produced in the recitation of the Quran during the *katmī kuran* ritual, and it penetrates not only the salt and water, but also the contents of the plastic bags.²⁹ It is incorporated by the participants by tasting the salt and drinking from the water and is further spread to even more people, who use and consume the contents of the plastic bag, thereby extending commensality (Hardenberg 2015).

Distributing these resources is considered as a central part of the process of acquiring *soop*. If, for example, the plastic bags were not given to other people and the bread and tea were consumed by the organisers of the feast, the *soop* would get lost, as became clear in discussions about how left over plastic bags should be put to use. The *soop* acquired during the above mentioned processes can be transferred to achieve the purpose for which the *katmī kuran* ritual has been performed, e.g. to help a deceased in his or her journey to the ‘other world’. Similarly, to keep all the Zamzam water to oneself is unthinkable for a hajji. It would not fulfil the purpose of bringing the water home in the first place. Sharing food at a feast without expecting a return from the guests sacralises the food and lets the hosts profit from the religious merits thus produced (Light 2015, 64). The guests in turn take with them blessed food that is consumed at their home and give their blessing to the hosts. I therefore claim that like distributing sacralised water at *katmī kuran*, offering Zamzam water at the hajji feast should be interpreted not only as a social, but also as a religious act that underlines community and is part of sharing one’s fortune with others (Werbner 1998, 113). It is a meritorious act in itself. This clearly

²⁸ In addition to these plastic bags often hosts also gift other gifts like prayer mats (*jaynamaz*), *kalpaks* (Kyrgyz felt hat) and shirts to the participants of *katmī kuran*.

²⁹ Hardenberg describes a similar procedure concerning food in plastic bags at funerals in northern Kyrgyzstan (Hardenberg 2015).

shows how the activities that aim at establishing cosmic value (*soop*) already imply social relations to other members of the community.

Summary

The second perspective understands feasts through their moral and religious aspects. I claim that sharing one's fortune with others, participating in each other's lives through feasting, gift giving, and the exchange of blessings, or good wishes is at the heart of social and religious life in the village of Ak Terek. The processes of sharing, gift giving and sacrificing animals for feasting are viewed as moral obligations that when fulfilled ultimately lead to reproducing community and acquiring religious merits (*soop*) both at the same time. Thus relations that are maintained at the feasts help to acquire religious resources through the successful transformation of the pilgrim and through processes of distribution and sharing at the hajji-feast. Distributing holy water therefore does not deplete one's resources, but contributes to one's resources in terms of *soop*. From this perspective, the hajji himself also appears as a source of resources that spread out from him to the whole community of believers, who are all invited to share in his fortune through participating in his feast. The guests in turn help him to acquire religious merits throughout the process of his pilgrimage by uttering good wishes and blessings during the sacrificial meal before the pilgrimage and the hajji feast after his return. Thus the hajji feast shows us how closely linked social and cosmic relations at feasts are in Ak Terek, and surely also in other places in Kyrgyzstan. We can therefore analyse the hajji feast as a socio-cosmic field, where social and cosmic values and relations are closely linked and can hardly be distinguished.

Socio-cosmic Fields and Ritual Resources

In this paper I have provided two different descriptions of the ritual economy of a hajji feast. Each description deals with the practises of distributing holy water and gifts at the hajji feast, presenting them in light of related practises and beliefs.

The first perspective views the (hajji-)feast in southern Kyrgyzstan as a central social institution through which households gain prestige, claim status and maintain their network of relations. The second perspective understands feasts through their moral and religious aspects. From this perspective the

hajji appears as a source of religious merits that spread out from him to the whole community of believers, who are all invited to share in his fortune through participating in his feast.

In the following paragraphs I attempt to bring both perspectives together by discussing my findings in light of the concepts of ‘cosmic and social resources’ and ‘socio-cosmic field’ (Hardenberg, this volume).

The Ritual Economy of a Hajji Feast and Socio-Cosmic Fields

Let us now return to the questions, which the field of ritual economy is concerned with: How can economy and religion be distinguished, and in which ways are they interrelated? As we have seen in the introduction of this paper, Hardenberg suggests to distinguish the economic from the ritual not on the basis of actions alone, but according to the relations involved in them (Hardenberg, this volume). Economy takes place in the social field, which is constituted by relations between people; ritual, by contrast, is performed in the cosmic field, relating to cosmic forces. The overlapping part of these two fields he calls the socio-cosmic field. I will now discuss the question of whether the hajji feast and the surrounding activities take place in the social, the cosmic, or the socio-cosmic field in detail.

The hajj represents the pilgrim’s venture towards a special socio-cosmic field, a field of actions that is separate from his usual relations in Ak-Terek. When starting off for the hajj the pilgrim is separated from his usual social relations in the village and finds himself in a liminal state with millions of other pilgrims, who all pray and perform rituals in unison. The pilgrim re-enacts important faith-testing moments in the lives of Ibrahim and Hagar, and performs the sacrifice of *kurman ayt*, during which a pilgrim is able to shed his sins. He also interacts with cosmic resources that help him in this process, such as Zamzam water, which is considered to be a gift from God. This way of connecting with all other fellow Muslims of the World (*umma*), relating to God, shedding one’s sins, and attaining cosmic resources directly from their sacred source was not possible during the Soviet Union and is now embraced again by Muslims from Central Asia.

When the pilgrim returns to his village he is welcomed with a feast to which all the people come that are related to him (Hardenberg, this volume). At this feast the hajji is integrated back into this socio-cosmic field with his new, elevated status. He brings with himself resources that he shares with all his guests by letting them ‘have a taste’ of his fortune. I claim that these

processes of sharing serve to legitimate the pilgrim's 'selfish' accumulation of resources (*soop, bata*, Zamzam water, and other gifts) during the pilgrimage, and protect against evils that could arise from other people's envy. At the same time the hajji feast, like other feasts, is a stage where wealth, success and fortune are presented, and the hosts are able to show and maintain their good relations with their guests and with God. The pilgrim is presented as coming from the religious centre, and as having incorporated the sacredness of the pilgrimage. Thus, at the hajji feast the resources acquired in the context of the socio-cosmic field of the hajj are transferred into the socio-cosmic field of his local community.

However, even when handled in the context of a feast these resources still remain sacred and further sacralise this field, changing its cosmic aspects. Traditional Kyrgyz feasts implicitly involve cosmic agents, e.g. by featuring the expression of blessings. Through receiving and giving resources like Zamzam water that implies a relation to God, the guests even more explicitly interact with God. Thus, these tangible and intangible objects impact the guests' relation to God. In consequence, the hajji feast should be conceptualised as a socio-cosmic field, where processes of exchange, sharing, and sacrifice change the relations among humans, and between humans and cosmic agents (Hardenberg, this volume). In this socio-cosmic field one and the same resource (e.g. Zamzam water) figures in relations among humans, and between humans and cosmic agents at the same time.

The case of the hajji feast shows, how resources can 'travel' through different fields, connect them, or even transform them through their properties, and the relations that they imply (see also Kicherer, this volume). Hence, I suggest considering cosmic, and social resources not as different 'things', but similar to Appadurai's term 'commodity situation' rather understand the social, and the cosmic field as different situations in the 'life' of a resource. These cosmic, social, and socio-cosmic situations are determined by the social, cosmic, and socio-cosmic relations in the context of which resources are interact with (Appadurai 2010). Following Appadurai, I will now look more closely at the resources that are central to the hajji feast, their use and their sources of value in order to further examine the socio-cosmic field of the hajji feast, because 'from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context' (Appadurai 2010, 5).

Resources at the Hajji Feast

Which resources are central to the ritual economy of the hajji feast, and what is their function for maintaining and changing relations? I claim that in order to study ritual economy, it is not only important to look at what a resource represents or symbolises, as ‘models for’ and ‘models of the world’ (Geertz 1973). When studying how a resource ‘materializes and substantiates world-view for managing meaning and shaping interpretation’ (Wells/McAnany 2008, 3) it is even more central to look at the ‘local ontology’ of resources, how they are constituted, how its properties, and essence are conceptualised and dealt with in different contexts.

Delaney claims that for the Muslims from rural Turkey the Kaaba and the well of Zamzam in Mecca symbolise their spiritual meanings in a concrete material form: ‘For many villagers, as for many Muslims, to make the hajj is to touch the foundation of faith and to drink of the wellspring that sustains and gives it meaning’ (Delaney 1990, 515). Similarly, in rural southern Kyrgyzstan during the hajji feast water from the well of Zamzam functions as a central resource. In Kyrgyzstan holy water is valued, because its sacred qualities can be incorporated by people by drinking it (Bunn 2013, 133). Similarly to water, food can also be sacralised through reciting the Quran onto it (Hardenberg 2015). I consider these properties of water and food as central for their ritual functions at feasts, where they serve to transfer qualities and enable people to share sacredness by letting each other taste from the sacralised water and food. Taking this train of thought even further, the hajji himself can also be considered as a resource (see above), since he, like water and food was also permeated by the sacredness of Mecca and his personhood changed through the pilgrimage, similar to the quality of the water and food. He therefore is able to have an impact on the socio-cosmic field of the people interacting with him. The ability of these resources to sacralise, purify and heal not only point to their ability to absorb, but also to a constancy of their properties. Even when crossing the borders of socio-cosmic, social, and cosmic fields their properties persist. Thus, Zamzam-water that is given by God as a sacred gift to man in Mecca is even able to transform the socio-cosmic field at the hajji feast in Ak Terek, through its connectedness to, and origin from God. This efficiency rests on people’s awareness of these properties.

What is valued in these resources and where does their value come from? The ultimate source of value at the hajji feast lies in the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Mecca the pilgrim retraces Prophet Mohammad's, Prophet Ibrahim's and Hagar's footsteps and performs a sacrifice (*kurmandik*). Through the pilgrimage the pilgrim is purified, his personhood is transformed (Werbner 1998, 95–99). The sacredness of the holy place is embodied both in the pilgrim himself and in the sacred gift of holy water (Werbner 1998, 99). At the hajji feast itself the hajji's transformed personhood is presented through the symbolical association with the holy place and the pilgrimage. In the distribution of holy water he and his relatives figure as intermediary between the holy centre of Mecca and the local village community. Through his blessings and his gifts the hajji shares his fortune with the members of his community, keeping or even gaining further religious merits (*soop*). Thus, the status of a hajji is valued highly and can serve as a source of (religious) authority.

However, central to the hajji feast are also local patterns of value creation, which uncover the social form of the values the hajj and the hajji feast exhibit, but are also ultimately linked to cosmic concepts like *soop* (Hardenberg, this volume). Sharing one's fortune with the members of the local community through feasting and gift giving legitimates the hajj. The *moldo's* comments uncovered how the hajj can also be understood as less urgent than other social needs. The hajji feast thus transforms the pilgrim's individualistic or 'selfish' act of collecting religious merits for himself (and his closest relatives) during the pilgrimage, into an event of significance for a holistic social entity, the whole local village community and his other relations (Hardenberg, this volume). All members of the community, and all other people the hajji is related to receive some holy water and gifts from Mecca that make it possible for them to 'taste' some of the merits gained. The guests at the hajji feast and at the sacrifice (*kudayi*) before in turn help the pilgrim by praying for a successful pilgrimage that is accepted by God.

Also, processes of feasting and sharing things with others figure as sources of value. When referring to activities as *soop*, e.g. producing bread or praying *namaz* (Louw 2013), people implicitly, or explicitly refer to God. *Soop* is imagined as an intangible resource that represents countable religious value. It can be produced and transferred to others, usually to one's deceased parents or one's children (Mittermaier 2013; Hardenberg 2015). At feasts *soop* is collected through sacrifice, and through processes of sharing and giving without expecting a return (Light 2015, 64; Werbner 1998, 113).

Feasts produce religious merit, but they also show what else is highly valued in the social field: economic success, being cared for and respected by

one's children, and having good relations to many people. In order to acquire resources like the *batas* of one's guests, economic resources, and social relations are necessary, which give additional value to a feast. Giving a feast therefore appears both as a morally good, or pious activity that implies beliefs about God and the after-life, and as a sign of success in the social field. Both feature prominently in feasts in Central Asia, which make them into an object of shame and pride. Through them status can be demonstrated and claimed, visible also in the clothes exchanged at feasts.

To sum it up, the value ascribed to the above mentioned resources has its source in the holy place of Mecca, the sacrifices performed during the pilgrimage and at the hajji feast, the sacredness of the Quran, and in processes of sharing without expecting a return (Light 2015, 64; Werbner 1998, 113). The sacredness of these processes is expressed in terms of producing religious merit (*soop*).

The most prominent intangible resource of the hajji feast is *bata*, blessing or prayer. *Bata* is the means of helping each other, by expressing the wish for good things. Implicitly or explicitly they refer to God and politely ask him to grant these wishes. In other words, the human actors use the resource *bata* in order to achieve something good, and refer to God, a cosmic actor in order to realise their wishes. Therefore pronouncing a *bata* already implies a socio-cosmic field. The fact that they are expressed frequently not only at feasts, but also during everyday life shows how much social, and cosmic relations are conceived of, and dealt with together; how economy and ritual merge.

Conclusion

Focusing on the interconnectedness of cosmic and social relations through the study of socio-cosmic fields (Hardenberg, this volume) enables us to see the ritual economy of feasts in Kyrgyzstan in a holistic way, and thus contributes to our understanding of the relation between economy and religion. Feasting and gift giving at an hajji feast can be understood as both a way of sharing the sacredness acquired during the hajj, and establishing a mutuality of being through 'offering a taste' of one's fortune, but also of celebrating and demonstrating the new status of the pilgrim as a hajji through performance of authority. Contrary to the Soviet view of feasts as secular national custom, this analysis of the ritual economy of a hajji feast has shown that in the village of Ak Terek in southern Kyrgyzstan feasts are not necessarily viewed as incompatible with the popularity of the new religiosity described by

Hardenberg, Hölzchen, and Tulebaeva (this volume), but central to the economic and religious life of its inhabitants. The hajji feast, which is popular in many regions in southern Kyrgyzstan, even serves to connect the socio-cosmic fields of the followers of a ‘new Islam’ and the people that want to stick to ‘traditional’ practices and beliefs (described as *salt* by Tulebaeva, this volume). Central to the processes of sharing religious fortune, and demonstrating status at the hajji feast are resources, that function as cosmic and social resources at the same time, e.g. water (Féaux de la Croix 2010). The ubiquity of resources central to feasts in Kyrgyzstan in everyday life opens up new questions concerning the connection between the economic use of water, food, but also *bata* and *soop*, and their ritual function in Kyrgyzstan that offer interesting topics for further research.

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BAKTYGÜL TULEBAEVA

In Search of the Good Life Value Conflicts and Dilemmas in the Practice of Islam in Kochkor, Kyrgyzstan¹

Keywords: Islam, *salt*, value-sources, value conflicts, resources, healthy lifestyle, Kyrgyzstan

Introduction

During my research in Kochkor, a village in the northern part of Kyrgyzstan,² I interviewed a doctor, who was known for recommending her patients to folk healers. She explained that sometimes when she diagnoses no pathology, but the child keeps crying and shows anxiety, she advises the parents to take the child to *apalar* (singular *apa*).³ The term *apa* in Kyrgyz literally means ‘mothers’ or ‘elderly women’ however, in this context it is clear to patients that the doctor means specific women – traditional folk healers. Even more interesting was that although she sends her patients to healers, she does not

1 I thank my supervisor, Professor Roland Hardenberg, and my colleague, Dr. Jeanne Feaux de la Croix, for their constructive comments and detailed revision of my paper. I also extend my gratitude to two contributors of this volume, Stephanie Kicherer and Louise Bechtold, for their suggestions for further improvement of this paper and Andreas Dürr for helping me to design my graphs.

2 I conducted nine-month fieldwork between 2012 and 2013 under my PhD research project on children and children’s health and well-being in Kochkor, a village in the northern part of Kyrgyzstan. The population of Kochkor, which is around 22,000 people, consists of Kyrgyz people as a majority, there are also some Dungans (a term used for the Muslim people of Chinese origin, who live in former Soviet regions), Uighurs and Russians. I mostly held interviews with Kyrgyz families about the ‘healthy growth’ of children, that circled around the topics of health, *tarbiya* (moral education), children’s health related rituals and life-cycle rituals, and the role of formal and informal educational institutions in the lives of children. These topics were discussed within the framework of Kyrgyz ethnic traditional values, the Soviet past, modernity, globalisation and Islam.

3 For Kyrgyz words I have used the transliteration system of the American Library Association and Library Congress for Slavic alphabets and ö=ø; ü=γ; ng=H; and j=Ж (eg. when Ж is pronounced as in journal in English for the additional Kyrgyz letters).

herself use their services. It is not that as a doctor she supports biomedicine only and does not believe in the power of *apalar*, who use various healing rituals in treatment. On the contrary: she is convinced of their efficaciousness and gave even more credence to folk healers after her own child's case many years ago. Nevertheless, she now no longer uses their services because of her beliefs and practices as a Muslim, which have become stronger and do not allow her to use the help of traditional folk healers any more.

Similar scenarios are becoming very frequent in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The increasing interest and devotion of people to Islam led to a shift towards 'Islamic ways of healing', which people tend to find more appropriate. The main reason for this shift seems to be the rise of a new identity and new values related to a 'new Islam' or '*musulmanchylyk*', terms which I will discuss further below. The strengthening of Islamic religious identity and belonging among people in Kochkor changed not only people's perception of health and healing practices, but also their idea of a healthy lifestyle, related to diet, health, behaviour, and broader social relations. However, if we take the fact that Kyrgyz people considered themselves Muslims even before, and nevertheless practiced non-Islamic healing rituals, it becomes imperative to inquire into this new identity, and ask why now it started to contradict those kind of traditional healing rituals, performed by *apalar*.

By analysing the discourses and changes going on in the social and religious practices of people in Kochkor, I argue that religion serves as a resource both in a way that it promises to grant 'good life' and it changes people's relationships to each other and to God.⁴ The supporters of the version of Islam currently spreading in Kochkor imitate the religious norms mentioned in Quran and other Islamic sources. This has affected their traditional lifestyle, beliefs and practices, and brought changes in their cultural values and social relations. By concentrating on the topics of health and healthy lifestyle, in this paper I aim to look at the relationships between differing and contrasting values, which people hold as important in their lives, and which shape their 'socio-cosmic fields' anew (Hardenberg, this volume). The elaboration of this topic will also shed light on the understanding of the kind of Islam currently

4 This paper, in which Islam as religion is seen as a resource, was developed for the summer school 'Religion as Resource: Local and Global Discourses', organised by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Tübingen in July 2014, within the framework of the Collaborative Research Centre 1070 RESOURCECULTURES. In this paper, I apply the meaning given by the SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES to the term 'resource', but I also use its classical meaning, in which religion is accepted as a resource in a sense that through religion, one may achieve a good life or a life worth living. See Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 16.02.2016).

practiced locally and how it affects the overall lifestyle of people in Kochkor as well as Kyrgyzstan in general.

Islam as a Resource: The Theoretical Account

The idea of being Muslim and leading the life of a Muslim is ‘very complex and diverse’ (Marsden 2005).⁵ This complexity and diverseness also became visible in Kyrgyzstan after the country gained independence in 1991 and started to experience a ‘Re-Islamisation process’.⁶ This process has led to huge changes in the worldview and the everyday practices of people in Kochkor. One prominent example can be given on the local idea called *salt*.⁷ The word *salt* can be translated into English as Kyrgyz customs and traditions and local cultural practices, which tend to be of great importance for people, as it regulates their social relations in their everyday lives. However, with the current changes brought by the Re-Islamisation process in the region, new values are introduced and some of the local cultural practices, under the label of *salt* started to lose their importance and were replaced by norms mentioned in Islamic sources.⁸ This has an immense effect on the ‘socio-cosmic relations’ of people, the concept that is introduced and discussed by Hardenberg in this volume. Such changes in the culturally grounded ‘socio-cosmic relations’ of people in Kochkor were exactly what turned the current Islam into a hotly debated topic in the village. Today as I have noticed, the values that people take as the basic principle in their lives are derived mainly from two different value-sources: one is according to *salt* and the other one is according to the Islamic scriptures.⁹ However, I will argue that these two value-sources are not independent from each other, nor do they fully oppose each other. As I will show later in a diagram (*fig. 3*), previously both *salt* and local Islam expressed

5 See also Abu-Lughod (1993; 2002) and Deeb (2006) particularly on Muslim women and their lives.

6 In this paper, with ‘Re-Islamisation process’ I refer to the process of the flourishing of Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan after being officially banned during Soviet times.

7 I translate the word *salt* as Kyrgyz customs and traditions and local practices. In a broader sense, the word *salt* can also stand as an equivalent to the English word ‘culture’ or ‘cultural practices’. See Beyer (2009) for a detailed explanation of this term.

8 It should be noted that this kind of experience was also made during Soviet times, when new values were introduced and many cultural practices labelled as *salt* were less followed.

9 In this paper for a comparative purpose I limit myself to values and relations based on *salt* and Islam only. I do not discuss other values influencing people in Kochkor, such as those from the former Soviet period, current values of modernisation or other global values, which are also present and which also shape and re-shape the socio-cosmic fields of people.

shared values and created a more or less united 'socio-cosmic field'. However, with the current Re-Islamisation process some practices accepted as *salt*, do not correlate to the norms mentioned in Islamic scripture, and certain norms and practices accepted as 'Muslim practices' cannot be accepted as traditional and fall into the category of *salt*.

Thus, the questions that I raise and discuss in this paper are as follows: How does the current Islam practiced by the people of Kochkor shape the 'socio-cosmic fields' of the villagers based on the two value-sources mentioned before? What are the correlations between the local concept of *salt* and the newly practiced Islam? And in which way can the current Islam be understood as a resource? To answer these questions, I refer to the Dumontian theory of value, particularly the hierarchy of values (Dumont 1970; 1986), which was, in respect to cultural change, further developed by other anthropologists.

Dumont approaches cultural studies through the concept of values. According to him, 'values shape cultural structures' (Robbins 2007, 296) and serve as 'determinations of the relative importance of elements of a culture (beliefs, ideas, things, etc.)' (Robbins 2007, 297). With his concept of a hierarchy of values, Dumont emphasises that according to values some cultural elements are regarded as dominant and others as subordinate, which may vary in different contexts. Robbins, inspired by Weber, elaborates the Dumontian idea further by noting that highly valued elements 'tend to be more elaborately worked out, more rationalised [... and tend] to control the rationalization of less valued ideas' (Robbins 2007, 297). This seems to perfectly describe the situation in Kochkor, when people started to debate on *salt* versus 'current Islam' and what is acceptable according to them. The last point is analysed in the context of cultural change which, according to Robbins, occurs when 'key values change' (Robbins 2007, 301). In Kochkor the introduction of new 'key values', which have paramount importance in the currently practised kind of Islam, creates a suitable condition for 'value conflicts' (Robbins 2007; 2013). I argue that conflicts occur mainly because new 'key values' introduced in Kochkor, which are welcomed by a certain group of people and resisted by another, brought huge changes in relationships in socio-cosmic fields (Hardenberg, this volume).

Hardenberg's concept of 'values' presented in the introduction of this volume also draws on the work of Dumont. Introducing the concept of socio-cosmic fields, Hardenberg himself takes Kyrgyzstan and India as examples to show the interrelationship and interaction between a social field (the field of interaction between human social actors) and a cosmic field (the field of

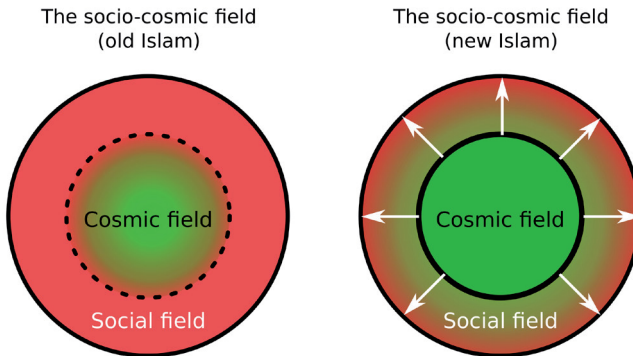


Fig. 1. The socio-cosmic field and old Islam/new Islam.

interaction between human and non-human actors). He states that the level of interaction and overlapping of these two fields depends on social and cosmic values. By using Hardenberg's concept of the socio-cosmic fields for my particular case of Re-Islamisation I argue that the current advance of Islam among people in Kochkor, which I label as 'new Islam' throughout this paper, is emphasising the value of the cosmic field and is introducing new norms and values related to a person's relationship to Allah, which as a result are altering people's everyday social interactions and cultural practices. They bring significant changes in the existing socio-cosmic field(s), as I will show below. Throughout this paper, I will look at the nature of the relationship between norms derived from Kyrgyz *salt* on the one hand, and Islamic scripture on the other, and analyse how this affects cultural practices and social relations. In other words, Hardenberg's concept of the socio-cosmic fields helps to explain the idea that the strengthening of Islam has resulted in the increasing importance of the cosmic field or the perception of the cosmic field as the core of any social relations, which was not that prominently emphasised before the advance of Islam. Further, I will show how, for those, who accept Islamic scriptures as a main value-source, their activities and social relations are regulated by the values mentioned in those scriptures. This is how I see the relations between socio-cosmic fields in relation to Islam practiced before the Re-Islamisation process and after. The right graph on fig. 1 shows how with the advance of Islam the cosmic field started to be prominently emphasised. It also started to visibly influence the social field (see white arrows), such as the way people interact, the way they eat, the way they dress, the way they organise feasts and funerals and many more social activities.

It is also important to acknowledge the relations and interconnectedness between values and resources. Applying the basic concept of SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES, stating that resources of any kind only become resources by cultural activity Hardenberg (2014), defines resource as a process, stating that '[r]esources are not simply there, but made by people through acts of valuation'. When dealing with healthy lifestyle, one of the topics of this paper, people who are influenced by the current Islamic values, emphasise the very fundamental issues of identity, such as being 'a true Muslim' or 'real Muslim' and 'the right way of living', which can be achieved by Islam. As I already claimed in the introduction, Islam is now seen to people as a 'resource'. Here the term 'resource' derives from the newly developed concepts of the Collaborative Resource Centre 1070 RESOURCECULTURES of the University of Tübingen dealing with resources, resource complexes, and RESOURCECULTURES. This Collaborative Research Centre, with the aim to newly conceptualise the notion of resources, looks at 'resources' beyond their classical perception of being a natural raw-material or a resource in the economic sphere. It defines resources as 'tangible and intangible media, used by protagonists to create, sustain or vary social relations, units and identities'.¹⁰ For example, Islamic sources, such as Quran, Shariah, or Hadith, seen as a resource, provide norms on how to behave correctly both in the social and cosmic field by creating, sustaining and varying relations in these socio-cosmic fields.

It should be noted that the same characteristics can be applied to *salt*, the Kyrgyz cultural practices believed to come from ancestors, which also define people's relationships between each other and between God and other supernatural powers. Both sources have certain ideas about 'good life', 'healthy life', or 'successful life' and means to achieve them. However, unlike *salt*, the current Islam makes a particular emphasis on the reward that a person gets not only in this world, but more importantly, in the afterworld by following 'the right way of living', which started to attract people's attention to and interest in Islam.¹¹ On fig. 2 I show a picture of a poster that I took at the girl's madrasa in Kochkor, which clearly shows this 'right way of living'. The poster asks a girl to choose her way. If chosen correctly, the girl will live a beautiful life 'filled with roses'. She will get married, become a happy wife, happy daughter-in-law, happy mother, happy grandmother, and a happy mother-in-law. She will go to heaven in the afterworld and her mother and father will also go to heaven. If she chooses the wrong way, she will have a

¹⁰ See Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, 13, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 16.02.2016).

¹¹ For a similar case see Deeb (2006), who talks about people in *al-Dahiyya* in Lebanon.



Fig. 2. Poster on the wall of a madrasa in Kochkor. The text reads: 'My girl, choose your way' (Photo by author).

tragic life and at the end will go to hell. Together with her, she will also take four people to hell: her parents, her brother and her husband.

Below, I historically contextualise Islam among Kyrgyz people in order to highlight some fundamental religious dynamics of the recent past and then elaborate on the local categorisations of Islam. After that, I will discuss the local health-related practice called *kirene* in order to illustrate the importance of this culturally rooted practice and its decline with the advance of Islam.¹² Further, I will explain how these recent developments affect the overall lifestyle of people in Kochkor and how the villagers in their local discourses react to these changes. In the final part, I analyse the interplay of Kyrgyz *salt* – local cultural practices – and some novel practices brought by the Re-Islamisation process in Kochkor and present some of the debates resulting from them.

¹² As my PhD research project is on children and their healthy growth, I studied the topics of health, healthy lifestyle and healthy way of living also in the context of Islam, as it is practiced locally.

Context: Islam among Kyrgyz People

Islam in Kyrgyzstan and in other Central Asian countries has a specific form. In literature Central Asians are often called ‘cultural Muslims’ who accept themselves as Muslims by ethnicity, and not necessarily through their religious beliefs (Ruthven 1997). In other words: being Kyrgyz¹³ implied being Muslim (Fuller 1994; Montgomery 2007; Radford, 2013). The issue of interrelatedness of the ethnic and religious identities often becomes problematic if a Kyrgyz converts to other religions. For example, Pelkmans, who studied Kyrgyz converts to Christianity, stated that among his informants ‘[a]bandoning Islam implies a betrayal of Kyrgyz nationality’ (Pelkmans 2007, 892). Thus, by saying ‘I am Muslim’ Kyrgyz people do not only highlight their religious beliefs and its values as such. Rather it was, and to a certain extent still is, the identity that is inherited by a person from parents, which I refer to as traditionalism, which is strongly embedded in Kyrgyz culture. In Poliakov’s work traditionalism in Central Asia defines people’s way of life according to the principle that ‘one lives as their fathers devised’ (Poliakov 1992, 3). ‘Our fathers are Muslim, thus we are also Muslim’¹⁴ – this kind of notion would be accepted as the correct way to describe the perception that Kyrgyz people held until the re-advance of Islam, which started after the 1990s.¹⁵

Looking at the history of Islam and its practice in the region, we get the following picture: Sources suggest that Islam came to Kyrgyz people at the beginning of the 16th cent. (Torogeldieva 2009), however the significant process of conversion to Islam did not take place until the end of the 18th cent. (Gunn 2003; Silova et al. 2007). Similar to the religious variations between ‘settled’ versus ‘nomadic’ people described by some authors (see Bacon 1980; Gunn 2003), the northern part of Kyrgyzstan was considered less religious than the southern part.¹⁶ There were religious specialists, such as mullahs and religious institutions, such as madrasas existed. However, the scrupulous practices of Islamic norms were not followed by the mass of people. Only a few people went to

13 In this paper I will use the terms ‘Kyrgyz’ or ‘Kyrgyz people’ to describe citizens of Kyrgyzstan of Kyrgyz ethnicity.

14 For similar case, see Johnson (2006) who studied Mandinga people of Guinea-Bissau, for whom the identity of being Muslim is not due to religious conviction, but rather inherited from Muslim parents through blood.

15 As my fieldwork was conducted between 2012 and 2013, here I am talking about the different current practices of Islam and understandings of being Muslim.

16 It should be noted that settled people such as Uzbeks and Tajiks were considered to be more religious than nomadic people such as Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Turkmens. Kyrgyz people living in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan and having a sedentary lifestyle were more religious than people living in the northern part of Kyrgyzstan.

study in madrasas in this period and therefore the term *mullah*, in Kyrgyz *mol-do*, was associated with a 'literate' man (Aitpaeva 2007; Yudakhin 1965). However, it would be wrong to claim that religious aspects did not penetrate the everyday life of the mass. It did, but those practices got traditionalised¹⁷ and existed along with local practices and ideas and were considered as part of *salt* or Muslim culture, without having any distinction. For example, the Quran was read before or after the meal for pleasing the spirits of the ancestors or by healers in rituals involving local spirits at holy places.

During the Soviet period both traditional and religious practices were carefully scrutinised. Those religious practices, both Islamic and traditional folk practices, that had ethnic elements, or those which were characterised as a sign of 'backwardness' became targets of Soviet institutions with the aim to eradicate them (Bacon 1980; Keshavjee 1998; Michaels 2003). Despite strong efforts, the Soviet Union only partially achieved their goals, as these religious and cultural practices were kept alive in private.¹⁸ For example mosques were destroyed, but the elderly still kept performing daily prayers at home, and while local religious specialists were called 'charlatans' and persecuted, mothers and grandmothers still performed many healing rituals at home without any pressure.¹⁹ As one of my informants stated, 'during the Soviet time a child at school was scolded for mentioning God, while at home parents would ask the child to not forget about God'.²⁰ Moreover, from what my informants told about their relative freedom in conducting religious and traditional rituals in villages in the public, one can conclude that both religious and cultural practices in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan were not strongly affected by the Soviet policy. Most of my informants who had a Soviet childhood perfectly remembered how their grandfathers and grandmothers read *namaz* (daily prayers) at home by preparing themselves for the 'other world' or they would see elderly men in the streets carrying the Quran.

The historical account of the spread and practice of Islamic beliefs among Kyrgyz people suggests that Islam lived as a cultural element without being specified purely as a religious practice. Similarly, many traditional folk practices, in other words, 'ethnic traditions' of Central Asians were accepted as

17 See Rasanayagam (2011) for similar cases in Uzbekistan.

18 See Louw (2008) for a detailed ethnography.

19 Here, for 'healing rituals' I do not differentiate between Islamic or pre-Islamic practices. Regarding specifically Islamic religion, see Kandiyoti/Azimova (2004), who discuss that as men were engaged in 'public' activities, it was Tajik and Azeri women, who were the preservers of Islamic religion in the private sphere.

20 See Medlin et al. (1971) for the teaching of Soviet schools about the negative aspects of church and religion.

‘Muslim tradition’ (Kirmse 2013; McBrien 2006; Torogeldieva 2009). In addition, during Soviet times, both traditional folk practices and religious practices unintentionally got even more solidified by the Soviet policy (McBrien 2006).

The religious norms indicted in the Quran were not fully followed by Kyrgyz people in general, but still this did not mean that they were not ‘good Muslims’. In his work ‘*Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka: the Diversity of Everyday Religious Life in Central Asia*’, Montgomery (2007) clearly shows that a person, who piously follows the norms of Islam by visiting mosques and praying five times a day, just like another person, who might attend a Friday prayer once in a while and consumes alcohol, both claim to be good Muslims. As Inhorn and Sargent state, ‘what it means to be a ‘good Muslim’ takes particular local forms, based on locally grounded and morally imbued interpretations of the Islamic traditions’ (Inhorn/Sargent 2006, 5). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, as Akiner puts it: ‘Today, many [...] Kyrgyz regard themselves as Muslims – more by culture than by religious conviction’ (Akiner 2002, 24). However, I have noticed from my research that now, eleven years after her article was published, this tendency has taken the opposite direction. In other words, with the recent Re-Islamisation in the post-Soviet era these flexible understandings of being a Muslim or ‘good Muslim’ started to be questioned. For example, consuming alcohol or pork as non-halal food or following local beliefs and practices, such as worshiping holy places or spirits of ancestors, began to threaten one’s identity as being a ‘good Muslim’. Unlike before, the current Re-Islamisation, which is going on on a large scale, can be noticed in the public sphere by the increasing number of mosques and Friday visits to these mosques for prayers or increasing number of Islamic shops as well as through the transformation of outfits of Kyrgyz men and women (for details, see Hölzchen, this volume).

In some sources, the strengthening of Islam in the post-Soviet era is described as the ‘revival’ of Islam. However, I would not call it a revival because Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan noticeably differs from the Islam practiced before and during the Soviet period (see Khalid 2007). Further, I will use the terms ‘new Islam’ and ‘old Islam’ (my categorisation) throughout this work in order to differentiate these two versions of Islam. This categorisation is based on the discourses of my informants who referred to time-periods such as *murun* (before) and *azyr* (now) – a relative category for differentiating these two versions. Another terminological point that I want to clarify here is that in my paper I use the terms ‘good Muslim’, ‘true Muslim’, ‘real Muslim’, or ‘pure Muslim’ without defining them too meticulously, because these notions are topical, but highly contested, as I will show later in this paper.

Today, those Kyrgyz in Kochkor who ‘convert’²¹ to this new stream of Islam are rejecting some traditional practices, including many generation-old rituals. The ‘new Islam’ differs from the ‘old Islam’ in a way that now Islamic practices cannot be used alongside traditional folk practices, such as visiting holy places or conducting certain rituals that contain elements contradicting Islamic tenets. This has hugely changed relationships in the socio-cosmic fields. For instance, ‘new Islam’ has brought significant changes in the everyday life of people, starting from the idea of health and well-being to everyday rituals, celebrations as well as interpersonal relations and relations between ‘human and non-human’. In comparison to the ‘old Islam’, which was in harmony with Kyrgyz traditional folk practices, at least on the mass level, the ‘new Islam’ among a certain group of people in Kochkor creates the notion of a totally different religion. And exactly these kind of perceptions are accelerating and strengthening the discourses about the nature of Islam, i.e. how Islam was before and what kind of Islam is being practiced presently, which I have illustrated in the diagram below.

The left graph on fig. 3 shows how ‘old Islam’, the historically developed Islam among people in Kochkor, was embedded in a Kyrgyz *salt*. In other words, what was accepted as a Kyrgyz ethnic tradition was also considered a Muslim tradition and vice versa. Both traditional ethnic values and locally perceived Islamic values were in harmony and constituted one whole socio-cosmic field according to Hardenberg’s concept (Hardenberg, this volume). However, in the second graph of fig. 3, one can observe how ‘new Islam’ is not fully grounded within the realms of *salt* any more. It has slightly come out of it and that part stands as a new value-source with its own norms that regulate relationships between people and between people and God, more concretely – Allah.²² At the same time, the diagram clearly shows that *salt* and new Islamic values and practices do not fully get apart but overlap up to a certain level.

21 The verb ‘to convert’ in the English Oxford Dictionary is defined as ‘to change or make something change from one form, purpose, system, etc. to another’, ‘to change an opinion, a habit, etc.’ or, more specific to religion – ‘to change or make somebody change their religion or beliefs’. Correspondingly, here I put the word ‘convert’ in quotation marks because generally Kyrgyz people consider themselves Muslim and it is not about the conversion from Muslim to a different religion. Instead, this term is used by me to refer to the conversion from the ‘old’ version of Islam to a ‘new’ version of Islam, which significantly differ from each other. Second, by using the term ‘conversion’ I aim to show the feelings of my informants who mentioned about foreign elements in the ‘new Islam’, which indeed evokes the idea of a totally different religion from what they practiced before.

22 Hardenberg has observed that now people instead of saying *kudai* (Kyrgyz word for God), use the term Allah (personal conversation). I have observed similar changes in the terminology of my own informants as well. For example a commonly used term in Kyrgyz such as ‘*Kudaiga shügür!*’ (‘Thank God!’), has nowadays changed into ‘*Allaaga shügür!*’ (‘Thank Allah!’).

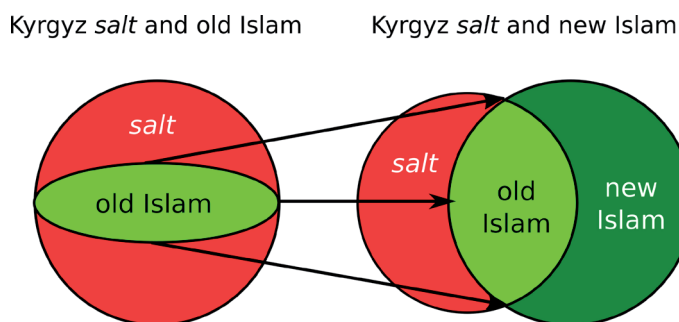


Fig. 3. The correlation and the relations between Kyrgyz *salt* and old Islam/new Islam.

Moreover, in the second diagram, I also drew the circle for Islam bigger than Kyrgyz *salt*, in order to show the increasing importance of the ‘new Islam’ in Kochkor.

The field, where the circles overlap, i.e. intersection, represents norms, values and practices, which contradict neither ethnic tradition, nor Muslim tradition, as it used to do before. These are the practices that do not cause any conflict. While the fields, which fall over the intersection, represent norms and values in tension, which evoke ‘value conflicts’ (Robbins 2007; 2013). For example, the red area that does not overlap with the dark green one represents local traditional practices which fall under the *salt* category, but they are accepted by Islamic sources and categorised as *shirk* (idolatry) or *bidaiat* (innovations, not mentioned in Islamic scripture). In the same way, the dark green area that does not overlap with the red one represents values and practices that are accepted as ‘Muslim tradition’, but do not fall under the category of *salt* and are perceived as ‘foreign’. This I will further elaborate in my examples on *kirene* and a case of dispute over a beard.

There is a similarity between the current process of Re-Islamisation that I observed in Kochkor and the Soviet policy in a way that both brought a cultural revolution in people’s lives. While the declared target of the Soviet Union was to create an ‘atheist Soviet Man’, the declared target of the current Re-Islamisation process, promoted by official Institutions as well as by lay believers, is to create a ‘religious Muslim’, who, in case of Central Asia, does not match to the ‘Muslim by ethnicity’, mentioned by Pelkmans (2007), or ‘Muslim by culture’, mentioned by Akiner (2002). However, I would point out two differences between these processes. First, unlike the Soviet policy in Kyrgyzstan external Islamic influences lack unity as they derive from different Islamic countries, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, or even Bangladesh and India

with differing religious practices and cultural elements and different political agendas. Second, unlike the Soviet Union, which could not completely destroy deeply rooted Kyrgyz traditional practices, the current Re-Islamisation process has resulted in the discontinuation of some of them, which allows me to argue that Islam is seen as a strong resource both in its classical term, as well as the meaning defined by the SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES. Before turning to my examples, I would like to shortly elaborate on the local categorisations related to Islam.

On the Local Categorisations: *Musulmanchylyk*

As noted before, for people in Kochkor, the self-identification of being Muslim, like being Kyrgyz, remains unquestionable. However, with the current process of Re-Islamisation in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, the local categorisations began to evolve around the question of who is a proper Muslim. Many debates started about the nature of Islam. The religion is practiced and interpreted in different ways, making it difficult for local people to grasp what Islam in reality is. The idea of what ‘true Islam’ or ‘real Islam’, from what I have observed, sometimes leads to heated debates, because people tend to claim that their own version of Islam is the right one. The existence of many sources and branches of various religions in the country also adds more confusion to this situation (Social Research Center 2008). Indeed, some of my informants confessed that they cannot define what true Islam is: ‘We got ourselves confused about which is right and which is wrong’ (*‘özübüzdün bashybyz ailanyp kaldy’*). Despite the large number of religious people in the village, one of the mullahs in Kochkor noted: ‘People lack religious knowledge!’ meaning that people lack the knowledge about what true Islam is and interpret and practice it differently. I also want to underline that the very word ‘Islam’ was not used much among local people in Kochkor. Some children at the age of 11–12, whom I asked about Islam even did not know what it was. Even an old lady at the age of approximately 70 replied to my question on what she thinks of Islam – ‘*Al emne?*’ (‘What is it?’). In the local context, people use the phrase *‘musulmanchylykta’* (according to a religious way), *‘dinde’* (in religion), *‘kuranda’* (in Quran), or *‘shariatta’* (in Shariah).

It is very important to rely on local categorisations and interpretations of Islam (Louw 2012) and also to pay attention to the local terms people use, when talking about Islam. I have noticed that in the local context, the terms such as *musulman* (Muslim) and *musulmanchylyk* (a set of values derived from

Islamic religious sources) are used to denote different levels of identification. For example, the local term *musulman* (Muslim) is used to denote a general identity of Kyrgyz people, which is not questioned, in the similar way as their ethnic identity is not questioned such as 'All Kyrgyz are Muslim (*musulman*)'. However, the local term *musulmanchylyk*, from what I observed, was more specifically referring to the norms mentioned in Islamic sources and also the complex of practices, which derive from the scriptures.

I do not translate the local term '*musulmanchylyk*' directly as 'Muslimness', as it is done in some sources (Aitpaeva 2007; Borbieva 2012; Louw 2008; Rasanayagam 2006), because in my understanding the local term and its English translation are of different meaning. The term 'Muslimness' refers to a Muslim identity based mainly on ethnicity, culture or religion as described above. However, from what I observed in the field, the local term '*musulmanchylyk*' was used when people mostly talked about 'new Islam', that is about the norms derived from the Islamic sources, which were put in opposition to '*saltyk*' (local practices).²³ Toktogulova, who also considered the local term *musulmanchylyk* in the local context, concludes that '[m]usulmanchylyk requires strict adhering to Islamic rules and clear distinction from folk beliefs' (Toktogulova 2008, 512). Thus, *musulmanchylyk*, as a source of values comes from religion (*din*), Quran (*kuran*), or Shariah (*shariat*), the words that the villagers employ, which stand in opposition to certain traditional folk practices, which I categorised in this paper as *salt*. When talking about local practices containing elements opposed to the Islamic tenets, people usually noted that it is forbidden according to *musulmanchylyk* ('*Musulmanchylykta bolboit eken*')²⁴ and even those practices, which are strongly embedded in the culture, started to be rejected. To illustrate this, I will start with my ethnographic data on the local child-related health beliefs and practices called *kirene*. I analyse the changes that are brought by the advance of Islam to this practice in Kochkor and discuss what the changes in such practices can tell us about the wider social dynamics in Kyrgyzstan.

23 By referring the term *musulmanchylyk* to the new Islam, I do not claim that this referral is absolute. It would be more correct if I translate *musulmanchylyk*, not as Muslimness, but 'Muslim tradition', which in the case of Kochkor has inconsistencies with some 'Kyrgyz ethnic traditions' categorised as *saltyk* which are accepted as *shirk* or *bidaiat*.

24 As the local phrase shows, most of the time when the villagers talked about practices in the new Islam, they added the word *eken*. As a local researcher and an instructor of Kyrgyz language for foreigners, I understand that the adding of the word *eken* implies that what is currently experienced is something new that she or he had not known before. Indeed, the way people talked about current Islam, by adding the word *eken* implies that it is new knowledge or foreign practice, which they did not have before.

***Kirene* – the ‘Disbalance’ in Child Health**

Before starting my field research, I assumed that health related rituals of Kyrgyz people had a stronger and more persistent character than other rituals, because they are related to culture specific illnesses. Furthermore, I held the belief that rituals conducted for children should be even more stable given that they are directed to children’s well-being and their proper development. However, evidence from my fieldwork shows that my assumptions were only partially true, as I came across many religious people²⁵ who had stopped performing some child-related and health-related rituals, which were claimed to be important.

In Kochkor, many families conducted healing rituals for children. Because of local understandings of children’s status and body function, almost all children are believed to experience a certain health related condition. There is one children’s health condition, which is of concern to most mothers in Kochkor. This is when a child cries continuously, becomes powerless (*shaldyrait*) and vomits. At this point, this health condition does not yet have a specific name. The name is only determined by the care-taker of a child who makes a diagnosis after recalling the events of the day. The symptoms of the child may be expressions of three different local beliefs on harms to child health: the first one is *kirene* (when a child is exposed to ‘heavy’ atmosphere), the second one is *jürök tüshtü* (when a child gets frightened, literally ‘heart falls down’), and the third one is *köz tiidi* (the evil eye). The mentioned order of these local health beliefs also indicate the frequency of these ‘harms’ diagnosed among children in Kochkor. In this paper I will discuss only the first one, *kirene*, which is most commonly met.

‘*Kirene kirdi*’ (kirene entered) – is how people from Kochkor would call it.²⁶ I will not call *kirene* as an illness, because my informants never classified it as *ooru* (local term for illness). It can be understood as ‘disbalance’ in health condition. *Kirene* affects babies and children mostly. Mothers suspect that a child is exposed to *kirene* because of the environment a child has been in, such as a crowd. Usually it is when parents have guests at home or pay visits to homes. The presence of many people does not mean the presence of many

²⁵ If before only mullahs – *moldo* – were considered to be ‘religious people’, then today due to the spread of knowledge of Islam among the larger population, including both elderly and the youth, the meaning of the term – ‘religious person’ - also got broader. Further, in this paper by religious people I will define not only mullahs, but also lay people who started to regularly perform Islamic religious practices in their everyday lives.

²⁶ I have learned that people in other regions of Kyrgyzstan might call this phenomenon differently. For example, in the Issyk-Kul region people call it *ach kirdi*.

eyes, at least none of my informants mentioned evil eye, or even just eye when talking about *kirene*. Presence of a child in a crowd means that a child cannot stand that atmosphere. Most of my informants used the phrase '*bala kötörö albait'* (a child cannot withstand), commenting on a child's inability to withstand the strong aura²⁷ created in a crowd. A child is believed to be clean and pure, and that is why the occurring atmosphere is considered to be 'heavy' for a child. Until a child grows older and develops enough 'strength' to endure that kind of atmosphere it will be considered fragile and vulnerable to it. Another reason for why *kirene* is not described as an illness is, because it is seen more as a 'normal' part of a child's health condition and any child is believed to experience it in its childhood. A child eventually will get over *kirene* and this is part of the process of coming of age.

Correspondingly, all mothers know rituals against *kirene* and the practice of treatment seems to be culturally embedded among people in Kochkor. The most popular treatment that I heard from my informants is as follows: one takes some ash into a tea bowl (*chyny*) and adds seven kinds of 'tastes' (*daam*), such as sugar, salt, pepper, flour and other ingredients. The combination of the ingredients may differ based on what is available at home. After adding the seven tastes to the ash, a mother covers the bowl with a napkin and touches twelve parts (*on eki müchö*) of the body of an affected child with the bowl.²⁸ If a hole appears in the ash while the ritual is conducted, it is believed that a child has got *kirene*. The size of the hole in the ash shows how gravely a child has been exposed to *kirene*. The deeper and the bigger the hole is, the stronger the *kirene* was. After the ritual, the ash is disposed of outside of the house. This ritual is performed three times. My informants noted that as time passes, one can also notice how the size of the hole decreases and by the end of the healing treatment there will be no hole on the surface of the ash, which means that *kirene* left a child.

The performer of the ritual also utters some phrases and wishes, such as: '*Kirene chygyp ket!*' ('Kirene, come out and go away!') or '*Menin kolum emes, Umai ene, Batma-Zuura apanyyn kolu!*' ('This is not my hand, but the hand of mother Umai, mother Batma-Zuura!'). Umai²⁹ and Batma-Zuura are the patrons of children and health. Mothers usually explained the post-ritual health

27 *Aura* (Eng. aura) my informants used this term in Russian.

28 The idea of 'twelve parts' (12 *müchö*) is common among Kyrgyz people. This example about the twelve parts of the body is based on the demonstration and narratives of one of my informants only. When asked which twelve parts she meant, she noted the following: head, two shoulders, two arms, the areas around heart, back and stomach, two knees, and two legs.

29 For detailed explanation of a patron Umai, see Abramzon (1949), Aitpaeva (2007), Potapov (1973).

condition of their children as follows: ‘*balam typ basyldy*’, ‘*srazu toktodu*’, ‘*tynchyp kaldy*’, ‘*srazu es alyp kaldy*’, ‘*jasap koisom ele jakshy bolup ketti*’, which can be translated as ‘my child stopped crying immediately’, ‘my child calmed down immediately’, or ‘as soon as I performed the ritual, my child got better or got relieved’. Of all these women none said that the ritual did not work or that they do not believe in the effects of the conducted ritual. Instead all stated that as soon as it was done the child got better or stopped crying.

The illustration of the *kirene* case shows the importance of this practice and how frequently it is practiced. However, *kirene* and many other equally common healing rituals became the target of eradication by religious people, the followers of ‘new Islam’. The idea of *kirene* is preserved, but the methods of treatment have altered according to Islamic values. Invoking the names of patrons or goddesses such as Umai or Batma-Zuura, believing in their healing power, or using objects such as ash or other things in healing rituals are now considered to be inappropriate. Such rituals are considered as *shirk* (idolatry) or *bidaiat* (innovations, not mentioned in Islamic scripture) in Islam. Those people in Kochkor who began to follow the values and norms of ‘new Islam’, abandoned the above mentioned healing ritual, which some of my informants clearly classified as *eski salt* (old salt).

Those religious people replaced the healing ritual against *kirene* with the practice of reading verses from the Quran as a healing procedure by claiming the conduct of the former to be *shirk* or *bidaiat*. The explanation of the female doctor mentioned above for her sending other patients to traditional healers, while refraining from their services herself was as follows:

‘My husband reads prayers and he says that they [meaning the rituals, kyrg. singular *yrym*³⁰] are *bidaiat*. We do not follow them. We do not follow ancient things of the Kyrgyz.³¹ Sometimes I want, but my husband is against that. He says it is *bidaiat*.’

Bidaiat,³² the word coming from the Arabic language meaning innovation, describes practices not mentioned in the Islamic scriptures. It serves as an indicator of changes brought in the socio-cosmic fields. *Shirk* or *bidaiat* are

30 We were talking about Kyrgyz traditional rituals conducted for children, which contain many elements that are forbidden by Islamic norms.

31 Here we were talking about healing practices of rituals that contain elements contradicting Islamic norms, and the quote ‘We do not follow ancient things of the Kyrgyz’ refers specifically to those practices.

32 I first heard the term *bidaiat* from my informants. It is a Kyrgyz word derived from Arabic *bid’ah*.

just terms, but the meanings that they hold are very important. For example, coming back to the second graph in fig. 3, everything that is outside the green circle (of both light and dark colors), which marks the values and ideals of ‘new Islam’, is categorised as *shirk* or *bidaiat* and not allowed to be practiced. Here, Islamic sources, which are obviously valued higher by the followers of the new Islam, serve as a resource, in the sense of the definition of the collaborative research centre RESOURCECULTURES, because values and beliefs are constructed and practices and relationships in the socio-cosmic fields are regulated by them.

If value conflicts occur, which seems to be the case with the doctor, when she is in a dilemma of using traditional healer’s services herself, it is the ‘rationalisation of values’ which comes into play (Robbins 2007). Here, values derived from the Islamic scriptures are rationalised and they control the rationalisation of less highly valued ideas, as the example of *kirene* shows, when this ritual is categorised as *bidaiat* and, as such should not be practiced. I came across many other cases on health and illness in Kochkor, which helped me to see how the villagers’ newly obtained values affect not only their health-seeking practices, but also the whole idea of a ‘healthy lifestyle’, which I will consider below.

Islam and the Values on Healthy Lifestyle

People’s ideas of health and illness have started to change with the current Re-Islamisation process and began to be influenced by ideals of being a proper Muslim based on the Holy Scriptures. My religious informants justify their decision to stop practicing certain traditional healing rituals by saying that they are forbidden according to *musulmanchylyk*, in Quran (*kuranda*), in Shariah (*shariatta*) or in religion (*dinde*). On the contrary, following Islamic tenets obediently means literally the ‘source of good health’, which is accepted as the reward of God. This is how an old Dungan lady at the age of 60 explained to me about the role of Islam in health and leading a healthy lifestyle:

‘Using things in the Quran itself is good for health: If you read the book of Quran (*Kuran kitep*), God will give light to your eyes and your eyes will see well. If you read the Quran with good intentions (*niet menen okusang*), your heart will be clean. If you read it with devotion (*jürökkö koiup okusang*, literally ‘by applying it to your heart’), your heart will not hurt and your hands and legs will not hurt.’

This Dungan lady, who speaks perfect Kyrgyz and teaches Kyrgyz girls at the local madrasa in Kochkor, was one of the many who believe in the power of the Quran and that it is only God, who 'gives cure' to people. As I observed from the words of my religious informants, being healthy or ill is tightly connected and strongly depends on the level of being a 'good Muslim', that means somebody who is following Islamic rules written in the Quran and being devoted to God. This can be clearly seen in the way religious people relate Islamic rules to a healthy lifestyle, such as reading the Quran or praying five times a day, eating halal food or uttering *bismillah* before taking a sip of tea or starting to eat. In their view, even biomedicine can become ineffective if an ill person does not keep in mind Allah before taking any pill. Emir, a religious man in his late twenties, noted that before taking a pill one should say: 'Oh, Allah, this [cure] will not occur from this pill, but only from you', which implies that the taken medicine will work upon the ill person only with the order of God.

Like health, which is considered to be a gift from God for following the norms mentioned in the Islamic scriptures, illness is seen as a punishment by God for the sins that one commits. Especially children's illnesses are seen as a straight cause of sins committed by their parents.³³ 'Parents do deeds which would not please God' (*Kudaiga jakpagan ishterdi jasashat*) – was noted by a female healer in Kochkor, who cures with the help of the Quran. Sins are believed to be committed, when one does not obey the norms and values in the Holy Scripture or act against them. Emir, who is a father of two children, confirmed this notion:

'Whenever I make a pause on daily prayers (reading *namaz*), I encounter a problem. Even if it does not affect me, my son gets sick, my wife gets sick, my daughter gets sick, my sister gets sick. Whenever I miss prayers, I expect such problems. My wife once got sick. Doctors suspected that it was *saryk* (Hepatitis A). Before going to see doctors, I laid my wife in front of me and read *surahs* (verses from the Quran). I pleaded Allah to forgive me and my wife for missing some prayers. There were times when in order to collect *dünüio* (wealth) I could not read *namaz* (prayer) in time, as I had to work'.

The word *dünüio* is translated into English as 'wealth'. In my understanding, this young religious man used this very word in an ironic way, because

33 See Keshavjee (1998), for similar cases among Tajik Muslims.

in his case, he worked not to collect wealth, but earn for their basic living, as he was the only breadwinner in his family. In Emir's understanding, because of *dünüio*, the material well-being, he skipped *namaz*, which in his understanding, caused God's disappointment and that is why his family has encountered this health problem. Apart from Emir, I met many religious parents for whom the process of healing included besides reading verses from the Quran, also pleading God to forgive their sins. By sins my informants usually meant practices that oppose values and norms in the Islamic sources. Thus, by being or becoming a proper Muslim, which now started to imply the one who obediently follows the norms mentioned in the Islamic sources, one tries to restore the health that was destroyed by one's own improper deeds.

Reading verses from the Quran to cure children has now started to be commonly practiced and has led to some parents considering themselves as 'health experts'. The power of *surahs* is unchallenged by religious people, in the same way as a traditional healing ritual used against *kirene* is not questioned by those mothers, who continue to perform such rituals. To my question, if he knows cases when one kept reading *surahs* but the ill person's condition worsened, Emir replied:

'Fatiha surah, the most powerful surah of Allah, never makes things worse. *Paigambar* (the prophet Muhammad) cut his hand and it was divided into two and he connected them with the help of surah. There is no any doubt in surah!'

Emir's case is one of the examples that show that religion is seen as a resource, in the way defined by the Collaborative Resource Centre 1070 RESOURCECULTURES which 'creates, sustains or varies social [as well as cosmic] relations, units and identities'.³⁴ In addition, one can also see how religion also serves as a resource in its classical economic sense, as a means for achieving some desired outcomes. In this case, prayer is seen as a medicine, reading *namaz* without missing it is also seen as preserving the harmony with Allah who grants health, otherwise he can send illness as punishment. I have observed that the idea of achieving a 'good life', 'healthy life' or 'successful life' in this life and 'going to heaven' (*beishke chyguu*) is very much connected to the idea of being a proper Muslim and following Islamic religious norms, which leads to the changes of the existing socio-cosmic fields. May it be the idea that God

34 See Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, 13, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 16.02.2016).

rewards people, who follow Islamic norms with good health, or may it be fear to be punished by God for not following these norms, it should be noted that there is a power in Islam that attracts people. This could be one of the reasons for people even with strong traditionalism to give up certain old cultural practices and adopt norms and practices indicated by ‘new Islam’.

Islam as a ‘Shop of Wishes’

During my fieldwork I met a woman – Altynai *eje*³⁵ – who started to read *namaz*³⁶ in 2002. I met her in one of the *Taalim* lessons. *Taalim* is a religious lesson that takes place once a week, where both men and women gather in separate places. Religious people take turns and host lessons in their houses. In my case, girls at the age of 11–12 and women of different ages gathered and heard religious teachings. Altynai *eje* explained to me that one attendance at a *Taalim* can transfer a person’s sins, committed in a whole week, into blessings (*soop*). That time, the *Taalim* lesson was taking place in Altynai *eje*’s house and she was the person who led the lessons. After attending two of these lessons I had a chance to talk to her about her life, her family and about Islam in Kochkor. She was very much satisfied with her new life after she started to read *namaz*, but she also mentioned the limits that they had to face in the social life. For example, they attend funerals but do not eat food there, if they know that it is not halal. Or they became estranged from their friends and relatives, because they cannot eat food there, as women prepare food without having *gusul* (in Arabic – *ghusl*, meaning full body ablution), or because men and women sit together in one room, practices that do not correspond to the norms mentioned in the Islamic scriptures.

If we look at the second diagram on fig. 3, in which Kyrgyz *salt* (cultural practices) and the new version of Islam overlap only at a certain point, Altynai *eje* is a good example of a religious person, who holds Islamic values (green circle) much higher and accepts only those elements in the Kyrgyz *salt* (the light green oval, which overlaps with the dark green circle) that are seen appropriate in Islam. In other words, for her Islamic norms and values are seen as paramount and ‘more rationalised’. By analysing her narrative, one comes across a set of values, which help to determine the factors that play an important role in her life and affect her decisions:

35 *Eje*, a Kyrgyz word for addressing women older than oneself.

36 ‘Reading *namaz*’ is translated as fulfilling daily prayers, but it was also the phrase that people used when referring to one’s devoted practice of Islam religion and its tenets.

‘Before reading *namaz* vodka was present at home, we (meaning herself and her husband) would fight and children would also see that. And how would you give good moral education to children! After we started to read *namaz* many things changed, life started to be better and we stopped fighting [...] My husband started in 2000. He started to go to *davaat* (religious preaching) and began to read *namaz*. One day he came home and asked if I want to read *namaz*. My heart rose and heated up. After some time, I realised that I also want to go to heaven and started to learn praying. In 2002, I started to wear a scarf (veil).³⁷ Later the women in the bazaar, who sat next to me, started to talk to me less (*köp katyshpai* [...] *köp süilöshpöi kaldy*). First, by addressing my scarf, they asked if my ears hurt and some asked if I became Baptist. I asked what Baptist was but they mocked me as if I was pretending not to know what it was (*koichu ai, ölümüş bolboi deshchü*). One day, I was coming home for lunch at the same time to read my afternoon prayer. Suddenly a neighbour of ours yelled ‘Baptist is coming!’³⁸ I came home, told my husband that people are looking at me strangely. I took off my scarf. ‘This is God’s test and you should pass this test. Now go and read two *reket namaz* (Arabic: *rakat*) and ask God for forgiveness!’ – my husband said. Then I wore it again ... Our life has changed drastically. Life started to be better. Before reading *namaz* there were times when we did not have bread and tea at home, we ate porridge from corn. My husband told that when one reads *namaz*, God gifts *yrysky* (goodness related to food) abundantly (*Yryskyny mol chachat*). I also got convinced in it myself later. Since my husband and I started to read *namaz* our life has significantly improved. I now ask women

37 In Kochkor, veiling did not mean hijab, but also wearing a scarf that would open only face and wearing a long skirt.

38 The expression ‘Baptist’ here describes a Kyrgyz person who just recently became religious and started to follow some religious practices which were not observed before. It does not refer to Christian baptism or the Baptist church. Neither does it clearly state that it is related to Islam. I interpret the term to describe a religion alien to the people in Kochkor, specifically, seen as a ‘wrong religion’ – ‘wrong’ in a sense that for Kyrgyz people, who are perceived as Muslim. Instead a person, who has started to follow any other alien religious practice, is labelled as Baptist. It is symbolised in this specific example by the wearing of a headscarf. Similar to Altynai *eje*’s case with her neighbor, once when I was interviewing three old ladies in the street one of them asked if I was not a Baptist to which another lady replied: ‘If she were a Baptist, she would have worn a scarf’. This is the only characteristic that I can provide when it comes to the term Baptist. However, the analysis of the discourses that people used in this context shows the lack of knowledge among people in Kochkor about currently practiced Islam and other religions in the village. This was also noted by one of the local mullahs and confessed by some of my informants.

at the bazaar to read *namaz* and I also give them rosaries as a present. Some of the women whom you (addressing me) saw coming to the *Taalim* lesson are ladies from the bazaar.’

Indeed, Altynai *eje*’s statement clearly expresses her satisfaction with the changes after she had started to lead a ‘religious’ life. They have a small shop in the village centre where they sell Islamic goods ranging from ‘Islamic’ dress, books, perfumes to ‘Islamic’ medicine. Her house is one of the rare two-storied houses in the centre of Kochkor with the interior renovated in *Evroremont* style (Euro-refurbishment style, which is fashionable in Kyrgyzstan) and filled with high quality household belongings. For village standards it was high above average. Also, Altynai *eje* values the peace that her family could achieve only when her husband became religious and stopped drinking vodka. She also noted that to those, who read *namaz*, who have become religious and follow Islamic tenets, God gives *yrysky* abundantly. *Yrysky* is understood as blessings of God and usually refers to food necessary for livelihood³⁹ (For a similar idea see Kicherer in this volume who writes about *baraka*). Like in Emir’s narrative about health, which can be granted by God, Altynai *eje* also strongly believes that what they have achieved is due to their pious life obeying the Islamic scriptures. Although it was not stated by herself directly, it seems to me that like Emir, Altynai *eje* is afraid of losing the ‘good life’ offered by God in case she stops following the prescriptions of the Holy Scriptures, which would create imbalance in the cosmic field and, which in turn would influence their lives.

Similar to the cases mentioned by Pelkmans (2007) about people who convert to Christianity or any other religion, the ‘conversion’ of Kyrgyz Muslim’s to ‘new Islam’ in Kochkor also is accompanied by accounts of people who had a bitter past and who started to experience a better life after the ‘conversion’. In Kochkor, as elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan, alcoholism continues to be a big issue in the post-Soviet period. Similar to Altynai *eje*’s case, starting to ‘read *namaz*’ creates hope to cure alcoholism and to start a good life. ‘Why don’t you take your husband to the *davaatchys* (religious preachers)’ was what one woman was advised by her friend as a solution for her husband’s drinking. One of my informants, a young man who is less religious, stated:

³⁹ Many informants mentioned food on the table blessed by God as *yrysky*. One of the *mulahs* in Kochkor also explained to me that in Islam *yrysky* is related to a person’s life, because a person lives as long as God grants *yrysky* to him or her and the person dies when his or her *yrysky* finishes.

‘Islam has become a ‘shop of wishes’ (*lavochka jelanii*). For example, one can pray in a mosque and turn to God asking for better life, as if that is granted through becoming a pious Muslim’.

Despite this person’s criticism, the perception of Islam as a ‘shop of wishes’ seems to be true from my own observation too. I met a young man, a father of two children, who started to perform *namaz* and turned to God when his son got severely sick and was hospitalised. This man stopped praying as soon as his son recovered. Equally, the recently started common practice of youth’s attending Friday prayers in the period of difficulties or disorder can be understood as the hope for a solution of difficult conditions by religion.⁴⁰

Kyrgyz *Salt* and *Musulmanchylyk* as Dominant Value-Sources

As mentioned earlier, according to the Dumontian theory of values, ‘a culture possesses a paramount value that ultimately structures the relations between all the other values it contains’ (Robbins 2007, 297; see also Otto/Willerslev 2013; Robbins 2013). As the cases in the section above show, people in Kochkor started to feel the existence of more than one ‘paramount value’, which derive from two different value-sources. However, it should be noted that these two value-sources – *salt* versus *musulmanchylyk* – do not stand for culture versus religion, respectively. Rasanayagam rightly states, that ‘it makes little sense to treat Islam as a distinct category of ‘religion’ and to separate it from a category of cultural practice or social relations’ (Rasanayagam 2011, 43). Rather, it is about cultural and religious practices derived from ‘ethnic traditions’ that are coming from ancestors on one hand, and the cultural and religious practices derived from ‘Muslim traditions’ mentioned in Holy Scriptures on the other, which at certain points oppose the practices of ‘ethnic traditions’. Given the strong traditionalism of Kyrgyz people on one hand and the rapid process of Re-Islamisation on the other, it is well worth to take a closer look at the relationships of *salt* and *musulmanchylyk* – the two *value-sources* that regulate relations in the socio-cosmic fields.

The friction between the former and the latter became recently especially evident and prominent with the religious dynamics in Kochkor, where people started to be strongly committed to the norms mentioned in the Quran or

⁴⁰ See Mostowlansky (2013), who also mentions the link between religious activities and the pursuit of a good life.

Shariah, to follow the path of Muhammad and are influenced by Arabic, Turkish, Indian or Bangladeshi teachings. What is more, they also adopted foreign cultural practices from these countries. This has greatly altered the cultural practices and social relations of local people by instigating value-conflicts. One of the lively and heated debates among people in Kochkor is, to what extent those local cultural practices that they have been following are correct in *musulmanchylyk*, or to what extent current practices of religious people, who follow 'new Islam' correlate with *salt*, Kyrgyz customs and traditions, local cultural practices. Thus, one cannot help asking: 'Which cultural practice or whose cultural practice do we mean when we talk about 'new Islam' in Kochkor, or Kyrgyzstan in general?' One of the local mullahs introduced to me the term *saltyk islam* (cultural Islam) and defined it as follows:

'What is *saltyk islam* – it is to preserve the Islam that has been coming from our ancestors. We do not need the tradition of the Arabs, Turks, and Pakistani people [...] There are many good Kyrgyz *salt*, but we support them only if they do not oppose to religion.'

This local mullah is acclaimed for being highly 'knowledgeable' in Islam and at the same time conducting his religious services in Kyrgyz national dress. There are, however, other mullahs who strongly abide by the values and norms of the textual Islam and one of them even sees 'cultural Islam' as 'a tool of enemies who want to destroy this religion'.⁴¹ Unlike them, this local mullah seems to acknowledge the importance of *salt* and tries to combine values derived from both value-sources.

The juxtaposition of *salt* and *musulmanchylyk* and current debates on their inconsistencies⁴² should not engender the idea that values coming from these two sources are totally different or fully opposed. As my second graph on fig. 3 shows, they are not fully apart, but overlap. Both consist of similar as well as differing values that regulate the interrelationship and interaction in the 'socio-cosmic fields'. For example, almost all of my informants support the presence of 'new Islam' for its bringing *yiman* (conscience, honesty, good manners) to people, but not all of them like the way, how it is also bringing a new, foreign culture, such as 'Arabic' dress or a fashion of wearing beards by young men. Once during my conversation with my neighbours in Kochkor, a

⁴¹ This was the statement of another mullah in Kochkor, when I asked how he understood the term *saltyk islam*.

⁴² See Borbieva (2012), for a similar case on the incompatibility between local tradition and Islam.

hot debate burst out between a ‘newly converted’ woman (approximately 70 years old), whom I will call Jarkyn *apa*⁴³ and her ‘non-converted’ husband (of similar age) and son (in his early forties) about values and practices that are derived from the two value-sources:

Me: How long have you been ‘reading *namaz*’ (praying)?

Jarkyn *apa*: Not so long; I also grew up among atheists [laughs].

Me: How do you perceive ‘beard’?

Jarkyn *apa*: It is *sünnöt*.⁴⁴ It turned out that one should grow a beard. I do not like how one wears Arabic baggy dress (*Janagy shalbyrap, Aravianyn bolbogonun kiip jürböibü, oshol maga jakpait*). Okay, let one grow a beard, it is *salt* inherited from father⁴⁵ (*atasynan kalgan salt eken*, meaning it is a tradition coming from ancestors).

Son: [interfering] Mama, it is not *salt* inherited from father [meaning ancestors]! The *salt* inherited from father is that a son cannot grow a beard before his father grows a beard.

Jarkyn *apa*: Ai, it is not so. It turned out that after one reaches the age of 20, he should grow a beard!

Husband: (who does not have a beard) It turned out to be so in Shariah (*Shariatta oshondoi eken da*).

Jarkyn *apa*: [getting angry with her son] You, do not argue with me, all right!

Son: If papa does not have a beard, how will I grow a beard?! [laughs]

Jarkyn *apa*: [to her son] Ai, if you start reading *namaz* and enter *musulman-chylyk* and when you are asked to grow a beard you will grow a beard, you do not have a choice (*koi dese koiosung, ailang jok*)! This is *sünnöt*!

Son: I will not grow (my beard) before my father grows his!

Jarkyn *apa*: Your father did not ‘enter religion’ (*dinge kirgen jok*, meaning that he does not practice Islam religious norms fully). He only visits a mosque to perform prayers.

Husband: [stopping his wife] Ai, wait, do not confuse the child (meaning me). [Turning to me] It is like this, my child. We have X,⁴⁶ who is our mullah for twelve years. In summer he wears *kalpak* (Kyrgyz

⁴³ *Apa* is translated into English as a mother. However, here I refer to Jarkyn as *apa*, as it is a culturally accepted practice to call all women of the age of one’s grandmother as *apa*.

⁴⁴ In Arabic ‘*sunnah*’. According to one of the local mullahs, having a beard is not a must, but is encouraged as it was worn by the prophet Muhammad.

⁴⁵ Here by ‘father’ the old lady implies ancestors, and not her son’s father.

⁴⁶ The name of the mullah was mentioned by my informant, but I replaced it with X for confidentiality reasons.

national hat), in winter – *tebeti* (Kyrgyz national hat). He finished an institute (meaning a religious institution) and with his knowledge he would behave and dress ‘normally’ (*jön ele jürdü*, meaning he did not grow a beard or wear an Arabic dress). As for those who have recently learned *byssmylda* (meaning who is new to religion, even implying the lack of religious knowledge), they wear baggy (*shalbyrak* – adjective with negative meaning) trousers and gowns and have become *shumduk* (*shumduk bolup kalyshty*, meaning they pretend to be very religious).

Jarkyn *apa*: Kyrgyz people’s dress for reading *namaz* was not like this. All would nicely have *ak kalpak* (Kyrgyz traditional hat), *chepken* (Kyrgyz traditional vest), young ladies would never tie their scarves in the front. Now it has become different!

Jarkyn *apa* does not like Arabic dress, but supports growing a beard accepting it to be tradition, coming from ancestors. Her son, by referring to *salt*, stated that he is not growing a beard as long as his father does not wear a beard, and in his view, his mother is wrong to see growing a beard by a young man as a tradition. However, Jarkyn *apa* does understand the growing of a beard as a tradition, but here as a ‘Muslim tradition’ coming from the Prophet Muhammad. She used the term *sünnöt*, which in Arabic also means ‘tradition of the Prophet’ (see Abdel-Khalek Omar 1997). Thus, the practice of growing a beard is judged by her and her son in two opposing angles, each of them using their own version of ‘tradition’ as more rationalised. Further, Jarkyn *apa*’s husband, for whom Kyrgyz *salt* is of dominant value, he applies a version of Islam that corresponds with Kyrgyz traditional elements, such as the mentioned mullahs X wearing Kyrgyz traditional dress, but not the Arabic dress, which is negatively described as *shalbyrak*, meaning baggy, ugly looking. The kind of Islam that is experienced in Kochkor with its ‘foreign’ elements is indeed seen as ‘somehow dangerously foreign’ (Louw 2012) and thus negative. This negative perception was also mentioned by some of the female informants, who were against the ‘Arabic dress’ and ‘beard’ culture, brought by the new Islam:

‘Our mothers only tied their scarves in front during daily prayers, and then tied it nicely in the back after prayer, not like women currently, who cover themselves from head to toes.’

Or by referring to the men in white gown and long beards that they see in the street:

‘Our father has a nicely trimmed beard, not like those men who have a long beard or whose, with whole faces hidden in a beard.’

Negative impressions of a newly introduced ‘Islamic’ fashion, on the contrary, trigger doubt about the nature of contemporary Islam and questions its being ‘true’ or ‘real’.

Similar to the statements mentioned above, the current practices of Islam are compared to what was practiced in the past where the nature of Islam is discussed and debated. Some of my informants noted that the ‘real Islam’ (*nakta islam*) is the one that their ancestors practiced. This shows that values derived from ancestors, i.e. *saltyk*, are seen as ‘dominant’ and they control the rationalisation of other values, including the ones that are newly introduced by ‘Islamic culture’. However, it should be noted that not for everybody the newly introduced Islamic culture creates negative sentiments. For example, Emir and Altynai *eje* both support Islamic fashion and follow Islamic values in their everyday lives and the number of such people is increasing. For these people, norms and values derived from Holy Scriptures are of dominant value, so they do not feel bad for abandoning certain traditional rituals considered as *salt* or *saltyk*. But there are also people ‘in-between’ like Jarkyn *apa*, who debated with her son. She started to practice the ‘new Islam’, but the traditional folk practices also remain of great importance for her. She confessed that she feels uncomfortable when in *Taalim* lessons they are told to stop those practices, which contradict Islamic tenets:

‘It is impossible to give up Kyrgyz *salt*. This mentality will not stop (*takyr kalbait da*). Do your religion, obey to your God, do your work, in your heart, do clean things for God, but it is impossible to give up Kyrgyz mentality (Kyrgyz: *mentalitet*, adopted from Russian). I feel uncomfortable when mullahs ask to stop *tushoo kesüü* (Kyrgyz traditional child ritual, which is believed to be important for the proper development of a child). I wonder how one can just stop it! How can you stop something that you have been doing since ancient times!’

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the debate between the family members mentioned above, especially the last statement of Jarkyn *apa* about her condition of being caught ‘in-between’ leads me to the conclusion that people in Kochkor are

experiencing a huge turnover in their value-systems that brought tremendous changes in their lifestyle. Here again, I would like to remind that my claims and examples were only within the framework of ‘new Islam’ and its influences on the existing cultural practices and that I did not touch other influences of the past, or of the present such as modernity, nationalism and many other current social, economic and political influences. I have shown that with the advance of ‘new Islam’ in the region, at present two dominant sources of values in Kochkor exist: one based on *salt*, in which ‘old Islam’ is an integral part, while new ‘cultural practices’ related to dress or beard are not accepted. The other one is based on Islamic sources, which local people call *musulmanchylyk*, but it does not support the old *salt*. By looking at the local *salt* vs. *musulmanchylyk* discourses applying the perspective that ‘dominant values serve as determinations of the relative importance of elements of a culture’ (Robbins 2007, 296), I reach the following conclusion:

On the one hand, it is *salt*, Kyrgyz customs and traditions or local cultural practices coming from generation to generation, that are used as a measurement to estimate, categorise, legitimise or question the nature of ‘new Islam’ that is practiced in Kochkor. The idea of some of my informants that *nakta islam* (real Islam) is the one that their ancestors practiced, or the acknowledgment of mullah X who wears traditional costumes as the real mullah, will serve as an example here. On the other hand, the values of *musulmanchylyk* dictate what should be abandoned or kept from the Kyrgyz traditional folk practices.

To Emir, the values related to *musulmanchylyk* are held much higher than *salt*, Kyrgyz traditional practices with pre-Islamic elements. However, Emir’s negative view about the latter, results from the interpretation that those practices with pre-Islamic elements contradict to *musulmanchylyk* and are labelled as *shirk* and *bidaiat* and that is why Emir does not practice them. But this case can be further interpreted as fear that Emir experiences from practicing something which contradicts Islamic tenets and that might deprive him of health and punish him by sending illness to his family. In the same way, Altynai *eje* believes that through reading *namaz* and following the religious path she will receive Allah’s rewards, such as *yrysky* (abundance) in this life and his merit in the afterworld. On purpose I finished the previous section with the ‘in-between’ statement of Jarkyn *apa*, because there are also many people in Kochkor who experience tensions similar to what Jarkyn *apa* experiences, when they are caught in-between two value-sources and it is difficult for them to make a decision.

If we employ the definition of resource given by SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES, *musulmanchylyk* serves as a major resource that creates, maintains or changes social and cosmic relations. Altynai *eje*'s case has shown that her new religious lifestyle has affected her social circle, such as limited meeting with friends and limited attendance of social events in the community, without sharing food, which is indeed a significant marker of social networking in a Kyrgyz community (see Bechtold, this volume). Similarly, the examples on *kirene* and other health-related points mentioned by the Dungan lady or Emir show that healthy lifestyle is directly related to the relationships in the cosmic field, in this case between a person and Allah. Thus, *musulmanchylyk*, in the face of the 'new Islam', seems to claim to be a resource in its classical meaning as well, through which one achieves good life, successful life, or healthy life, which are desperately desired in the time of hardship and uncertainty. By granting peace, success, and *yrysky* to Altynai *eje*, health, and problem-free life to Emir, or even solving the alcohol related problems of the villagers, 'new Islam' is indeed imagined as a 'shop of wishes'.

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YANTI HÖLZCHEN

Religious Education and Cultural Change

The Case of Madrasas in Northern Kyrgyzstan

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, Islam, madrasa, religious education, values

‘Thank God, now is a good time, people build mosques and madrasas [...] now we have yiman’ (Imam, Yssyk Köl region, April 2015).¹

‘All these mosques, madrasas – [who needs those?] – what we need are hospitals, kindergartens, water systems!’ (Woman in her 40s, employee at the regional administration [akimiyat], Yssyk Köl Oblast, April 2015).

‘There is no general understanding of the role of madrasas [...] Often, boys who have problems are sent to madrasas, their parents hope that they will learn how to become good persons [...] We want to improve and increase the knowledge of Islam – that’s why we have this madrasa’ (Madrasa director, Bishkek, May 2014).

Introduction

The above comments show that madrasas, and religious institutions in general, are perceived of and evaluated in various ways in Kyrgyzstan. This may be a result of the drastic changes Kyrgyzstan has undergone with respect to Islam in the past two decades. While at the end of the Soviet Union the country

¹ *‘Yiman’* translates differently depending on who uses the word and in which context. Generally, *yiman* is associated with a strong adherence to morals. Used by religious actors, as in the above sentence, *yiman* implies the sincere belief in God, and pious and morally good behaviour. In other contexts it may refer ‘solely’ to good manners.

had 39 mosques, nowadays these count up to 2300 in the whole country.² It is not only mosques that stick out as testimonies of a heightened interest in and engagement with Islam. The number of Islamic funds and organisations has also increased significantly especially since the turn of the millennium. Theological faculties and madrasas are being constructed and religious groups, especially the *davatchylar*,³ are actively calling their fellow Muslims to turn to the ‘correct’ practices of Islam. In their eyes, this implies the observance of the rules of daily conduct prescribed in the Quran and *hadith*⁴ and following the example of the Prophet Muhammad in their everyday conducts.

During my fieldwork⁵ I encountered various ways of understanding Islam: as something new or foreign, as a presently unknown or formerly valued knowledge, as something suppressed or distorted under decades of Soviet rule. Regardless of these different evaluations, the above mentioned understanding and practice of Islam is broadly gaining relevance in Kyrgyz society. In public, the numbers of men attending (Friday) prayer at mosques have increased throughout the past years as have the numbers of people praying five times daily and fasting regularly. Many men grow beards and wear Pakistani style long cotton gowns, more and more women wear the *hijab*, i.e. a headscarf covering hair and neck, and generally people increasingly practice Islam along the guidelines of the Quran and the *hadith*.

Religious practice – grounded in the knowledge of the Quran, the *hadith* as well as their prescribed practices and moral guidelines – is what I consider

2 Data based on interviews with representatives from the State Commission for Religious Affairs (May 2014) as well as from the Muftiat (September 2015).

3 The so-called *davatchylar* (plural of *davatchy*) are part of the global Tablighi Jama’at movement which originated in British India (Lenz-Raymann 2014, 104). In Kyrgyzstan, it has taken on specific localised forms (Toktogulova 2014). Among practitioner’s most prominent features are the *davat* (Arabic: *da’wa*; call, invitation), 3-day, 15-day or 4-month travels throughout the country and also abroad, as well as *ta’lim*, private meetings for religious learning. While the Arabic term generally indicates missionary activities, in Kyrgyz *davat* almost exclusively refers to the activities of members of the Tablighi Jama’at. See also Nasritdinov/Ismaïlbekova 2012; Toktogulova 2014.

4 ‘Hadith are accounts that report the words and deeds of the Prophet and his Companions. They are the primary resource for Muslim knowledge of Muhammad’s sunnah, or exemplary practice’ (Ali/Leaman 2008, 45).

5 My doctoral research is part of the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES of the University of Tübingen (Germany). Looking into ‘religious resources’ in Kyrgyzstan, I carried out fieldwork from February through September both in 2014 (Bishkek) and 2015 (Yssyk Köl Region). For more information see <<https://www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers/sfb-1070/projects/project-division-c-valuations/teilprojekt-c-04.html>> (last access 09.12.2015).

to be ‘religious knowledge’.⁶ According to my experiences, official imams, directors of Islamic funds, madrasas, theology faculties and, in general, people who are ‘close to religion’ (*dinge jakyn*)⁷ constantly complain about the Kyrgyz’ lack of knowledge: ‘*bizde ilim jok*’, ‘*bizge ilim kerek*’. *Ilm* translates into ‘knowledge’ in a very broad sense.⁸ However, in my conversations with these ‘newly pious’,⁹ it was clear that by ‘*ilm*’ they referred to a body of knowledge comprising practices such as daily prayer, the memorisation and recitation of the Quran, knowing the deeds of Prophet Muhammad and generally following his example in one’s everyday activities. It is this kind of knowledge, albeit with different emphases, that mosques, madrasas, *davatchylar* and a number of Islamic funds and organisations seek to promote among Kyrgyz people.

In my present research, I investigate madrasas – along with mosques, funds and religious groups – and their role for promoting religious knowledge (*ilm*), a main ‘religious resource’.¹⁰ I take into consideration the social and cultural changes of everyday practices, spaces, rituals, social ties as well as identities deriving from this ‘new’ kind of religious knowledge.¹¹ In this article, I want to highlight madrasas as realms of both economic and religious

6 What I define here as ‘religious knowledge’ is a specific understanding derived from my interviews with imams, *davatchylar* and other practicing Kyrgyz Muslims. In other contexts, and for other people or other religious specialists, ‘religious knowledge’ might comprise different (albeit overlapping) aspects. See for example Abashin 2006, Louw 2013 and the recent publication by David Montgomery (2016), which was published while this paper was going to press. ‘Religious knowledge’ itself is a broad term which I discuss in detail in my dissertation.

7 People ‘close to religion’, i.e. those adhering to Islamic practice on the basis of the Quran and *hadith* and having a certain knowledge of the scriptures, were the main focus group during my research (especially official village imams (*imam*), imams on *raion* level (*imam hatib*), representatives of Islamic institutions such as funds and madrasas, *davatchylar* as well as other persons identifying themselves as strictly practicing persons). Julie McBrien has applied the term ‘newly pious’ in her dissertation, lending it from Hefner 2005, referring to ‘people adapting scripture-oriented interpretations of Islam’ (McBrien 2008, ix; 2). Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge that practices and understandings of Islam among this focus group, too, are ‘polyvocal’ (Werner et al. 2015, 1864).

8 Implicit, albeit unclear differentiations are sometimes made between ‘*bilim*’ and ‘*ilm*’. In this case, *bilim* implies a canon of available knowledge or information (for example conveyed in educational institutions), whereas *ilm* implies the active and personal effort/work into reaching a conclusion regarding specific knowledge. Nevertheless, *ilm* and *bilim* generally are used interchangeably.

9 A term Julie McBrien takes from Hefner (2005); cf. footnote 7.

10 The SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES regards resources as a social process, i.e. socially constructed across time and space, and ultimately as the basis for creating, maintaining and transforming social units and identities. Applying the SFB’s analytical concepts, I regard the network of religious institutions promoting religious knowledge as a ‘resource complex’. Cf. Bartelheim et al. 2015 and <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de>> (last access 9.12.2015).

11 ‘New’ here refers to this specific understanding of religious knowledge from an analytical viewpoint as a feature largely introduced since Kyrgyzstan’s independence, and which differs from

interaction basing my analysis on Hardenberg's notion of 'socio-cosmic fields'. As Hardenberg argues previous approaches to 'ritual economy' have operated with predetermined categories of 'ritual' and 'economy'. By putting his emphasis on actions, values and relationships, Hardenberg wants to break away from such categorisations. As an alternative, he introduces fields of relationships, which are either produced through interactions among human beings, using economic resources – the social field – or through interactions among humans with cosmic forces, using ritual resources, i.e. the cosmic field (Hardenberg, this volume). Madrasas, in this understanding, serve as paramount examples of how the social and the cosmic field overlap: activities surrounding madrasas, as well as those within madrasas, establish relationships among humans, yet with the primary aim of serving and maintaining one's relationship with God. Therefore, basically any activity connected to a madrasa is in itself 'socio-cosmic', as the relationships among men always take reference to the relationship with God – madrasas, thus, present socio-cosmic fields *par excellence*.

This understanding of madrasas as socio-cosmic fields will be at the heart of this article. Departing from my ethnographic example of the so-called 'Imam Borboru', a madrasa in the town of Karakol (Northeast Kyrgyzstan), I will depict the various activities involved in establishing and maintaining a madrasa as well as the daily activities of this madrasa's students and teachers. From this example, I will delineate some common characteristics with other madrasas included in my research, and by doing so depict madrasas' ties to society's wider political and social contexts. This shall highlight how madrasas, as religious institutions, are to be understood as socio-cosmic fields and how they are embedded within the broader socio-cultural setting. This latter aspect provides the basis for the argument that a plurality of social and socio-cosmic fields in Kyrgyzstan may be identified, therefore confirming the existence of 'largely autonomous, only partly inter-lapping sub-fields' (Hardenberg, this volume). The last part of this paper addresses the question whether the socio-cosmic field of madrasas permeates into other socio-cosmic fields, particularly socio-cosmic relationships built on *salt* (Kyrgyz custom/tradition).

In sum, this paper answers to the following questions: In which ways are madrasas to be understood as socio-cosmic fields? What kind of interactions are to be discerned both in the social as well as in the cosmic field of madrasas? In which ways are these related to other social and cosmic fields

other forms of religious knowledge, for instance connected to healing practices and *mazar* worship (cf. Tulebaeva, this volume; Abashin 2006; Aitpaeva 2007; Louw 2007; 2013; Montgomery 2007).

apparent in Kyrgyz society? What are the key values¹² underlying the illustrated activities within and surrounding madrasas? And last, do these key values help us understand processes of social and cultural change in the field of Islam in present-day Kyrgyzstan?

The Imam Borboru of Karakol

The Imam Borboru of Karakol is situated in the heart of Karakol, a city at the eastern point of Lake Yssyk Köl in northern Kyrgyzstan. Karakol, with a population of approximately 70,000,¹³ is a thriving city and also the administrative and governmental centre of Yssyk Köl Oblast.¹⁴ In summer it is flooded by national and international tourists, using Karakol as their base for trekking, horse riding or bicycle tours. In winter too, it is renowned as the country's main region for winter sports. Karakol also extends its importance to market trade, presently still with China, but in future more intensively with Kazakhstan due to the launch of the Custom Union promising open borders and trade mainly with Kazakhstan and Russia.¹⁵

Some of Karakol's main tourist attractions bear witness to its rich history and multicultural influences (partly tracing back to early Silk Road trade relations) such as the wooden Orthodox Church, the Dungan Mosque¹⁶ as well as the Tatar Mosque exhibiting a dome with striking blue mosaic tiles, located on a side road only one block away from the city centre.¹⁷ It is the latter mosque to which the 'Imam Borboru' (literally 'Imam Centre') introduced below is affiliated (*fig. 1*). At the time of my research in June 2014, it had been working for about a year, although, as I was informed,¹⁸ it had not yet resumed the

12 In the same manner as Hardenberg, I understand 'key values' to be values which are central to humans' relationships, both among each other as well as between humans and cosmic forces.

13 According to the population and housing census of 2015 (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2015).

14 Kyrgyzstan is administratively divided into seven regions – *oblast*. These are again subdivided into *raion* (regional districts), and at village level into *aiyl ökmöttü*.

15 Kyrgyzstan entered this Customs Union in April 2015.

16 The Dungan mosque, built in the early 20th cent., exhibits an exceptional wooden and Chinese influenced architecture and is also the Central Mosque of Karakol.

17 These historical influences still resonate in Kyrgyzstan's multiethnic population of today. While ethnic Kyrgyz are the majority, followed by ethnic Russians and Uzbeks, Dungans, Tatars, Uighurs and others form minorities among the Kyrgyz republic's present population (cf. National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2016).

18 The interview was held with the assistant of the madrasa's director, the head imam of the Tatar mosque. In June 2014, this imam had just been appointed district head imam (*imam hatib*) in one of the regional districts (*raion*) of Yssyk Köl *oblast*.



Fig. 1. Entrance of the Imam Borboru
(Photo by author).

building also accommodates a child day care centre, a beauty salon, an attorney's office, as well as the branch office of a local political party. I was told that in its early years, the building had housed a music school, and prior to its usage for the Imam Borboru it had served as a girls' madrasa which later had been transferred to Grigorievka,²⁰ a town approximately a hundred kilometres away from Karakol.

¹⁹ For attaining official status, registration both with the Spiritual Administration for Muslims (Muftiat) as well as with the governmental Commission for Religious Affairs is required. Because the Imam Borboru serves the same tasks and shows the same features as any other madrasa I so far visited in northern Kyrgyzstan, in the following I will refer to it both as 'madrasa' as well as 'Imam Borboru'. Generally, the Kyrgyz term *medresse* (madrasa) is ambivalent. *Medresse* is commonly used to refer to more or less structured institutions (other than mosques or prayer rooms) of Islamic teaching for young boys or girls. Madrasas are not institutionalised according to consistent guidelines; this and the lack of public awareness of the actual functions of madrasas contribute to ambiguous definitions. For example, orphanages funded by Islamic funds were frequently pointed out as madrasas to me.

²⁰ This madrasa operated from 1997 to 2008, and as I was told was closed down due to a lack of funding. Nevertheless, it must have been a quite renowned madrasa in the Yssyk Köl region as it was often mentioned to me when explaining my research. Since 2009 the buildings house

official status of a madrasa, hence the description as 'Imam Centre'¹⁹ providing young males with preparatory courses.

The Imam Borboru is located in an inconspicuous building along one of Karakol's main roads. The building itself is of long rectangular shape, probably dating back to the 1940s or 1950s, with drab wall panelling common for buildings of this time. It has two floors, and while the sleeping dorms, bathrooms, dining room and kitchen are located on the west wing of the ground floor, a large room laid out with carpet, big calf-high tables and filled bookshelves serves as teaching area on the second floor. Besides these rooms used by the Imam Borboru, the

The head of the Tatar Mosque, to which the Imam Borboru is affiliated, is also the director of this madrasa. At a relatively young age (mid-thirties), he holds degrees from the Islamic University in Bishkek as well as from the famed Al-Azhar University in Egypt, and is known and respected throughout the whole region for his profound religious knowledge and vast networks. Together with his assistant and another teacher he manages the Imam Borboru and all three conduct classes. During his early years as the mosque's imam he called for the need of a madrasa, and advertised this among his personal networks. As I was told, a local Tatar²¹ reacted to this and bought the current building. Along with another sponsor from Saudi Arabia refurbishment was financed, began in 2010 and took three years until the madrasa's opening in fall 2013. The Imam Borboru officially carries the name of the Tatar investor's late brother, Ilfat, and above the building's main entrance a large banner welcomes its visitors with the words '*Ifat atyndagy Islam taanuu jana okutuu Borboru*' (Ifat Centre for studying and teaching Islam). To the right of the entrance doors a commemorative stone plaque exhibits the name of the Tatar sponsor's mother (Ismailov Bachtijar kyzy Elzana), indicating that she too, supported the establishment of this madrasa (*medressege jardam*²²). Apart from these initial sponsors, the madrasa now relies on regular sponsors in order to cover its overall expenses. For example, there are sponsors from the local vicinity providing bread and other food stuffs, or others bearing the costs for everyday utilities such as gas, electricity and water. Teaching materials as well are either given directly by sponsors, or financial contributions are used for the purchase of books and other teaching materials.

The curriculum and teaching manuals are determined by the head imam and his assistant.²³ While pacing through the teaching room and glancing over the filled book shelves, I was struck by both the abundance as well as the variety of books available (*fig. 2*).²⁴

an orphanage, funded by a different Islamic fund. Even though the children visit the secular village school and I was told that there are no explicit religious teachings, in their free time the children are instructed in the basic forms of Muslim practice (prayer, behaviour etc.).

21 Albeit being mentioned as Tatar in the interview it may be assumed that this person holds Kyrgyz citizenship with Tatar ethnic background.

22 Literally: (financial) help to this madrasa.

23 At the time of my research in June 2014, there was no standardised curriculum for Islamic educational institutions. However, a friend who conducted a UN funded research project including madrasas throughout the country in 2015 stated that during the project's research period the Muftiat had been working on the implementation of a uniform syllabus.

24 Some of the books I recognised from visits to other madrasas and private encounters, for example, there were a number of copies of the specific books used during the so-called *ta'lim* (religious meetings) promoted through *davatchylar*.



Fig. 2. Bookshelf at the Imam Borboru (Photo by author).

At the time of my research the madrasa had seven male students at the age of fifteen and sixteen. During the first year of their studies the emphasis is on learning the Arabic alphabet and language, and introducing the students to the fundamental Muslim practices prescribed in the Quran, such as how to do the daily prayers (*namaz*), how to eat, wash, dress, prepare and serve tea etc. Their studies are taken further by learning how to recite the Quran, by memorising the narrations of the Prophet (*hadith*) and generally by learning the basics of Islam. Besides lessons, the madrasa's daily program is structured along prayer times, meals and time for rest and leisure: in the early morning the boys come together for the first prayer, held jointly at the Tatar mosque, directly followed by a first class until 6 am. Between 6 am and breakfast at 9.30 am the boys may rest, with a short period for physical exercise before breakfast. Until lunch they again partake in lessons, and after the afternoon prayer they may enjoy their leisure time as they wish. The day is drawn to a close with the evening prayers.

Common Features with other Madrasas in Kyrgyzstan

Most of the features outlined for the Imam Borboru are common for other madrasas I visited throughout north-eastern Kyrgyzstan. Besides privately initiated and funded madrasas such as the Imam Borboru, a number of madrasas are built and maintained by Islamic funds. One prominent example is the ‘Social and Progressive Fund Adep Bashaty’, established in 2003.²⁵ It is one of the most active funds in Kyrgyzstan, and its mission is to promote a ‘socially responsible society and to teach the people to live by Islamic rules’, in accordance with Kyrgyz culture and traditions.²⁶ The fund has branch offices in each Kyrgyz *oblast*, and maintains six madrasas throughout the whole country. Adep Bashaty further offers religious education by giving public seminars and lectures, hosting public (charity) events during the fasting month, organising annual nation-wide competitions in recitations of the Quran as well as other venues, for instance on the occasion of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (*mavlid*). All these events are accompanied by a reference to moral aspects – for example which role Islam should play in family relationships and in social behaviour –, which resonates in the fund’s name, literally translating as ‘beginning/source of morals’. The fund’s representatives and madrasa directors and teachers all constantly and proudly made me aware of the fact that Adep Bashaty is funded solely by local Kyrgyz (*jergiliktüü adam*),²⁷ most often successful businessmen and entrepreneurs who ‘care about others and who are patriots of Kyrgyzstan’.²⁸

25 *Koomduk Progressivdүү Fondu Adep Bashaty*. For more details (in Kyrgyz language) see <www.adep.kg> (last access 25.11.2015). During my interview with one of the fund’s representatives in 2014, I was told that Adep Bashaty was initiated by a group of Kyrgyz men who had completed their religious education at Cairo’s Al-Azhar University in the late 1990s.

26 <http://adep.kg/adep_bashaty/1-post1.html> (last access 26.11.15).

27 However, during Adep Bashaty’s public seminars I visited, the large banners displaying the sponsors’ names showed mainly Turkey-based firms.

28 Interview with Adep Bashaty representative in spring 2014. By emphasising its local funding, Adep Bashaty most probably seeks to distinguish itself from other major Islamic funds, for example the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY; *Vsemirnaya Assambleya Molodyoji*) and the fund Is’chan Charia, both redistributing financial funding from the Arab states mainly for the establishment of mosques, but also of madrasas, water systems, hospitals and orphanages. Funding of mosques and other religious institutions is one main point investigated in my dissertation.



Fig. 3. Karakol Medresse (Photo by author).

A fellow researcher described Adep Bashaty's madrasas to me as 'resembling modern Turkish colleges',²⁹ and indeed, their *'Karakol Medresse'* as well as their madrasas I visited in Bishkek are very clean, modern and well equipped. The Karakol madrasa (*fig. 3*) is located at the town's periphery in a newly constructed two-story building, opened in 2009, and can accommodate up to around forty male students, although at the point of my research in June 2014 it had only twenty.³⁰ In addition to classrooms all furnished with desks, chairs and blackboards, there is also a prayer room, a computer room, dormitories with bunk beds, a kitchen and dining hall, bathrooms as well as facilities for teachers and other personnel such as doctors. Buildings, equipment,

²⁹ In the 1990s, a number of private schools and universities – with high standards of both facilities as well as education – were opened throughout Central Asia by Turkish sponsors, mainly through the Fethullah Gülen movement (see Balci 2003 for a detailed account).

³⁰ The madrasas I visited in northern Kyrgyzstan were all male madrasas (i.e. students as well as teaching personnel were all male). However, research conducted by a friend of mine within a UN funded research project revealed that female madrasas outnumber male madrasas. During my fieldwork I encountered only one female madrasa in Osh hosting up to hundred female students.

personnel and maintenance of the madrasas are all financed by the fund itself. Additionally, however, the students pay a fee of 1000 Som per month³¹ for lodging and food. Students of Adep Bashaty's madrasas are required to wear clean black trousers, a white shirt and the Kyrgyz national male head-dress, a *kalpak*. At the Imam Borboru, however, I saw the boys wearing either regular clothing or long cotton gowns³² and a *dopi* (Muslim skull cap).

Adep Bashaty's madrasas generally follow a similar daily routine as outlined for the Imam Borboru, that is, the day is structured along the lines of prayers, meals, lessons and leisure time. The timetable handed out to me listed the following subjects: Arab language (*Arab tili*), the rules of reciting the Quran (*tajvid*), the narrations of the prophet (*hadith*), the biography of the prophet (*sira*) and the basics of Islam (*Islam negizderi*). Additionally a subject called *tarbiyalyk saat* is taught, referring to education in general behaviour and rules of conduct.³³ Apart from these, Adep Bashaty madrasas offer their students participation in correspondence courses in secular subjects such as mathematics, history, Kyrgyz literature and natural sciences, through which they may obtain their state diploma (*attestat*).³⁴

After graduation, students may continue their religious studies at the Kyrgyz Islamic University, a theological faculty or an institution abroad.³⁵ Generally speaking, future job options are limited to appointments either within Kyrgyzstan's Spiritual Administration for Muslims, the Muftiat, its respective organs³⁶ or with other religious institutions (madrasas, NGOs).

31 In June 2014, 1000 Som equaled approx. 13€ (for comparison: in rural areas a doctor's or teacher's salary averages 4000–6000 Som/month). The same amount, also for lodging and meals, is to be paid at the Imam Borboru.

32 Often referred to as 'Pakistani' or 'Arab style' clothes. Along with the Muslim female headscarf *hijab*, covering a woman's hair and neck revealing only her face, the cotton gowns and *dopi* are frequently subject of heated debates of whether these dress practices conform with Kyrgyz traditions or not. I presented further discussions on this in my talk 'Madrasas and Madrasa education in northern Kyrgyzstan: Encounters and Challenges of Muslim Identity', at the Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS), October 8th–11th 2015, in Zurich (Switzerland).

33 *Tarbiya* corresponds with the Russian word '*vospitanie*' – education, upbringing. This timetable was applied in the Adep Bashaty madrasas I visited in Bishkek and Karakol, with the exception of their madrasa located in Baityk village (close to Bishkek), which focuses solely on the memorisation and recitation of the Quran.

34 These courses are subsidised, yet additionally each student has to pay 2000 Som per month (approx. 35 US\$).

35 Popular countries include Egypt and Turkey, and Adep Bashaty supports their students' further education through its networks in these countries. Graduates of other madrasas and schools may also choose Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for further religious education.

36 The Muftiat is subdivided into administrative units: *kazyiat* (oblast level), *imam hatib* (raion level), *imam* (official imam on village level).

Some students have also voiced that, with their additional language skills (Arabic, and sometimes Turkish) they could also work as translators in international firms.

Apart from the regular educational curriculum, at all madrasas I visited during my fieldwork it was common to offer short-term courses to school boys (aged six to thirteen) during the summer holidays. For example, at the Imam Borboru und Karakol Madrasa the boys came from the neighbouring villages. With these courses, both institutions aim at familiarising these young boys with basic Islamic practices (prayer, how to wash, eat etc.), the Arabic alphabet, the fundamental basics of Islamic knowledge as well as well-mannered everyday conducts (preparing tea, serving food etc.). While at the Imam Borboru courses last five to six weeks, at the Adep Bashaty Madrasa fourteen-day courses are offered. In both cases, courses are advertised at the time of Friday prayers at mosques and through word-of-mouth-recommendation. Adep Bashaty additionally turns the advertisement into a kind of practical experience (*praktika*): They send out their regular students to invite the neighbouring villages' youth and to act as teachers to the younger boys during the courses.

A further common feature of nationwide madrasas is that the teaching staff is usually considerably young (mid-twenties to late forties), and often teachers and directors have completed supplementary education at religious institutions abroad (mainly Turkey, Egypt, and Russia). Some of them also work as imams or have teaching experience from other madrasas. Staff recruitment usually works either through private networks and recommendations or through the networks within the fund,³⁷ in some few cases also through placement by the Muftiat. Besides the directory and teaching staff, most madrasas also have cooks, maintenance and security personnel, however this is not the case for the Imam Borboru. This may be due to the difficulty of allocating private funding, which also means that the Imam Borboru's staff usually works voluntarily (seen as part of the imam's job) or, if at all, a small amount may be diverted from the donations as compensation. Adep Bashaty, on the contrary, has the financial means to provide their staff monthly salaries from the fund's general assets.

Motivations of young people to study at madrasas vary, though it is worthy to note that most of the students I spoke to had not come from previously

37 Adep Bashaty, for example, has a policy of replacing its staff in regular intervals, and usually sends teachers from the southern to the northern regions and vice versa.

pious families.³⁸ Rather, they had often been advised to take up religious studies by friends or relatives diligently engaging in Islamic practice. Moreover, the directors of two madrasas I visited admitted openly that many boys study at madrasas because their school achievements were too poor to engage in further state university education; or that they are sent to madrasas when their parents ‘cannot handle their bad behaviour’. This, in their opinion, reinforces negative perceptions of madrasas in public, such as madrasas rearing extremist Muslims or as places where imams beat the students. As a counter measure, I was told, one of Adep Bashaty’s main aims is to enhance a more positive attitude by providing good teaching and structural conditions in their madrasas in order to function and be perceived as ‘Islamic colleges with a good (educational) level’.³⁹

The Madrasa as a Socio-Cosmic field

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, madrasas are prime examples of how both realms of economic as well as religious activity converge. This becomes apparent when looking at the values guiding the actions within madrasas and the various activities connected to the establishment and maintenance of madrasas.⁴⁰ In my opinion, values have not been satisfactorily touched in previous approaches to the field of ‘ritual economy’, for example in the contributions by Widlok (2013) or McAnany and Wells (2008).⁴¹ Therefore, Hardenberg’s emphasis on the valued actions establishing fields of specific relationships enables a novel and comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms and the socio-cultural changes of ritual economies, here understood as realms of social and cosmic actions.

In the madrasas described above both social as well as cosmic actions can be identified. On the one hand, the establishment and maintenance of madrasas is based on people’s interactions and social networks as well as

³⁸ Indicating that these families do not strictly adhere to prescribed rules in the Holy Scriptures.

³⁹ Representative of Adep Bashaty, May 2014.

⁴⁰ Hardenberg explicates these activities as acts of provisioning (production, distribution, and consumption) and exchange. The activities within the madrasas as well as acts of establishing and maintaining madrasas can definitely be analysed in these terms. Here, however, I put more emphasis on the values at play.

⁴¹ McAnany and Wells do address values, however, these rather resonate in their understanding of ‘materialized worldview’, i.e. the material and substantial forms of activities of provisioning and consuming (McAnany/Wells 2008, 7–10). However, their term ‘worldview’ is left without further explanation. The central importance of values as such, or how they inform certain acts of provisioning and consuming, is not investigated.

on their personal efforts in terms of time, work, finances etc. In the case of madrasas financed through funds such as Adep Bashaty, the monetary fruits of people's work produced in the social field are distributed towards various people. On the other hand, the cosmic field is present within the madrasas: it is here where humans both learn and embody the ways of how to create and maintain relationships with God, and put both the knowledge as well as this relationship into practice in their everyday actions. The conveyance of this knowledge within madrasas though, simultaneously relies fundamentally on the social interactions between teachers and students: mentors teach their students not only Arab language, the Holy texts and the practices prescribed by these. Ultimately, they provide the young students with the means to successfully create and maintain their relationship with God: by knowing how to pray, how many times to pray, how to take their ablution; by refraining from alcohol and drugs; by reciting the Quran, knowing the *hadith* and following the Prophet Muhammad's example in their everyday conducts and human relationships. The students are given the guidelines of how to be a good servant to God, and generally – in the eyes of 'newly pious', and also of most Kyrgyz in general – how to be a moral and faithful person (*yimanduu adam*), and to follow the 'good/right path' (*jakshy/tuura jol*).

In order to understand the above mentioned interactions as socio-cosmic it is crucial to ask: What are the values guiding and motivating these actions? When directly asking for the incentives of building a madrasa, of teaching for little money, of contributing to a madrasa's running costs, people instantly referred to *soop*.⁴² *Soop* (merit) is closely connected to the Islamic directive of dedicating one's time, material wealth, (physical) work and knowledge to good deeds that will be of continuous benefit to both the donor and the receiver (Arabic: *sadaqa jariyah*). These deeds range from smaller acts, such as learning one Arab letter or surah from the Quran each day, teaching someone how to read the Quran or giving out copies of the Quran, to deeds such as donating money for an orphan, paying someone's bills or investing in the construction of schools and mosques, the latter act being rewarded with the utmost merits ('*Eng soop bolot!*').

In other words, these deeds aim at the community and occur within the social field – they establish and maintain relationships with other humans. Nevertheless, for these contributors first and foremost these deeds are directed toward God, because God – and only God! – rewards these deeds

42 This Kyrgyz word derives from the Arab term '*tawāb*' to be translated as religious merits or meritorious deeds (Mittermaier 2013).

in this life as well as in the life after death. In this life, one is granted health, good social relations and wealth in all its facets; but the crucial idea of *soop* is to receive merit for one's afterlife.⁴³ The more one knows about Islam, the conduct of Islamic practices and about its values, the more *soop* one is able to collect, and the better one's current life as well one's afterlife will be.⁴⁴

What I want to point out here is that *soop* in this understanding builds primarily on one's individual relationship with God. *Soop* can only be provided by God, even though it may be obtained through both individual deeds and accomplishments (prayer, fasting, correct behaviour, i.e. following the prescriptions of how to take ablution, how to enter a mosque etc.), as well as deeds directed at the community and social relationships (teaching the Quran, sharing one's wealth through donations and alms (*sadaka*), helping the poor and needy, treating one's parents and fellow human beings respectful, sharing food etc.). Therefore, even though *soop* has a social directive (see also Bechtold (this volume) for the role of *soop* in communal feasts), ultimately it can only be achieved through and provided by the (individual) relationship one holds with God. This resonates in the numerous formal and informal conversations during my fieldwork, in which people told me that everything is given by God (*kudai/Allah bergen*) – my health, my house, my livestock, my family, my social network etc. The well-being and quality of my life and that of my close ones depends primarily on how (well) I serve God. That is through believing in God with a pure heart (*taza jürök*), by praying regularly, fasting, going to the mosque, continually learning about Islam, helping fellow people, giving alms etc. – in sum: by living according to what Islam teaches and what God asks of me.⁴⁵

While it is this knowledge, which is essentially taught in madrasas, it is not solely the knowledge of Islamic teaching. Knowledge provided in madrasas furthermore stands for a **moral directive**, as indicated in the preceding

43 Kicherer (this volume) has observed striking similarities in her research field, the Bartang valley in Tajikistan, relating these to the concept of *barakat* (divine blessing). The features of *soop* outlined in my case study converge with what Kicherer terms 'meritic *barakat*'.

44 *Soop* therefore stands for an inherently calculative system. However, as this calculative system is embedded within the realm of cosmic relationships, being calculative is not in the slightest evaluated negatively, as it would be within the field of social interaction and relationships. A friend of mine told me about a device (similar to a ring) with counting digits in order to keep track of the amount of *soop* one collects each day. In her work, Mittermaier (2013) elaborates on these calculative aspects within Islam, too.

45 It is no wonder, then, that in many of my conversations I was told that before starting to pray regularly, to believe and to serve God, life was one of hardships, experiencing sicknesses, death and poverty. Many pointed out to me that before they had started a pious life, they used to drink alcohol, used to get into fights and were out of jobs. It had been 'God's test' (*Allahdyn synoosu*).

paragraph. In my interviews people, whether practicing Muslims or not, always remarked that with Islam ‘morals had come’ (*yiman keldi*), as with the spread of knowledge and practice of Islam (through mosques, madrasas and *davat*) people refrained from alcohol (*‘el arak ichpeit’*), didn’t fight or argue (*‘el urushpait’*), and generally the local village communities, as well as Kyrgyz society at large, had become more peaceful (*‘tynch bolup kaldy’*). The madrasa thus, transcends its function as a solely educational institution, i.e. it further stands as institution providing society’s youth with good manners and morally good behaviour.⁴⁶ As two madrasa directors pointed out, boys are often sent to madrasas when they have problems⁴⁷ or when parents cannot handle their children’s bad behaviour. From the point of view of those investing their personal time, efforts and knowledge into the establishment, maintenance and activities of madrasas, they create and reaffirm their own cosmic relationship with God (on the basis of *soop*). At the same time they contribute to the (moral) good and wealth of their local community, as well as to the moral prosperity of Kyrgyz society. In other words: one offers to one’s fellow human beings the opportunity of getting in touch with God, and also with the global Muslim community (*umma*). By the education in madrasas the youth is taught how to create and maintain cosmic relationships with God, a knowledge which at different stages during Soviet rule had significantly been suppressed and distorted, at least in public.

In sum, by taking into account the guiding value of *soop* it becomes clear how madrasas can be understood as socio-cosmic fields *par excellence*: *soop* motivates the activities and relationships between humans, which are simultaneously, and primarily (!), acts of creating and maintaining one’s cosmic relationship with God. Additionally, the madrasa also stands for ‘something else’, i.e. in its material and substantial form of a religious institution it represents what McAnany and Wells in their account of ‘ritual economy’ understand as materialised ‘worldview’ (McAnany/Wells 2008, 1, 7–10). It becomes a symbol of Islam’s moral potential for society.

This socio-cosmic field of madrasas should also be studied within wider social and cultural contexts. First, it has to be taken into account that the socio-cosmic field of madrasas is a newly evolving one:⁴⁸ the spread of religious knowledge, as based on an adherence to textual Islam and its prescribed prac-

⁴⁶ Manja Stephan in her case study on Tajikistan has written about the moral dimension of religious education, i.e. Islam as moral resource (cf. Stephan 2010).

⁴⁷ However, it was not specified in the interview what kind of problems are meant.

⁴⁸ How this is based on the understanding of religious knowledge as a (new) resource in Kyrgyz society is argued in my doctoral thesis.

tices and moral guidelines, has – in this intensity – only been enabled among a broad public since Kyrgyzstan’s independence and the implementation of religious freedom. Second, despite the constitutional separation of state and religious affairs (manifest, for instance, in administrative state structures and the separate administrative function of the Muftiat), the state’s predominance over religious affairs nevertheless resonates in legal restrictions, affecting madrasas’ scope of action to a certain degree. Third, the socio-cosmic field of madrasas is highly contested. Through the spread of new religious knowledge fundamental changes of so far upheld rituals and social relationships are under way. It can be argued that the socio-cosmic field established in and through madrasas penetrates considerably into existing socio-cosmic fields, such as the socio-cosmic field which holds *salt*⁴⁹ (customs, traditions) as ‘paramount value’ (Dumont 1977; 1980).

In the following section I want to show how the socio-cosmic field of madrasas interacts with other social fields (i.e. politics) and socio-cosmic fields (i.e. *salt*), and relate these observations to social changes currently under way in Kyrgyzstan. In this endeavour, I accept Widlok’s proposal to investigate ritual economies, or in this case, socio-cosmic fields by taking into account wider historical, political and social processes (Widlok 2013, 177).

Madrasas in Post-Soviet, Transnational and Political Settings

Madrasas and other institutions promoting religious knowledge in present-day Kyrgyzstan have to be understood against the historical background of Soviet influence, i.e. how independence opened up opportunities for religious activity after decades of Soviet suppression and disintegration of any official religious activity, institutions or posts. While an account of pre-Soviet history of Islamic institutions goes beyond the scope of this paper,⁵⁰ I here concentrate on the main factors enabling the significant increase of Islamic institutions that promote religious knowledge since Kyrgyzstan’s independence in 1991.

⁴⁹ See Tulebaeva (this volume) for an extensive consideration of how *salt* and ‘new Islam’ compete as two different cultural and value systems. Additionally, the term ‘*salt*’ itself has dimensions reaching beyond its English translation of ‘custom/tradition’, i.e. regulating both social relationships as well as those with ancestors, nature and God. See Beyer 2009 for a detailed account of *salt*.

⁵⁰ For this discussion see my upcoming dissertation. Also, following contributions deal with the pre-Soviet history of Islam and Islamic institutions: Kemper et al. 2010; Khalid 2007; Motika et al. 2013; Ro’i 2000; Werner et al. 2015. Investigations into schools of religious education under the influence of Jadidism are to be found in the works of Khalid 1998; Kubatova 2012 and Suny/Martin 2001.

The implementation of religious freedom and the general opening of the country towards global markets and communities in this context is central to the emergence of a thriving public religious sphere. The first to react to the legal permission of religious activity in public were Christian missionaries,⁵¹ while the strong presence of Islam gained impact especially after the turn of the millennium. In the nineties, the appeal to Islam was mainly connected to the country's nation building initiatives and embedded in common narratives of Kyrgyz national identity (Shahrani 1984; Privratsky 2001; Rasanayagam 2011; Nasritdinov/Ismailbekova 2012; Abashin 2014; Werner et al. 2015). However, the establishment of Turkish colleges and universities played a substantial role for familiarising the younger generation with the Muslim world and Muslim practices.⁵² Furthermore, the Muftiat as representative and authoritative body for Islam in the country took on more and more presence within society, as did the Islamic University closely affiliated with the Muftiat.⁵³ While in the 1990s and early 2000s, the activities of members of the *Tablighi Jama'at*⁵⁴ movement, generally known as *davatchylar*, was received with disdain among the general public, nowadays they are vital for the familiarisation with Islamic teachings and practices, especially in the rural areas. For instance, the majority of practicing Kyrgyz during my field-work had been drawn to Islam through *davat*.

The *davat* represents one of several international flows of exchange, less in terms of money (as shown with the example of the Imam Borboru's funding from Saudi Arabia) but especially as exchange of religious knowledge and personnel across geographical borders. The activities of the *davatchylar* rely heavily on their shorter or lengthier trips (*davat*), both throughout

51 However, their influence has remained marginal in a predominantly Muslim society. Among others Pelkmans has written extensively on Christian missionary activities (Pelkmans 2007; Pelkmans/McBrien 2008), and further discusses that the law for religious freedom, in practice, also caused certain limitations (Pelkmans 2015).

52 Balci (2003; 2014) has addressed this issue. One of my closest people in Kyrgyzstan recounted his memory of how in his Turkish college he and his fellow students were invited to prayer lessons during which they were always offered food – a reason why he voluntarily joined these lessons.

53 The current institution of the Muftiat derives from an administrative structure established in Soviet times. Before independence, the Muftiat for the Central Asian Republics was located in Tashkent (Tajikistan), with branch offices (*kazyiat*) in each Republic. The Kyrgyz *Kazyiat* was established in 1943, and continued to be the current Muftiat after independence, <muftiyat.kg> (last access 9.12.2015).

54 Kyrgyzstan is currently the only country of Central Asia where the *Tablighi Jama'at* (TJ) practices legally. The movement has been highly localised, to the extent that according to my research findings quite a few Kyrgyz do not realise they are practicing Islam on the basis of the TJ movement. See Nasritdinov/Ismailbekova 2012 and Toktogulova 2014 for further ethnographic and theoretical details.

Kyrgyzstan but also abroad, commonly Pakistan and India. During many of my interviews, people reminisced about their travels and encounters with fellow Muslims, and many pointed out that even *davatchylar* from as far away as Germany ('from your home country!') had come to Kyrgyzstan. While these informal networks enable experience with people from abroad and require relatively little financial costs, those who have the means go abroad and obtain an official degree from universities in Egypt, Turkey, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the number of people going on pilgrimage to Mecca has increased significantly throughout the past years. These forms of religious experience and education abroad, on return to Kyrgyzstan, considerably contribute to the country's thriving religious atmosphere.

Another substantial form of international exchange becomes evident in the construction of mosques, extensively enabled through Islamic funds redirecting donations from mainly Arab sponsors to local Kyrgyz communities. For instance, in Yssyk Köl Oblast about two thirds of all mosques are built with foreign donations from Arab states.⁵⁵ A minority is funded with money from Turkey,⁵⁶ and the construction of mosques via community efforts (*ashar*) or with donations from wealthy villagers is becoming more and more common.⁵⁷ Funds, such as Adep Bashaty, but also more informal religious groups, further contribute to the promotion of religious knowledge through their madrasas, seminars, public events, and private meetings for sharing their knowledge and discussing religious issues; particularly the internet, but also books, radio and television are important media of information transfer.⁵⁸

All these activities underlie certain statutory requirements. For instance, any religious institution – mosque, madrasa, theology faculty or Islamic organisation – legally has to be registered both with the governmental

55 This information is based on data of mosques I gathered throughout the whole *oblast*, was confirmed in estimations made by different imams, and further resonates in numbers given to me by representatives of the Muftiat.

56 During my fieldwork in Yssyk Köl Oblast I encountered no mosque funded by Turkish sponsors. However, I was told that Turkey does fund mosques in Kyrgyzstan, albeit a minority. However, the new Central Mosque of Kyrgyzstan currently under construction in Bishkek depends largely on Turkish donations.

57 One prominent imam estimated these as approx. 30% (interview taken in May 2015). These, too, serve as nice examples of how personal work and effort is shared and redistributed to the local community in a similar vein as Bechtold (this volume) shows for the hajj feasts, or as Hardenberg (this volume) states for feasts (*toy*; *ash*) in general. More elaborate ethnographic data about this will be provided in my dissertation.

58 Additionally, small booths in the vicinity of any larger mosque sell books, prayer beads, carpets, *halal* cosmetics and other paraphernalia. Furthermore the growing importance of *halal* certification and the evolving '*halal* industry', as well as the spread of Islamic financing reveal the steady development of a religious market (Pelkmans 2006; Kitiarsa 2008).

Commission for Religious Affairs and the Muftiat. Also, the land or buildings for these institutions are allocated through governmental institutions – through the *aiyl ökmöttü* at village level and the *akimiyat* in the *raion*⁵⁹ – and construction can only be initiated by submission of certain official documents provided by these. In the case of madrasas, additionally, there are regulations pertaining to curriculum and degrees. It is statutory that madrasa education may only be entered after completion of nine years compulsory education. Degrees obtained from madrasas are however, not officially accepted by the state Ministry of Education if the madrasa's curriculum does not dedicate 40 % of its overall curriculum to secular subjects. Therefore, degrees from madrasas as well as the Islamic University and Islamic theology faculties have no state validity,⁶⁰ thus limiting job chances solely to the religious field.⁶¹ Endeavours of Adep Bashaty offering their madrasas' students participation in correspondence courses for attaining their state diploma (*attestat*) are exceptional, and are part of the fund's efforts to establish madrasas as high quality educational institutions, and thereby to improve madrasas' public reputations.⁶²

These examples shall serve at this point to indicate the scope of political and state authority over madrasas and the socio-cosmic field produced through and within these.⁶³ Public discourse and the fear of terrorism have spurred even more attempts by the state to increase their measures of control, such as regular investigations by the State Security Service (*Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*), regulations imposed on people seeking *davat*, but also jointly organised seminars by state representatives and imams raising awareness about radical forms of Islam.

Overall, speaking in Hardenberg's terms, these interactions show that interactions of religious institutions with the political sphere can be understood as the interaction with another social field, guided by its own values (democracy,

⁵⁹ See footnote 14.

⁶⁰ The only exception I know of is the Theology Faculty of the State University in Osh, which closely works together with institutions in Turkey.

⁶¹ Considerations of such a parallel emerging educational system have been presented in my talk 'All God's Words Give Us Benefits – Considering Religion as Resource in Kyrgyzstan' at the conference 'Religion as Resource' held at Tuebingen University in July 2014.

⁶² Media reports and foreign funding have spurred gossips of madrasas training extremists and terrorists, for instance <<http://www.rferl.mobi/a/imam-arrested-charged-with-torture-in-tajikistan/25410121.html>> (last access 9.12.15).

⁶³ Here I refer mainly to the regulations state institutions impose on madrasas. Within the local communities, however, other discourses may arise in regard to authority and leadership. Abashin (2006), for instance, has discussed this in his account of conflict between different religious actors in a village in Tajikistan. Beyer, too, has reflected upon different forms of authority and ways of attaining leadership in her account on *salt* in Talas, Kyrgyzstan (Beyer 2009).

state sovereignty, state security etc.). In this specific case, this social sphere, to a certain degree, exerts control and authority over madrasas' socio-cosmic field, therefore to some extent limiting them in their scope of action. Nonetheless, the networks to other religious institutions abroad (e.g. universities, foreign funds and sponsors) as well as globally active religious groups (e.g. the *Tablighi Jama'at* movement) highlight the extent to which the socio-cosmic field of Kyrgyz religious institutions is engaged with and linked to the socio-cosmic fields of actors and institutions from other Muslim countries. This, in turn, has significant impacts on local socio-cosmic fields and will be addressed in the following sub-chapter.

Socio-Cultural Change through the Lens of Socio-Cosmic Fields

In the preceding paragraphs I have outlined the historical, political and transnational setting of madrasas, understood as contexts enabling, forming and at times also restricting the socio-cosmic field of madrasas. In the subsequent paragraphs I will discuss, how the socio-cosmic field of madrasas, building on the conveyance and spread of religious knowledge, penetrates into another socio-cosmic field of Kyrgyz society: the one Hardenberg (this volume) has exemplarily demonstrated in regard to feasts and which in Tulebaeva's contribution (this volume) builds on the paramount value of *salt* – (Kyrgyz) custom/tradition.

In the preceding parts of this paper, I have focused on madrasas as socio-cosmic fields, i.e. as realms of value informed interactions producing specific social and cosmic relationships. Based on the prominent example of the value of *soop* I have argued that any action is in itself socio-cosmic, as social relationships are always derived from the primary aim to serve God, and thus the cosmic relationship. In the following I want to argue that it is this **individual relationship** between a human being and God which is gaining more importance and prominence, and that cultural changes in Kyrgyzstan have additionally to be understood on the basis of these shifts in regard to valued relationships. I will put aside the visual and 'materialised' forms of worldview (among others the spread of mosques, women wearing headscarves, changes in ritual practice⁶⁴) and look at how **relationships** based on certain values contribute to these (visual) changes.

⁶⁴ These will be discussed in detail in my doctoral thesis. Additionally, existing literature has touched upon single aspects, such as McBrien 2009; 2012; Werner et al. 2015.

For this argument it is crucial to look at the ‘cultural logics’ (Robbins 2007) of the values guiding both the actions as well as the relationships resulting from these. In my example of madrasas I have outlined *soop* as a crucial value for understanding madrasas as socio-cosmic fields. I have shown that the value of *soop* motivates both actions within the social field, aimed at creating and maintaining relationships among humans, as well as actions in the cosmic field, thus creating and maintaining relationships with God. I have claimed that the religious knowledge produced, distributed and consumed in madrasas promotes the relationship with God as primary, meaning that all social relationships are in essence directed first and foremost at God, because it is God who rewards these good deeds of social interaction. On the individual level, one receives and collects merits for one’s afterlife, but also for **this** life: one is healthy, is blessed with good social relationships, and is satisfied with life the way it is.

In other words: *soop*, as a value, has two dimensions – one directed at social relationships, and one directed at individual salvation.⁶⁵ These dimensions correspond with what Robbins (2007) has identified as ‘value of relationalism’ and ‘value of individualism’ in his study of cultural change among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea under the influence of Christianity. Robbins argues that the Urapmin in their everyday actions are constantly confronted with choosing between ‘two cultural orders [that] are governed by different values [...]’ (Robbins 2007, 307). One cultural order, that of ‘traditional Urapmin social structural thinking’ (Robbins 2007, 307), is guided by the value of relationalism, defining – and here he relates to Dumont’s notion of value hierarchies (Dumont 1977; 1980) – ‘the creation and maintenance of relationships as paramount’ (Robbins 2007, 307). This stands in contrast to the cultural order of Urapmin Christianity, which builds on the paramount value of ‘the creation of an individual self that is worthy of salvation’ (Robbins 2007, 309).

In alignment with Robbins, Tulebaeva (this volume) analyses cultural change in Kochkor (Kyrgyzstan) as resulting from two conflicting orders, each building on different paramount values: the order based on *salt* (Kyrgyz tradition/custom) versus the order based on *musylmanchylyk*⁶⁶ (referring to

⁶⁵ Anderson, in his account of Muslim piety movements and ways of the formation of selfhood in Egypt, depicts these two modes by referring to ‘virtue established through social exchange and interaction (*mu’aamalaat*)’ or ‘simply through [individual] worship (*‘ibaadaat*)’ (Anderson 2011, 3).

⁶⁶ Tulebaeva (this volume) states that in her research area, the town of Kochkor, people using the term *musylmanchylyk* specifically refer to religious values and norms written in Islamic scripture and also the complex of practices that derive from the scripture.

Islamic practice based on the Holy Scriptures; in my words: Islamic practice informed by my definition of ‘religious knowledge’). In contrast to Robbins’ example from Papua New Guinea however, these two cultural orders equally build on Islam, as well as on communal values. That is, during feasts and in Kyrgyz rituals based on *salt* it is as vital to recite surahs from the Quran, to express one’s wishes and to sacrifice animals in the name of Allah, as it is in feasts attended by people strictly adhering to prescribed rules of Islamic conduct.⁶⁷ During the latter feasts no alcohol is involved, men and women sit in separate rooms and in between meals people leave the room for prayer. Common features of both types of feasts are for instance the abundance and serving order of food, the forms of hospitality, and the constant reference to values such as *yrys* (happiness), *tynch* (peace), *yntymak* (good/close relations), *kut* (prosperity) or *den sooluk* (health).

However, the relationships inherent in these values take on a different relational direction or emphasis. While in feasts on the basis of *salt*, the communal values are achieved **through the social gathering**, through the collective consumption of food (and commonly also alcohol), and through the collectively given and received wishes (*kala*) – and are therefore provided by God. In the understanding of the ‘newly pious’, however, the communal values are seen as the reward given by God in turn for one’s own constant efforts to do good deeds and to follow the rules God himself has provided in the Quran. In this context, giving and attending a feast is done under the primary objective of serving God by ways of promoting community – and not vice versa, as mentioned above, giving a feast under the primary objective of social obligation and strengthening kinship ties (Beyer 2009; Hardenberg 2010; 2016; Light 2015a; 2015b).

A friend of mine, who had started praying *namaz* and learning about Islam a few years ago, put it nicely in one of our conversations:

‘To be *baktyлуу*, happy, has different meanings. For many, it is to have children, a house, buying a car, giving big feasts [...]. In Islam, though, true happiness – *bakyt* – is only found by following the way of God [...] to live according to the *sunna*⁶⁸, and to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad.’

67 One of these feasts was called ‘*yimandashuu toy*’ (literally: feast for becoming more pious). The purpose of this feast, as my host explained, was to collectively discuss religion and *yiman* (moral/piety).

68 While the *hadith* are the collection of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, the *sunna* additionally comprise his deeds and actions. Actions based on these *sunna* – for instance growing a

Bakyt therefore does not refer to material wealth and socially established status, but fundamentally to the relationship one personally maintains with God. In contrast to Hardenberg's claim of **new** values being introduced to Kyrgyz society by 'Islamic reform institutions' (madrasas and the like), I hold that values such as *bakyt*, *yrys*, *tynch*, *yntymak*, *kut* and *den sooluk* etc. **persist**, and represent key values in Kyrgyz society both in the context of *salt* as well as in the context of *musylmanchylyk*. What changes however, are the **relationships** these existing values primarily address and produce. That is, for those who start practicing Islam based on the kind of religious knowledge madrasas and the like convey, formerly paramount social ties and relationships with kin are superseded by the paramount value of building and creating one's individual relationship with God. This, as I have shown, does not exclude social relationships – but the quality and quantity of social relationships is seen as both a way of creating one's cosmic relationship with God as well as the outcome or reward for one's services to God (prayer, fasting, sociable behaviour etc.).

As Bechtold (this volume) and others have shown, giving feasts has many objectives, among them declaring status, sharing, creating community etc. (Hardenberg 2010; 2016; Light 2015a; 2015b; Jacquesson 2008). In my preceding account I have outlined yet another dimension to feasts: feasts as deed towards God, as well as a reward given by God. In my opinion it is this dimension which is inherent in the religious knowledge that is attained, among others, in madrasas. Madrasas serve as institutions of providing youth with the knowledge of how to establish and maintain good relations with God, which ultimately provide them with a life of well-being (comprising *bakyt*, *yrys*, *tynch*, *yntymak*).⁶⁹

This dimension has far-reaching consequences on different levels. I argue that the changes we observe in social and cultural practice can only be understood, if values are taken into account. For instance, one of my interlocutors told me her father did not speak to her for two years when she started veiling herself. While for her the veil was an expression of her faith and service to God, her father condemned this as disobedience to his order (not to veil) and therefore, as an act of utmost disrespect of their relationship. Another informant told me that her father was deeply hurt by his brother turning to strict adherence of Islamic practice. Not only would she and her family constantly feel insulted (her father's brother did not accept that they would

beard, eating with one's right hand etc. – are determined *sunna* (here used as an adjective), and are rewarded by merits (*soop*), too.

⁶⁹ There is substantial literature on the topic of well-being adhered through specific practices or forms of worship. See Borbieva 2013; Louw 2013; Montgomery 2013; Werner et al. 2013; 2015.

not pray and learn about Islam and constantly urged them to do so), but her father was especially hurt by his brother's (*bir tuugan*) disrespect to him.⁷⁰

'My uncle does not respect my father as a brother. My father feels he is treated just like any other person, as it is obligatory [to God] to treat any Muslim like your own brother.'

In both accounts social relationships as well as the values attached to these (obedience and respect towards one's parents; respect and support towards one's siblings) are subordinated to the relationship between an individual and God, thus subordinating the valued social relationship to the paramount cosmic relationship.

In conclusion, in my study I do not view cultural change from the perspective of two conflicting cultural orders, each with its own 'cultural logic' (cf. Robbins 2007, 307).⁷¹ Rather, I seek to draw attention to the values persistent both within the cultural order of *salt* as well as that of *musylmanchylyk*. In my view, the values at work incorporate Robbins' two cultural logics: the ideas of 'relational value' and 'individual value'. Therefore, I prefer to speak of 'value logics'.⁷² Depending on the context, at times the communal value logic pertaining to the affirmation and strengthening of (human) community may be emphasised (as in Bechtold's account of the hajj feast), or the value logic addressing the individual relationship with God may be paramount. In sum, cultural change in the field of religious practice in Kyrgyzstan may be understood as the growing consciousness of and attention towards the individual cosmic relationship inherent in Kyrgyz values, as emphasised by the 'newly pious'.

⁷⁰ *Bir tuugan* literally translates as 'sibling'. However, it implies a strong relationship based on respect and support among siblings, also mentioned to me with the noun '*birtuuganchylyk*'.

⁷¹ I agree with Tulebaeva's observations and analysis of two orders, one based on *salt*, the other on *musylmanchylyk*. However, I view each of our approaches as two different perspectives: while from Tulebaeva's viewpoint the **differences** between two cultural orders on the basis of different paramount **values** is addressed, I highlight the **common values** of both cultural orders, but how these diverge when looking at the **relationships** the values define as paramount. That is, I hold that *bakyt*, *yrys*, *tynch*, *yntymak* are common values in both cultural orders; however while in the order of *salt* social relationships are paramount, within the cultural logic of *musylmanchylyk* the individual relationship with God is paramount.

⁷² This argument prevents analytical restriction to either one or the other, therefore solving a dilemma Anderson (2011) seems to be in when arguing for the formation of sociality within Egypt's 'piety movement'. A concept of two 'value logics' allows to incorporate both the element of self-formation as well as that of a moral sociality.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, madrasas have been introduced and analysed from the analytical viewpoint of ‘socio-cosmic fields’ as defined by Hardenberg (this volume). These realms are understood as fields of relationships shaped through valued interactions. This focus not only circumvents the problems connected with universal categories such as ‘economy’ and ‘religion/ritual’, it also enables us to extend investigations in ‘ritual economy’ from ritual activities to institutions. In this vein, religious institutions (here specifically madrasas) too, are understood through a myriad of interactions creating social and cosmic ties alike. This in turn, allows a dynamic understanding of these institutions, and shows how these evolve through constantly ongoing social interactions and processes, at the same time framing these.

I have shown that madrasas cannot be understood in a restricted way as confined religious spaces. On the contrary, the local, national and international dimensions of local madrasas are highlighted. Furthermore, aspects of social and cultural change are elucidated from a new, albeit fundamental stance: the focus on relationships inherent in certain key values and established through specific activities. I have argued that it is not necessarily ‘new’ values introduced to Kyrgyz society through reform institutions and actors. Instead, analysing madrasas through the lens of ‘socio-cosmic fields’ has led me to detect a shift in the relationships these values address: a shift away from a holistic or relationalist emphasis on community ties towards an emphasis on individual relationships with God achieved through one’s individual deeds and directed at individual salvation.

By way of understanding relationships from the initial point of values and activities shaping and expressing these relationships, the concept of ‘socio-cosmic fields’ thus opens up a new and important perspective for the understanding of currently ongoing social and cultural change in the field of Islam in Kyrgyzstan.

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‘Write *Vaqf*, Read Paradise’¹

Emām Rezā’s Religious Endowment in the Socio-Cosmic Field of Mashhad, Iran

Keywords: *vaqf*, endowment, ritual economy, socio-cosmic field, Astān Qods Razavi, Emām Rezā

‘برگ عیشی به گور خویش فرست کس نیارد ز پس تو پیش فرست’

‘Send your ticket to paradise beforehand, for nobody can send it in your name afterwards’ (Sa’adi 1259, translation K. Müller).

Rituals² in the form of actions and performances³ are key elements in the life of Shia Muslims. My interview partners expressed the idea that thoughts as such have no effect on one’s life or the afterlife as long as they have not been performed. A good or bad thought will not be judged and evaluated by God or fellow human beings as long as it is not visible in one’s actions. There are different channels through which Shia Muslims learn what kind of actions is

1 This slogan was painted in big letters on a wall on the side of a main road in Mashhad. I am grateful to my research assistant, Ms. Akram Hosseini, that she called my attention to it. We discussed the meaning of this slogan: here, ‘write *vaqf*’ indicates a rather worldly, social context (implying a juridical status of possession between human beings), whereas ‘read paradise’ points to an extramundane, cosmic context in Hardenberg’s sense (see Hardenberg, this volume).

2 Speaking of rituals in the Shia context, although performance is of major importance, I do agree with Needham (1985) that rather than reducing them to an act of performativity, rituals should be viewed from the standpoint of a polythetic definition. Rituals, in the Shia sense, are an act of worship that involve cosmic entities (agents, objects and/or environment), can be connected to auspicious times, rely on symbolic communication, include some kind of performance (but are not reduced to it) and on many occasions the public, and are regarded to effect this life as well as the afterlife.

3 To me, performance in contrary to actions is ‘a chain of actions unfolding’ (Goffman 1956, 8).

appropriate and what outcome is to be expected. First of all, people refer to the Quran. Second, there is an elaborated guidebook named *mafātih al-jenān* (or just *mafātih*) (Qomi 1965) that recommends certain activities. Since this guidebook is written in Persian, includes translations of Arabic texts and is categorised in topics such as needs, life cycle events and auspicious times throughout the year, it comes in handy and is referred to frequently. Beyond that, there are countless books,⁴ TV shows, radio broadcasts⁵ and religious authorities⁶ in different institutions (mosques, cultural centres, universities etc.), who recommend certain acts of worship on an everyday basis and suit different needs and concerns. ‘Unofficial’, everyday collective negotiation of rituals and their rather unconventional interpretation and application for solving everyday problems complete (or at times, replace) this more or less official system of communication and pool of information that surround rituals.

Rituals are to a certain extent routinized in their modes of expression and can therefore be divided into different categories from an anthropological point of view.⁷ Within one category it is possible to find a number of variations of the ‘same’ action. Let me exemplify this through the group of rituals of donations: being a kind of gift exchange between God (for example, or an emām) and human beings, donations can be transactions of money, food, speech acts, valuable items⁸ or real estates. Depending on the occasion, the object donated, the actual gesture of donation and the time and space for these transactions vary. For example, dried dates that are distributed among pilgrims, tea handed out to those passing by the booths at the sidewalk commemorating the death of a sacred person, money or cloths left at a sacred place, valuable antiquities or even a real estate donated to a shrine – these are variations of the same category of ritual transaction. However, to endow a piece of land is a gift of a higher rank but is not regarded to be suitable at all

4 In Mashhad, most books on this matter are printed and distributed by the publishing house of Astān Qods Razavi – the administrative organisation of the shrine of Emām Rezā.

5 National television and radio channels are featuring different formats such as talk shows, interviews, advertising clips, documentaries, sermons and others on that matter. Telephone hot-lines have been established and cases from everyday life are being discussed live on air on a daily basis.

6 Here, ‘religious authorities’ is a broad expression for everybody who is given the authority to provide guidance in cosmic matters. Religious authorities include the hierarchically structured clergies (*rohāni*) who have been educated in Islamic theology, as well as people with charisma (Weber 1922) e.g. dervish elders who are within their community being approached in search for religious advice.

7 The variety of different actions and performances ranging from praying, sharing food, speeches and phrases, ritual washing of body parts, touching symbolic elements, weeping and crying, rubbing items onto sacred places, leaving money, to a variety of motions and movements.

8 Antiquities, art and carpets are examples of these kind of objects.

times. On specific occasions, a ‘simple’ prayer (repeated a certain number of times) is perceived to be the more suitable gift.

The variations of a ritual in different contexts communicate and materialise meaning and patterns of hierarchically structured values and their negotiation. Given that rituals are based on patterns of relations between human agents and to (sacred) agents such as God, the value system serves as a map that informs and guides one’s decision against/in favour of a relationship (and its intensity as well as outcome) and a certain ritual action.

In the Iranian context, this correlation of relationships, types of ritual actions and values ultimately leads to the decision about one’s eternal status in heaven or hell. Let me illustrate this in a simplified way: to be a good/moral person⁹ is considered to be important; to be a good person and act accordingly (e.g. donate for charity) will bring blessing for one’s life on earth (*barekat*). However, to be a good person who directs his or her actions towards God and/or agents considered sacred (e.g. with a *vaqf* endowment) results into blessing that encompasses *barekat* but more importantly brings blessing for one’s afterlife (*savāb*). On the ‘Day of Judgment’ (*gheyāmat*), all the sins and blessing of the individual will be calculated and the decision about the individual’s place in heaven or hell will be made.

When defining value, action and relation in their interconnectedness, Hardenberg’s concept of the ‘socio-cosmic field’ proves helpful (see Hardenberg, this volume). Comparing ritual actions in the cosmic sphere and action in the social sphere, Hardenberg finds a similarity: exchange and provisioning (including production, distribution and consumption) are two basic activities in both fields. What distinguishes these two types of actions are the relationships they are based on: the cosmic and the social ones. Whereas the social relations concern the social realm of humans, cosmic¹⁰ ones concern the relationship between humans and other-worldly agents. Finally, Hardenberg considers values in Dumont’s sense as hierarchical configurations that structure societies (Dumont 1980). According to this division, Hardenberg

9 That would be a person that lives according to values regarded as ‘good’ or ‘right’ in a certain socio-cultural context.

10 In this article, the expression ‘cosmic agent’ refers to the sacred (*moqadas*) personage in Shia Islam: God, the twelve emām, emānzadeh, the prophets and others such as Abolfasl, Zahrā and Zeynab regarded as holy. In Mashhad, people usually name God, Emām Hoseyn and/or Emām Rezā as a reference point. The term ‘religious agents’ would evoke the sum of all agents who are involved in activities that support a socio-cosmic worldview, including humans who are ‘religious authorities’ (see footnote 6). In order to avoid misunderstandings, in this article, I apply Hardenberg’s term ‘cosmic’, which refers to the agents mentioned above (God, emām, etc.) and all kind of actions related to them.

identifies a social field where labour and exchange are organised according to specific sets of values, which concern human relations, and a cosmic field, where labour and exchange possibly follow other values because they concern the relation between human beings and cosmic agents.

As these fields hardly ever exist separately and often influence each other, Hardenberg aims to study socio-cosmic fields by looking into the ways actions, values, and relations are intertwined. This article is using ethnographic data on *vaqf*¹¹ in Mashhad – home to the shrine of Emām Rezā – in order to investigate the interplay of the social and cosmic dimensions of endowments. After a short introduction of the field and a brief explanation of *vaqf* endowment, this article provides research data on *vaqf* in Mashhad that is analysed in three steps: *vaqf* as an expression of relationships, *vaqf* as an action and *vaqf* as an expression of values. In conclusion, the outline of the socio-cosmic field of endowment in Mashhad is briefly summarised.

The Field: Holy Place and Economic Hub

Mashhad (Arabic: ‘the place of martyrdom’) is the second biggest city in Iran. Its population of more than 3 million people has doubled in the last 30 years¹² and is still constantly rising. It is located in the Northeast of the country where it is the administrative centre of the Razavi Khorasan province. The word ‘Razavi’ as well as the name of the city itself point to the most important feature of this city: the shrine of Emām Rezā. This is also, why the city is referred to as the ‘holy city’. Starting the journey to Mashhad from another city in Iran by train or flight, the travel personnel will most certainly welcome their passengers by congratulating them for their journey to this ‘piece of heaven on earth’ (*ghet’e az behesht*). Approximately 20 million pilgrims have visited the city 2014, eight million more than 4 years before, and ten times more than 41 years before.¹³ The growing number of city dwellers and visitors is very much visible in the cityscape: buildings are being constructed, streets laid out, parks created, business opened up. Taking a 15 to 20 minutes ride by car and leaving the city centre in western direction, one will find skeletons of apartment blocks that form a ghost city waiting to be brought alive by their

11 *Vaqf* is a type of endowment that will be explained later in this article in more detail.

12 According to my own calculations based on statistics published by the municipality of Mashhad in print (Ma’avenat 2013) and on the website of the municipality, <www.mashhad.ir> (last access 02.05.2015); <www.smartcity.mashhad.ir> (last access 02.05.2015).

13 See footnote 12.

investors. This is a crucial phenomenon about Mashhad: Asking local residents why people come to Mashhad, the answer is the shrine. Asking them why people stay in Mashhad, the answer is business.

The city is an economic hub¹⁴ that radiates into the entire province and even neighbouring provinces. Its economic basis is (mainly religious) tourism, industry and agriculture. Whereas tourism is in the hands of more than 55,000 small businesses (most of them privately owned, with two employees or less), 1,500 tourist accommodations and 2,500 restaurants, the industrial sector is handled by more than 500 factories manufacturing mainly medicals, canned food, clothing and light machineries. Moreover, more than 1,400 businesses are located in the agriculture, housing and carpet sector (PreventionWeb Project UNISDR 2011, 13). Due to the vast agricultural and building activities, food and construction industry in combination with mining have the highest business revenues.

One key player in this economic system is Astān Qods Razavi (hereafter referred to as AQR), the non-governmental organisation that administrates the shrine of Emām Rezā. With an estimated budget of 2 billion USD (Kazemi 1996, 142), this conglomerate of foundations, facilities of public services¹⁵ and companies owns 52% of the land properties of the city of Mashhad in addition to more than 500 villages and farms as well as agrarian land and holdings that are dispersed all over Iran (Cizakca 2000, 84). In fact, according to the estimation of an AQR employee, 40% of the current source of income of the organisation is constituted of agricultural properties, real estates and more than 30 enterprises covering:

- 1) Industry and mining (including non-metal mineral industries, sugar, automobile industry, wood industry, weaving, and publication),
- 2) Agriculture, gardening, foresting, animal husbandry, and fish breeding,
- 3) Building and housing as well as road construction,
- 4) Computer and IT, and
- 5) Pharmaceuticals and health insurances.

Thus, AQR is involved in precisely those spheres of Mashhad’s economy that constitute the city’s main revenues and is accordingly very much visible in the city. Signs and logos (*fig. 1*) refer to AQR and an economic business (*fig. 2*) with

¹⁴ According to the economic report of PreventionWeb Project of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction=UNISDR (2011, 13), Mashhad’s economy is ranking second in the country.

¹⁵ These include for example the Razavi Islamic Sciences University, Islamic Research Foundation, libraries, museums, Razavi Cultural Foundation, Institution of Artistic Innovations, Research Centre for Youth and Society, Astān Qods Razavi Publishing House and others.



Fig. 1. Examples of AQR facilities within the city of Mashhad, May 2015: Sports facilities (Photo by author).

Fig. 2. Examples of AQR facilities within the city of Mashhad, May 2015: Pharmacy (Photo by author).

‘Razavi’ in its title is presumably a successful one: it stands for good quality, a stable financial basis, a powerful network, the use of modern technology as well as up-to-date knowledge, and is thus considered a reliable investment opportunity if not even a prospective business partner.

The organisation itself introduces its activities and duties in a variety of PR brochures, advertisement material, websites, scientific and other kind of publications as well as on TV and radio. According to its self-promotion, the responsibilities are divided into two parts: the administration of the shrine of Emām Rezā on the one hand and the administration of the endowments donated to the eighth emām of the Twelver Shia on the other hand. The donations to the shrine have been and still are the reason for the shrine’s myriads of possessions and occupations. Since the 17th cent., there has been a well-documented increase in *vaqf* donations to the emām mainly triggered by the ruling monarchs, Shah Abbas being one of the central figures (Karimian 2002, 29). Ever since, the development of the shrine was synonymous with *vaqf* donations: the more donations the more development.

Since the Islamic Revolution there has been a spike in expansion and extension of the organisation’s activities on the economic and non-economic level. According to Karimian from the Research Institute of AQR, the development of the organisation has seen a remarkable increase compared to the last centuries. The professionalisation of *vaqf* administration is named as one of the central reasons for these developments in the last 30 to 40 years (Karimian 2002, 31).

This article focuses on the ritual of *vaqf* as one major realm of activity that exemplifies the place of AQR at the intersection of social and cosmic fields.

What is *Vaqf*?

In Shia Islam, there are many ways in which a person can directly or indirectly re-distribute accumulated wealth: *zakāt*, *khoms*, *sadaqa*, *vaqf*, *kheyrāt* and *nazr*. These different acts of charity connect the distributor of property to cosmic agents since they are described in the Quran as acts of worship. However, depending on the individual situation of the donor and the location of resources, they also comply with collective and individual inner- and outer-worldly goals, concerns and needs. Although referred to as ‘donations’, they are regarded more or less as compulsory. The endowment of *vaqf* is described to be voluntary (*mostahab*). The word *vaqf* means ‘to stand’ and ‘to remain standing and be calm’ (Hosseini et al. 2014, 6). According to the Islamic

jurisprudence (*feqh*) as well as Article 55 of the Civil Law of Iran, *vaqf* is the confinement of property and the continuous distribution of its usufruct according to endower's will (Bineh Cultural Research Institution 2006).

Vaqf as I have encountered it in Mashhad has three meanings:

- 1) an action (Persian: *vaqf kardan* – 'to make *vaqf*'),¹⁶
- 2) the endowment as an altered juridical and religious status of a property ('These 10 hectares of land property are *vaqf*.'),¹⁷ or
- 3) an organisation that equals a non-profit, charitable trust or foundation ('This *vaqf* offers scholarships for orphans').¹⁸

The endowments can be divided in immobile (mainly real estate) and mobile (object and cash) *vaqf*. Recently the endowments of cash have been more and more renounced¹⁹ in favour of the endowment of financial stock, mostly incorporated in joint-stock companies. These processes take place at conference tables of enterprises behind closed doors, therefore not visible to my anthropological observation. *Vaqf* of real estates and objects, on the other hand, has a tradition of more than thousand years in Islam. Although endowed objects are numerous and important items on the list of AQR possessions, the discussion of this topic demands another paper. In this article, I will concentrate on the real estate kind of *vaqf*. It is very much present, debated and practiced in Mashhad: either endowed in urban areas, where their endowment types range from shops and companies to residential buildings and other rent yielding urban property, while in rural areas it consists of some kind of land used for agriculture.

¹⁶ In this article, 'to endow sth.' and 'to make *vaqf*' are used as interchangeable expressions for the same action. I choose to use the literal translation of the Persian expression, instead of switching to 'give *vaqf*' as it is used widely in the literature of other disciplines, in order 1) to emphasise that it is used as a verb (the process of creating an endowment as opposed to the result of this process) and 2) to avoid a mix up with *vaqf* as a noun meaning a charity foundation as described in the third upcoming point.

¹⁷ In this article, 'endowment' is used as a synonymous expression for a property that was changed legally and religiously to *vaqf*.

¹⁸ Since these charitable foundations are not subject of this article, the following nominations of 'endowment' or *vaqf* have to be seen synonymous to the second definition (see previous footnote). Beyond that, there are theological discussions about *vaqf* as a philanthropic philosophy. Clergy men explained in interviews that *vaqf* is an act which aims to connect humans with God and results ultimately in a 'healthy society' (*djome-e sālem*) where humans live harmoniously united in their believe in God and actively worship him.

¹⁹ This was permitted in Iran in 1986 by a Cabinet Decree (Article No. 44; see Cizacka 2000, 24).

The Embeddedness of *Vaqf* in the Socio-Cosmic Field

As described above, relationships, actions and values are here considered to be the pillars of a socio-cosmic field. In order to understand the position of *vaqf* in this field, the following analysis focuses on these three pillars as they find their expression in this particular ritual.

Vaqf as an Expression of Relationships

Mr. Alizādeh²⁰ is a businessman in his seventies whose financial success started off when establishing a supermarket and buying a ‘dry piece of land’, as he says, outside the city. When I met him and his family in their private garden that used to be that dry land, he was standing on a ladder picking ripe cherries from one of many fruit trees. Later he explained to me that he owns nothing. Everything that surrounds him and his family is God’s property.²¹ Moreover, in his view Emām Rezā made him the wealthy man he is now. Looking back at his own life, he can pinpoint the exact conversation that he had with Emām Rezā in the shrine that led to his success. He explained that he had fulfilled his duties: He and his wife brought up seven children – all of them strongly rooted in the belief in God and the Twelver Shia, visiting the shrine daily to weekly. All of his children have married and he was able to support these marriages financially for example by providing each of them with an apartment and a business (mostly gold business and trading in the bazar area around the shrine in Mashhad). Moreover, he and his family members have travelled to Mecca and Karbala (to the shrine of Emām Hoseyn in Iraq) several times. What else is left to do? He said that he turned to God for advice about what to do with his financial assets, gold, land and real estate properties. The most reasonable way seemed to him to turn it into *vaqf*. To the question ‘why?’, he answers that it is highly recommended in the Quran which he calls ‘the book of life’. Having a family of believers, having observed daily prayers (*namāz*) all their life, having fasted when it was time to fast, having mourned when it was time to mourn, having performed pilgrimages and having tried to stay away from sins, he considers his family standing in a close interactional relationship with God and Emām Rezā (as well as the

²⁰ The names of the informants in this article all have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.

²¹ This is a rather general expression meaning that he owes his financial and social wealth to God. Nothing can be acquired if not liberally and intentionally given by God.

other emām, especially Emām Hoseyn). They see the result of their actions or ‘work of worship’ when looking at how they have been ‘blessed’ in life: financial success, health, a big family with 16 healthy grandchildren, prestige and comfort. The interactional relationship with the cosmic agents results in God’s blessings in the present life and – even more important – the afterlife²² (*barekat* and *savāb*). For Mr. Alizādeh, making *vaqf* is the logic way of bringing his so far very positive exchange relationship with the cosmic (and social) agents to the next level.

That *vaqf* brings *savāb* – a blessing by God that is regarded to be a positive credit (*pādāsh*) for one’s afterlife – is not questioned by anybody. It is rather the amount of *savāb*, which *vaqf* is assumed to generate that varies in conversations: interview partners estimated the *savāb* value to be 10 to 100 times²³ the endowment value itself. Others call it a sure ticket to paradise (see also initial quote by the Persian poet Sa’adi), implying that its *savāb* value is so high (independently of the economic value of the endowment) that it makes up for any sins and therefore opens up the entrance to paradise. Mr. Alizādeh’s daughter explains that as long as the ‘Day of Judgment’ has not come, the endowment of her father is going to continue to help people, and as long as this help improves people’s lives, Mr. Alizādeh will receive *savāb* even when he himself is already in the afterlife.

As an action that is directed towards God and other cosmic agents it is regarded to be an act of worship (*ebādat*), of appreciation (*qadrshenāsi*), of gratitude (*shokrgozāri*) and/or of a ‘sacred work’ (*kār-e elāhi*). The latter will be discussed in detail below.

Granting blessings is not the only action cosmic agents are capable of. Similar to Mr. Alizādeh’s case, some interview partners identify God as the true owner of their properties thereby implying a rather secondary ‘management role’ that makes them the executors of God’s will. God and the other cosmic agents consult and hint at the right decisions and actions in conversations, dreams or actions of other social actors. The expression that *vaqf* is a gift from God to human beings can often be heard. Some interview

22 The word ‘afterlife’ is referring to what is called *zendegi-e barzakh* in Persian and means a life after the worldly life, but before the transition to paradise or hell, which takes place on the ‘Day of Judgment’. Thus, any kind of blessing collected until the ‘Day of Judgment’ in this present world (during or even after one’s lifetime) will improve the chances to ultimately enter paradise.

23 When asked about the concrete technique (some kind of algorithm) of ‘counting of blessings’, my informants referred to the indications in the Quran and have not been able to elaborate on the reason why it is ‘worth 10 times more’ or even ‘100 times more’.

partners state that making *vaqf* is a right²⁴ that God granted to all human beings (*haq dāshtan*). Eventually, this kind of action will religiously pay off (*sood dāshtan/arzesh dāshtan*).

However, with rights come duties. Whether or not the endowment was initially acquired in a way that suits God’s will (*rāh-e harām* or *halāl*) depends on the endower’s responsibilities and consciousness. Some emphasise God’s and Emām Rezā’s role for creating the right socio-cultural conditions that provide people with the ability to make an endowment (*toofiq dādan*). Clergymen, for example, emphasised in interviews that God would not let anybody endow, for example, a stolen property (*māl-e harām*) and therefore they argued that all *vaqf* are religiously correct endowments (*māl-e halāl*).²⁵ Businessmen, on the other hand, did not rule out the possibility of a semi-legal property to be endowed. They expect the fulfilment of God’s will in hell where the incorrect endower, in their viewpoint, will most certainly end up.²⁶

The same holds for the correctness of the act of endowing: Did the endower fulfil all the necessary criteria and manage to involve all respective parties? Although there are mandatory actions that have to be undertaken according to the Quran, cosmic agents allow humans to decide on their own how to proceed (*dast bāz gozashtan*) – especially when it comes to the use of the usufruct of the endowment.

Furthermore, the endower invests in a relationship with cosmic agents such as the emām by making *vaqf* in their name. To endow something in the name of somebody means to spend parts of its usufruct in a way that relates to this agent. An endowment in the name of Emām Rezā, for example, can support pilgrims (food, cloths, and medical care), provide facilities for the pilgrimage (accommodation, transportation, etc.) and increase theological as well as religious education²⁷ with a focus on Emām Rezā, etc.

24 I interpret this argument as a basic right, like the right to work as it is verbalised e.g. in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23).

25 Given their occupational background as clergymen and their position as instructors of Islamic education within the AQR system, their description of God’s characteristics and rule of conduct has a rather normative quality. The relevance of alternative interpretations has been played down, as irrelevant exceptions to the rules, or interpretations have been referred to as inaccessible for the human mind.

26 This case has been discussed rather theoretically in the interviews. When asked for real life examples of incorrect *vaqf* due to property right violation nobody was able (lack of information) or willing to discuss cases. One argument was that one should not talk badly about the deceased. However, many informants have been very sensible of their social networks, and did prefer not to accuse anybody in order to protect their own integrity.

27 While theological education includes an institutionalised structure, curriculum and certificate, religious education is understood as a (inordinate) range of lessons on religious matters offered by clergymen to the public. In the shrine premises, each day numerous classes on

Vaqf in the name of Emām Rezā is very popular in Mashhad, since the emām is regarded to reside in the city. Some interview partners laughed at my suggestion to make *vaqf* and not consider the most obvious source of *savāb* close by: ‘It’s like looking for pennies in the streets instead of asking the rich uncle for help when in need of money’ – money and pennies being religious blessings (see also Kicherer, this volume) and the uncle being Emām Rezā.²⁸ Others laughed at my suggestion to actually include Emām Rezā in their *vaqf*, arguing for example: ‘Mashallah, Emām Rezā has so much. I bet he even owns land in your country. My little contribution won’t have any effect there’.²⁹

Most people, however, do include Emām Hoseyn in their endowment will, saying that a certain percentage of the usufruct should be spent on annual mourning rituals for Emām Hoseyn and his family. Besides that, each year a ceremony should be held where family members and friends should pray and read the Quran next to the endower’s grave. Making these prayers and reading the Quran help in receiving *savāb* from God for the afterlife of the deceased person. In this way, the endower who engages in the ritual of *vaqf* establishes a perpetuating cycle of other rituals that connect him/her as well as other social agents to cosmic ones.

The endower is not the only person who interacts with cosmic agents. There is another crucial person who is always discussed by endowers or endowers-to-be in conversations about *vaqf* and who is directly connected to God: the imagined *vaqf* administrator (*mutavali*). Who is this imagined administrator? If the endower is a person who has done everything right, then the property is ‘correct’, the endower’s will is ‘appropriate’ and the act of endowment was realised according to the regulations. Under these conditions, she or he earns blessing and ultimately a place in heaven. His or her antagonist is the imagined wrongdoer who destroys the fruits of the endower’s ‘sacred work’ (*kār-e elāhi*), who takes personal advantage (*estefādeh shakhsi*) of God’s or Emām Rezā’s ‘holy property’ (*māl-e moqadas*) and therefore will be treated harshly in the afterlife (*azāb keshidan*) and burn in hell after the ‘Day of Judgment’ (*ātash gereftan*).

various topics take place from morning until afternoon at different locations (free of charge and open to everybody).

²⁸ Economic metaphors in cultures have been analysed e.g. by Gudeman (1986; 2001) and Klocke-Daffa (2001).

²⁹ *Vaqf* in Mashhad can be made in the name of Emām Rezā, in the name of another sacred character or simply in God’s name. In each case, the endower additionally needs to decide whether the endowment should be administrated by AQR or not. The dynamics of this decision process and the recent social changes linked to them will be explored in my thesis.

Apart from these two social agents, every person that is involved in the endowment process – establishing it, administrating it, promoting it – is expected to receive some kind of blessing (*savāb/barekat*) from God. Involvement in *vaqf* is considered to be *por barekat* – an activity that multiplies the blessing by spreading its original (tangible or intangible) source.³⁰

With regard to *vaqf*, the relationships between cosmic and social agents are thus closely knit and linked to a system of values and actions in a cosmic field. On the other hand, this cosmic field would not exist, if the act of endowment would not be supported by a network of social relationships between endower, family, *vaqf* experts, clergymen, lawyers, financial advisors, legal witnesses, *vaqf* administrators, AQR, the Government’s Endowment Office (Edāre-e Oqāf) and many others. On a macro level, this also includes the state and the society as a whole. Given the idea that *vaqf* endowments presuppose a social field where relationships between humans are considered to be unequal in material terms (well-off vs. in need), the act of making *vaqf* is considered as promoting equality because it is made without any expectation for reciprocity. However, this altruistic charity in fact builds upon and creates a social field in which agents depend on social relationships, reciprocal exchange and work in order to be able to endow something.

Let us again take Mr. Alizādeh’s case as an example: When he started to think about making *vaqf* he talked to his family, his financial advisor, to people he was advised to consult on the topic, clergymen of the shrine and his local mosque and to business partners. During a one year long process of collecting information, he formed an opinion on how and what he wanted to endow. He also engaged in an active exchange of information thereby knitting a broader social network with different people. When the decision was made, his lawyer and a *vaqf* expert helped him to write the respective endowment certificate (*vaqfnāmeḥ*), which was signed in a small ceremony with a clergyman, his lawyer, a legal witnesses and a close advisor. While some of them were paid for their services, such as the lawyer, the financial advisor and the clergyman, others who had supported him were not. For example, the *vaqf* expert who helped to write the endowment certificate was a business partner of Mr. Alizādeh’s son, the legal witnesses were family members and business partners of him.

30 Kicherer (this volume) refers to this phenomenon as she encountered it on her field research in Tajikistan as the ‘catalysator effect’.

In the certificate, the *vaqf* administrator was named to be a family member³¹ and was granted 5% of the entire profits generated in the endowment. The rest of the usufruct of his endowment is supposed to reach people in need. Mr. Alizādeh defined three groups of people in need and prioritised them: first his children, second the rest of the family and third orphans, poor people and people in need (e.g. money for an operation or an apartment for a newly-wed couple). Here, social relationships had to be defined and legally put to paper in order to realise the endowment, and Mr. Alizādeh decided to prioritise his own family.³²

Another case of an endowment involves Mr. Maleki and his colleagues. Mr. Maleki, a retired businessman, who owned a food production factory, explained to me that the reason he endowed his factory is that there is nobody within his own family, whom he considers suitable for managing the company in his name. And after all, he did not want to see the fruits of his lifelong hardship to be destroyed within a year. Moreover, he was not very satisfied with the life his children had chosen for themselves and preferred to finance their life style as little as possible. Instead, the usufruct of the endowment was to be entirely on people in need, which he defined as students who come to Mashhad to study (especially those from remote areas) and are therefore in need of an accommodation and a scholarship to support their life. The endowment of this functioning factory does therefore – other than Mr. Alizādeh's will – exclude the family. However, the endowment makes a difference for the employees of the factory since their jobs are secured: a *vaqf* administrator strives to keep up the routine and stability first and as long as possible, while a new owner might have re-structured the factory to match his or her own business goals and calculations at a higher risk rate. He or she avoids to threaten a healthy endowment and to commit a capital sin by harming its functionality and therefore depriving the students of their scholarships. This affects the atmosphere of the working place but also the promotion of the factory as well as the cooperation with potential investors and business partners.

In Mr. Maleki's case, the endowment is administrated by AQR. Within the conglomerate of AQR, the institution for the supervision of *vaqf* is one

31 The administrator can be a private individual as well as a governmental or non-governmental institution. It depends on the endower whom he or she finds to be the most suitable administrator in the long run. The relation to the endower and the reputation invoked in the public space are two major factors when choosing the right administrator.

32 The family head and businessman supposes that his family will not be in need in the near future because of their heritage rights. This means that, first, it will be catered to people in need and then, second, in the case that a family member should one day be in need, his or her case will be prioritised.



Fig. 3. Examples of AQR companies exhibited at the Exhibition Centre of Astān Qods Razavi located underneath the shrine complex, September 2015: Construction and Housing Company (Photo by author).



Fig. 4. Examples of AQR companies exhibited at the Exhibition Centre of Astān Qods Razavi located underneath the shrine complex, September 2015: Stock Broker (Photo by author).

of the greatest and most powerful in terms of budget, activity and staff. It is subdivided in numerous different departments that have been created in order to secure the appropriate and professional administration of all the different types of *vaqf* that have been handed to them. Each department has a head that reports to the units of finance, strategic management, human resources, statistics, infrastructure and facility management, and others that supervise the entire activities and budgets of the institution. The heads of department themselves administrate in their own departments similar units that are specialised on a certain type of endowment. Each department therefore consists of different offices that might be located in different cities or even countries, and employs an accordingly large number of staff.

It is a highly professionalised organisation, which strives for economic success (*fig. 3* and *4*), because the revenues are on the one hand supposed to generate social relief and therefore earn *savāb* for everybody involved.³³

³³ As to whether AQR is successful in doing so or not, is subject to an ongoing debate in Mashhad.

On the other hand, the revenues finance the maintenance and growth of this large institution of *vaqf* management and administration itself. As a major employer in the city, it has to finance office buildings, IT systems, furniture, office tools, wage plans and insurances somehow.

Thus, the endowment of Mr. Maleki creates new social connections in academic and business spheres,³⁴ backs up the existing social field of AQR and changes the endower's family and factory environment in the long run. Mr. Maleki secured his cosmic relationships by including a ritual in his will that is rather usual: An annual ceremony at his grave³⁵ and mourning rituals in the month of Muharam when Shiites commemorate the death of Emām Hoseyn.³⁶

In addition, Mr. Maleki told me about colleagues who made *vaqf* during their lifetime for a certain span of time (10 to 15 years) and named themselves as *vaqf* administrators. 'Very clever', he admits, since the endowers have a double advantage: state taxes on economically active endowments differ from the mere business oriented companies and elevate the profit of the business revenues of the endowment. At the same time, *savāb* is being earned since a percentage of the profit is used for charity purposes. 'An investment in the present and afterlife', Mr. Maleki states. After these 10 to 15 years, the *vaqf* administrator changed their status back to that of the owner of the respective business. Both changes require and alter a social network and imply an extra amount of ritual effort as well as economic exchange and provisioning for the endower.

***Vaqf* as an Action**

Vaqf is usually described as an 'action' (*amal* or *kār*) or 'act of worship' (*ebādad*). An interview partner defined it as a 'sacred work' (*kār-e elāhi*), a 'good deed' (*savāb*) that brings rewards (*pādāsh*) in the present life and the afterlife. Some do describe it even more specifically as 'work for God' (*kār barāye khodā*), 'services for God and people' (*dar khedmat-e khodāvand va*

³⁴ As demonstrated, business spheres are involved when different parties are being engaged in order to realise the *vaqf* and the students who are profiting from this *vaqf* in future are going to contribute to the academic environment.

³⁵ A standardised ritual that includes prayers and recitation from the Quran, which are spoken in the name of the dead person.

³⁶ This ritual on its part is a great catalyser for (economic) engagement on the social level – a socio-cosmic field that should be analysed in its own right.

mardom) or – as in the case of an endowment in the name of Emām Rezā – ‘spending [money] for Emām Rezā’ (*khardj kardan barāye Emām Rezā*).

Others emphasise that it is an act of ‘putting one’s own property at the service of others’ (*vāgozār kardan/dar ekhtyār gozashtan*). These different expressions point to the ritual’s position at the intersection of the social and the cosmic field: some actions are predominantly directed towards cosmic agents (ritual exchange and provisioning), while various others involve social agents (economic exchange and provisioning). Most of these actions however, engage and connect both fields of relationship.

In order to make an endowment, one has to own something. This is the reason why an endowment requires various socio-cosmic actions before the ritual itself can take place. If the endower has no inherited property, she or he needs to invest a remarkable amount of work: buy, sell, save, build, work, invest etc. a company, factory, real estate, etc. – all social actions based on certain values. Like Mr. Alizādeh, a lot of potential endowers first start to inform themselves about *vaqf* and then decide, whether they want to make an endowment and what it should include. Good advice is expected from trustworthy people of one’s own social network including other endowers, lawyers as well as institutions such as AQR and the Government’s Endowment Office (Edāre-e Oqāf). Furthermore, cosmic agents are being involved such as God (in prayers and reading of the Quran) and/or an emām – in Mashhad it is mostly Emām Rezā who is asked for advice.

In the case of the family of Mr. Shadjarian it all began with a dream.³⁷ Emām Hoseyn appeared in his father’s sleep complaining about the miserable moral standards in their neighbourhood (*mahal*): young women without proper Islamic clothing (*hedjāb*), unmarried couples in the streets, disrespectful behaviour in the holy shrine. Mr. Shadjarian’s father decided to do something about it: he worked hard in order to buy as much land as possible in his neighbourhood. When he finally owned almost the whole neighbourhood, he began to build mosques and institutions for religious education. He endowed most of this land before his death, leaving the administration to the next generations. Mr. Shadjarian is part of the group that administrates these endowments today. He knows well about the endowment procedure and decided to contribute his own endowment, in order to continue his father’s project. First, he bought a piece of land and built various

37 Dreams are regarded to be one of the most usual media by which cosmic agents and social agents, who reside in the afterlife use to communicate. An order given by such agents in a dream is likely to be put in action by the person who saw the dream. Numerous narratives of social and religious actions by interview partners start with ‘In a dream, I saw [...]’.

facilities for pilgrims (guest house, mosque, restaurant, gathering hall and parking space), which are connected with the shrine of Emām Rezā via shuttle buses – all of these services provided free of charge. The costs are covered by the profits of Mr. Shadjarian's supermarket chain.

He reminded me that *vaqf* – according to the Quran – is a voluntary action of charity. Yet, before one can endow, one must first settle the religious payments that are considered mandatory: *zakāt* (religious tax) and *khoms* (one fifth of the annual income that is given to a clergyman). Furthermore, one has to calculate the part of all the family's belongings that one truly owns. The following calculation is recommended in the Quran: two thirds of a family's property belong to the wife and children and are meant to secure their future, while the remaining third is at the free disposal of the head of the family. Iranian law applies this calculation if the last will contains no other regulations.

Mr. Shadjarian paid *zakāt* and *khoms*, although neither religious nor governmental institutions supervise these transactions. Like my other interview partners, he regards *vaqf* as a cosmic contract, although it involves the transfer of worldly property. The final authority to decide whether the contract is valid, and therefore the responsibility rests with God, to observe all necessary requirements correctly, rests with the endower. For Mr. Shadjarian, writing the according endowment certificate (*vaqfnāmeḥ*) was not too difficult since he is an expert on *vaqf* himself. The first paragraph of the document states the identity of the endower and his belief in God, the prophet, his family and the twelve emām. In the second paragraph, he testifies that he is certifiably sane, he is endowing voluntarily and that the property he wants to endow is his own. In the last paragraph the endower defines the exact endowment, the usage of its profits and the recipients of the profits the *vaqf* is expected to generate.

In the presence of a lawyer and a legal witness, a clergyman reads out loud the text or contract (*siqeh* or *aqd*) from the Quran and the endower has to reply accordingly in Arabic to the question if he/she is willing to endow the respective property. Finally, the parties present sign the endowment certificate (*vaqfnāmeḥ*). This procedure is considered sufficient for making a *vaqf*. However, AQR and the Government's Endowment Office (Edāreh Oqāf) on their part demand identity certificates and depending on the property endowed other documents as well.

This whole procedure shows that *vaqf* is located at the intersection of the social and the cosmic field. Cosmic relationships with God and the emām become manifest when signing the certificate and when performing speech

acts that ‘close the deal’ between the endower and God. On the other hand, social relationships are required, for example when the witnesses testify the act in front of other social agents. Moreover, paragraph two and three of the certificate define relationships and appropriate actions in the social field: group A is in need, take x% of the endowment profit in order to provide them with y. Both fields, the social and the cosmic are being engaged.

With the act of endowing property, the ritual of *vaqf* does not end. On the contrary: with the establishment of an endowment a chain of economic and ritual activities begins. In Mr. Maleki’s case of an endowment to AQR, I described above how the endowment administration is professionally organised in order to meet the endowment needs and stay up to date with economic developments. A successful endowment is supposed to grow. Interview partners speak in this context of activities such as building (*sākhtan*), buying (*forookhtan*), selling (*kharidan*), investing, making profits (*soot kardan*), working (*roo chizi kār kardan*), saving, distributing, administrating (*modiriyat kardan*), maintaining (*hefs kardan*), using (*estefādeh kardan*), helping (*komak kardan*), checking, analysing, and expanding (*gostardesh peydā kardan*). The ritual of *vaqf* is integrated in Iran’s legal system, courts handle *vaqf* disputes regularly, the financial balance of AQR, the municipality of Mashhad and entire Iran is dependent on the contribution that *vaqf* makes. Thus, the endowment is very much integrated into the social field. In addition, since *vaqf* includes actions concerning the relationship of the endower with God and Emām Hoseyn or Emām Rezā, it is very much integrated in the cosmic field as well.³⁸

***Vaqf* as an Expression of Value**

‘What the prophet and emām want, is a healthy society, good relationships between humans, believe in god and worship’, said an interview partner. *Vaqf* is said to be made in order to contribute to a better world with people living in harmony, where social needs and problems have been solved, everybody is being taken care of and all are united in their believe in God and the family of the prophet (*ahl-e beyt*) and their actions of worship. Thus, AQR promotes *vaqf* as an ‘expression of piety’ and ‘the answer to social, economic and cultural

³⁸ In this article, I focus on the endower’s perspective. There is, however, a complex side to *vaqf* that is in parts independent from the endower’s engagement with the endowment. More on this topic will be discussed in my PhD thesis on the ritual economy of the Emām Rezā shrine.

problems' (Karimian 2002, 29), using terms such as social justice, welfare, social security, cultural progress, and divine blessing as long as the present world exists. Values are quite clearly expressed in this statement: wellbeing of the community, social progress, firm cosmic belief and affirmative cosmic actions. In addition, interview partners, who have endowed or are planning to endow, have spoken about social and religious purity, independence as well as proximity in time, space and relationships. In this chapter, not all of the values can be discussed extensively. The goal is rather to exemplify in which way some of these relate to each other.

In order to understand the relevance and relation of these values, Dumont's thoughts on hierarchical oppositions, encompassment, levels and reversals prove to be helpful (Dumont 1980). My interview partners categorise actions hierarchically from a religious standpoint into 1) compulsory (*vādjeb*), 2) recommended (*mostahab*), 3) advised not to do (*makrooh*) or 4) forbidden (*harām*). While *vādjeb* and *harām* have been applied quite often, *mostahab* and *makrooh* have been less mentioned and many times rather described than named. This categorisation indicates a scale where actions according to their value can be ranked and put into relation to each other. Higher values can 'encompass' their hierarchically lower opposite, and, as Dumont states, these hierarchical oppositions can be reversed on a different level.

In the social field, the endowment is driven by the high value attached to good social relations. It is supposed to reach as many people as possible, help and support as many humans in need as possible. The society as a whole is concerned. Nevertheless, on a hierarchically lower level, the making of *vaqf* also refers to the individual person whose name will be kept alive and for whose soul people continue to pray. In the cosmic field, this hierarchy of values pertaining to the community and the individual is reversed: the endower personally invests in his/her relationship with cosmic agents, expecting an according reward in the here and after, while ideas about the welfare of the society are subordinated to individual goals.

Another good example is the value of progress. While on the level of social relationships, progress is valued higher than maintenance of the *status quo*, it does at the same time encompass its opposite. *Vaqf* is expected to grow and expand from an economical point of view and lead to the elaboration of culture (*farhangsāzi*) in society.³⁹ This progress of *vaqf* does however

39 Ongoing debates in Mashhad, whether *vaqf* is really an economic endeavour that generated progress or rather turns out to be a dead end economic wise, do not hinder the people of Mashhad from endowing and engaging in endowments.

encompass the maintenance of the property originally endowed. On the level of cosmic relationships, the contrary is the case: an endowment that is regarded valuable brings stability in the relationships between social and cosmic agents. For example, the mourning rituals for Emām Hoseyn are held in order to keep his memory alive. The endowment in the name of Emām Rezā is to reassure his status and respect as the emām residing in the city of the endower. The prayers read at the grave of the endower maintain the cosmic order and authority. This ritual does nonetheless include progress for the endower who is expecting a higher amount of blessing in his religious ‘bank account’ (*hesāb*) and finding approval by an emām engaged in the ritual. Therefore, it is not only an opposition of progress versus maintenance of the *status quo*, rather it is the presence of both values that makes the system work. However, in the different spheres of relations (in Dumont’s terminology: levels) one value is higher or prioritised.

The same applies for the value of closeness. In the social field, the order of priority that interview partners evoke when explaining who needs to be considered in an endowment is usually as follows: first the endower him-/herself and the family, then people in need who surround them and finally people in other places.⁴⁰ Although this appears to be an inversion of the value of community on the social level (‘help as many people as possible’), in fact it is not. People argue that in case the endowment helps orphans in Mashhad, but the endower’s own descendants impoverish, there will be no progress in the society in the long run. The endower is supposed to take care for the people he/she is responsible for first (this is *vādjeb*) and then help others in need (which is *mostahab*). Therefore, endowments that include the family only (including all future generations) are quite common.

In the cosmic field, hierarchy refers to the relationships people maintain with their religious actions.⁴¹ A general hierarchical order between God and the rest of the cosmic agents is given. In terms of power and influence, God is superior to all other cosmic agents, yet humans in need might turn to an emām instead of God, thereby reversing this hierarchy. Emām Rezā, Emām Hoseyn, Emām Ali and Emām Zamān are the four emām that people

⁴⁰ The expression ‘people in other places’ refers to people in need who are not considered to be part of the endower’s personal social realm. To quote an interview partner: ‘Before distributing food among the poor of some other town, one first has to help the people of one’s own town’.

⁴¹ Each individual might choose another cosmic figure as his/her primer interlocutor/guardian/role model in cosmic and religious matters. However, the favourite (and at many annual religious occasions given) cosmic agents are Emām Ali, Emām Rezā, Emām Hoseyn and Emām Zamān.

in Mashhad address in rituals most of the time. The answer to the question why they do so, is most often that an emām is closer to human beings than God. *Vaqf*, however, does call upon God directly – optionally including other cosmic agents. This way, rather distance than closeness of relationship is applied in the cosmic field when making *vaqf* (appealing the highest authority, God, instead of one of the more proximate sacred figures) – in contrast to the desired closeness of social relations that are prioritised in the endowment (family before public).

Let me recapitulate the values introduced and come to the conclusion about the relationship between the social and the cosmic field. The values discussed here, are individual cosmic engagement versus collective social engagement, social progress versus cosmic stability, and relations to distant cosmic agents versus relations to close social agents. Collective social progress is questioned if the person generating the progress does not have an individual relationship with cosmic agents. The same holds for close social relationships: without a relationship to God they are lacking in integrity and consistent lifestyle. In the same manner, debates about losing and forgetting values of *vaqf* are handled as well. The unwillingness to participate in charity such as *vaqf* is regarded to be a lack in social responsibility. Combined with the lack of good relations to the family, this leads to the deduction that the individual has no stable relationship to God, which ultimately is worse than the lack of social responsibility or weak family ties. Thus, relationships in the cosmic field are of highest value and encompass those of the social field. In comparison to an engagement with cosmic agents, the engagement in a social relationship is regarded as less important, yet to maintain good social relationships is even considered to be a type of worship. Actions and good relationships in the cosmic field ultimately have a positive effect on relationships in the social field (see also Kicherer and Hölzchen, this volume). On the other hand, the social field does not automatically integrate and refer to cosmic agents. Accordingly, afterlife is not included in the present life, but the life on earth will be part of the afterlife.⁴² It is the next step and not reversible. That is the reason why some describe *vaqf* as the ticket to heaven – as Sa’adi puts it in his poem (see initial quote) – which nobody will be able to send if the individual has not

42 As an interview partner described it: ‘When you are in your mother’s womb, you can’t see the world outside. You don’t have access before you have not been born into this life. But the womb is still part of our life, when we have been born. The same happens with those in the afterlife. They see us and interact with us. We are part of their reality, but we have difficulties interacting with them’.

purchased it while living on earth. Concluding, it is observable that although they are connected in many ways, the cosmic dominates the social field.

Closing remarks

Vaqf significantly shapes the economy of Mashhad. It is a ritual that is not erasable from the social reality of the city. It is at the same time an action of exchange and provisioning, i.e. forms of work that aim to create, maintain and change relationships with agents in the social and cosmic fields. It thereby draws upon values related to both the social field and the cosmic one. While the value system of the social field differs from the value system of the cosmic field – or is even a reversed version of it – it is the latter that encompasses the social one. It encompasses the social field of *vaqf* in the sense that the economic actions between human beings are valued in relation to ritual actions between human beings and cosmic agents. Some values are identical, some are reversed, but most of them stand in an hierarchical order to each other as it has been exemplified with some of the values expressed in interviews. The close entanglement of social and cosmic relations and the fact that actions for and with social agents are regarded to cater ultimately for long-term relationships with cosmic agents clearly shows the dynamic overlap of the two fields.

While this article focused on describing the basic tenets of the ritual economy of *vaqf*, it is needless to say that Mashhad’s socio-cosmic field has effects and implications that involve all kinds of economic and ritual actions and relationships as well as debates about their values, the latter being constantly negotiated and creatively expressed and produced in actions.

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CAROLIN MAERTENS

‘No Debt, No Business’

The Personalisation of Market Exchange in Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan

Keywords: Debt, trade, market, transition, personalisation, Islam, Tajikistan

Introduction

If one happens to travel in a shared taxi the roughly 600 km distance from Tajikistan’s capital Dushanbe to Khorugh, the capital of its mountainous Autonomous Province Gorno-Badakhshan, one is likely to enjoy the increasingly spectacular view on mountains and torrential rivers for at least fourteen hours. And if one happens to be brave enough and free from giddiness, it is advisable to get hold of a seat on the right side in direction of travel, preferably the front seat, since it provides by far the best view (and increases the chance to find a functioning seatbelt). Following the Panj river upstream on a dirt road for a great part of the journey, one can marvel at the steep canyons one passes through, at rock walls rising high above one’s head and at adventurous pathways vanquished by walkers, motorcycles, cars and donkeys right across the Panj river, which forms the border with Afghanistan. Apart from the visual entertainment, one may also wonder about the trucks that rumble together with passenger cars along the sometimes critically narrow road strip high above the river, shipping consumer goods to the Pamir region. As the trip provides abundant time to inquire into each other’s business and family or other issues, mostly randomly compiled fellow passengers gradually get acquainted with each other and exchange song texts, jokes and opinions over snacks circulating within the car or over a cup of tea, a bowl of soup or plate of shashlik at a roadside restaurant. It was on such journeys, which I undertook back and forth several times in the winter of 2013/14, that I accompanied some of the persons who inspired the present paper. Jammed between fellow travellers on the first or second backseat row (the much

desired front seat was often already reserved), I did not only learn a great deal about ‘Pamiri’¹ cordiality but gained insight into some of the tough working conditions of local retail traders. During six months of anthropological fieldwork in Ishkoshim Markaz,² the administrative centre (*markaz*) of the *rayon* (district) of the same name, located in the southwest of Gorno-Badakhshan, I explored the tricks of the trade of local retail trading. My focus of interest was identified by a female shopkeeper, who became impatient with my questions concerning the, unilaterally assumed, gender-bias within retail trading and told me: ‘If you are interested in trading, then look at this!’, dropping a heavy pile of three handwritten notebooks on the sales counter in front of her. She opened one of them and started reading out names of persons, amounts of money and dates, line by line, while vigorously relating names and money and dates with her forefinger. Up to this point, her husband, who was present in the shop as well but busy with accountancy work, had not shown any interest for our conversation. That immediately changed when the notebooks came into play. He joined us, opened another notebook, flipped through its pages back and forth and finally found what he was looking for: ‘Here, three hundred Somoni, four years!’³

Apparently, these notebooks pointed to issues that were and continue to be of serious interest to traders, and, as it turned out, to many people in Ishkoshim. As I came to know, these books document commercial debts of customers who had not paid immediately for the things taken, but promised to do so later. And I learnt that the Tajik word *qarz*, meaning debt or credit, is a buzz word with the potential to seriously upset otherwise calm entrepreneurs and to provoke extensive complaints about defaulting customers, who on their part would rather avoid talking about the topic.

Far from being an exception people in Ishkoshim (and elsewhere in post-Soviet Gorno-Badakhshan) regularly obtain consumer goods on debt

1 In this paper, the word ‘Pamir(s)’ refers to the high-altitude mountain area in Tajikistan’s eastern province Gorno-Badakhshan. Its adjective ‘Pamiri’ refers to the majority of inhabitants of that region, who, nevertheless, belong to various linguistic and religious groups. For a discussion of the diverse understanding and usage of the term Pamir(s) and Pamiri see Kreuzmann 2015, 158–163; for a critical discussion of the ‘misuse of the geographic term ‘Pamir’’ and the ‘misconception about the application of the term ‘Badakhshan’’ see Iliiev 2008, 54–55.

2 Between September 2013 and March 2014 I conducted fieldwork in Tajikistan and Afghanistan for my Master thesis within the Master programme for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. I am very indebted to Prof. Hardenberg for his generous support throughout my Master studies and beyond.

3 At that time, three hundred Tajik Somoni equalled approximately sixty US-Dollar.

basis, which, as I want to show, is not simply a feature of market economic exchange, but rather a complex practice involving moral concerns and forms of social obligation. Moreover, *qarz* points at larger issues concerning the specific course that the transition from Soviet planned economy to a market based economy has taken in Tajikistan's Pamir region. First, the introduction of market economic structures was mediated and promoted by the Isma'ili 'transnational assemblage' (Steinberg 2011), explicitly embedding (market) economic activity within a normative framework of religious-moral values that are based on a holistic Muslim conception of human existence and experience, in which worldly matters are inseparable from faith, and doing business is not detached from concerns of being a good person. Second, the practise of *qarz*, buying on the nod, is situated in a market economic context where financial means are notoriously scarce; a condition that is rooted in the specific integration of Ishkoshim (and Gorno-Badakhshan in general) into the provision system of the former Soviet Union.

Eventually, I argue that the economic transformation following the collapse of the Soviet Union did not only mean the privatisation of securing livelihood, which was formerly granted by the Soviet state, but, furthermore and foremost, led to the **personalisation** of transactions in a market economic setting, where relatives, neighbours and friends came to encounter each other as clients and shopkeepers. In short, market trade replaced provisioning, and personalised exchange relations replaced rather anonymous state regulation and redistribution. Consequently, departing from the observation that 'socialism was a system organized around state-controlled redistribution [and that the] dismantling [of] those channels produces a relative vacuum of mechanisms for exchange and distribution; therefore finance, trade, and other forms of exchange move to the fore as sites of innovation' (Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 3), I further argue that the personalisation of market exchange relations is the 'innovative' result of transition itself, emerging at the specific historical conjuncture of the discontinuation of 'Moscow provisioning' (Reeves 2014, 113–114), the introduction of market economic structures and the powerful presence of Isma'ili doctrine. The practice of *qarz*, then, being based on personalised relations between buyer and seller, represents an economic as well as socio-moral 'response [...] to the introduction of market activities' within a setting of notorious scarcity of money (Mandel/Humphrey 2002, 1). As such, *qarz* mediates between the potentially contradicting demands of the market and the community.

Legacy and Novelty in Response to Economic Transition

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 has yielded a variety of consequences for its former constituent republics, which, depending on their position within the Soviet (economic) system (among other conditions), struck diverse paths (cf. Pomfret 2002). There is a vast body of scholarly and policy oriented literature on the topic of transition, which to depict in its entirety is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, I limit my discussion to the heuristic and methodological question of how to relate the macro to the micro, that is, grand economic schemes on the level of national and international policies on the one hand to everyday experiences on the ground on the other. From a macro-perspective of political economy '[t]ransition is the shorthand term for the process of moving from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy' (Pomfret 1995, 6). In this view, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of its former republics were followed by measures aiming at the reorganisation of the (now national) political economy of the newly independent states. However diverse in specific post-Soviet national contexts, on the macro level some general features can be identified that, to various degrees, set in motion diverse transition processes. Thus, the 'ingredients of economic reform' (Pomfret 1995, 53) comprise of price liberalisation, changes in property rights, the introduction of free trade, a radical reduction of state services and subsidies, privatisation and downsizing of state enterprises and institutions and the establishment of capital markets (Mandel/Humphrey 2002, 2; Pomfret 1995, 53–59; Pomfret 2002, 30–46; Werner 2004, 111–113).

In order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the actual effects and consequences of such a vast endeavour, many anthropologists repeatedly made the point that the realisation of these political-economic measures must be studied on the ground as well (see e.g. Burawoy/Verdery 1999; Hann et al. 2002; Fehlings/Hardenberg 2013, 2), that is in the complex realm of everyday life where the transformation of 'market models into market realities' takes place (Bruno 1997, 58). Here, we need to look at the 'relation between macro structures and everyday practice' (Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 2) and 'how the unfolding uncertainties of macro institutions affect practices within micro worlds [...] [,] [how they provoke] the creative and resistive processes of everyday practice' (Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 7). This perspective poses a stark contrast to a teleological or 'closed-ended' conception of transition, which 'implies that post-Soviet countries inevitably and continuously move from communism to a predetermined end-point [...]. Following the modernization

paradigm, this endpoint would be a liberal democratic and capitalistic regime’ (Wooden/Stefes 2009, 5). The alternative approach explores ‘transition from communism’ without any preconceived notion of a possible endpoint’ (Wooden/Stefes 2009, 5), providing a decisive shift of focus: In a perspective, which takes such an endpoint for granted, transition is perceived as an intervention, the outcome of which is both predetermined and unquestionable, while pre-Soviet cultural and/or religious resilience and/or Soviet legacies are held responsible for shortcomings or failures of economies and societies in transition. In contrast, an open-ended approach to transition allows for the question of how ‘policies combine with pre-existing circumstances [in particular contexts] in different ways to produce different outcomes and reactions’ (Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 15). In this view, ‘the past enters the present, not as legacy but as novel adaption’ (Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 4).

In my view, the personalisation of market exchange relations, as I depict them here, represents such a ‘novel adaption’. Consequently, it can neither be understood as a form of Soviet legacy (e.g. condemnation of trade, Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 7) nor as resistant Pamiri peasant morale that would condemn exchanging foodstuffs for direct return (as suggested by Bliss 2006, 142). In fact, ‘what may appear as ‘restorations’ of patterns familiar from socialism [or from prior] are something quite different: direct *responses* to the new market initiatives, produced *by* them, rather than remnants of an older mentality. In other words, [...] what looks familiar has causes that are fairly novel’ (Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 2, original emphasis). ‘Fairly novel’ are the privatised responsibility to secure livelihood, the difficulty for some to make ends meet and shopkeepers who find themselves personally – socially and morally – confronted with the question whether to help out or not, while simultaneously being pressured to make a profit.

Finally, the continued ‘dominance of exchange over production’ (Burawoy/Verdery 1999, 15) in Gorno-Badakhshan is indeed a kind of Soviet legacy that contributed to the emergence of personalised market transactions. I consider it a legacy to the extent as it resulted from the Pamir region’s incorporation into the Soviet Union, which granted it a privileged position in regard to state subsidies while neglecting self-sufficiency (cf. Bliss 2006, 330) and local production of exchange value. Thus, though not a Soviet legacy in their own right, *qarz* and personalised market exchange are still directly related to conditions that bind the present to its Soviet past. In what follows, I flesh out these briefly sketched forms of legacy, novelty and response in a historical perspective in order to show how they came to constitute the present.

Soviet Legacy and Ismaili Intervention

The incorporation of the Pamir region into the Soviet Union in the 1920s was followed by socio-economic changes in subsequent decades that radically transformed society and set the course for its future path. Agricultural production experienced a fundamental reorganisation in the course of which crop cultivation and livestock farming were gradually collectivised and former subsistence farmers turned into wage labourers (Bliss 2006, 80, 246–250; Kreutzmann 1996, 171–178). Consistent with the overall Soviet economic scheme, wherein Central Asian republics contributed mostly in the field of agriculture (cf. Pomfret 1995, 32–40), Tajikistan engaged primarily with agricultural production and production of raw materials (Jones Luong 2004, 10; Pomfret 1995, 37). In contrast to extensive investment in agriculture, roads, social infrastructure, culture and scientific research (Bliss 2006, 248–249, 254–259), the degree of industrialisation and consequently the level of industrial production of non-agricultural goods remained generally low in Tajikistan, particularly in Gorno-Badakhshan where livestock farming, including the cultivation of fodder crops, played the most prominent role.⁴ However, since the high-altitude environment of the Pamirs was unsuitable for large-scale agricultural production, state farms were hopelessly unprofitable and the level of self-sufficiency even concerning agricultural products was respectively low (Bliss 2006, 251–254). Consequently, livelihood in the Pamirs was generously warranted through ‘cradle-to-grave welfare’ (Jones Luong 2004, 2), that is, extensive provisioning by the Soviet state concerning all spheres of life (subsistence, education, health care etc.).⁵ This is even more true for areas like Ishkoshim that constituted the ever sensitive external border of the Soviet Union and, as ‘[p]art of the arrangement with border regions across the Soviet Union [...] [,] receive[d] generous material subsidies in exchange for political quietude, loyalty or just for staying in one place’ (Shaw 2011, 343; cf. Bliss 2006, 247; Reeves 2014, 110–114).

4 The few industrial plants of Tajikistan were located in Khujand and the Hissar valley near Dushanbe (Rubin 1993, 75). In Gorno-Badakhshan, manufacturing was limited to the production of textiles and shoes in the province capital Khorugh, where reportedly about 2.600 labourers were employed in 1987 (Bliss 2006, 253).

5 According to Kreutzmann, 80% of foodstuffs and 100% of required fuel were imported to Gorno-Badakhshan during the Soviet period (Kreutzmann 1996, 186). Belkina travelled the Pamir Highway from the city of Osh in Kyrgyzstan to Khorugh in the mid 1960s and observed: ‘Every day one lorry after another leaves Osh for the Pamirs with flour, cement, coal, liquid fuel, timber, tinned food, textiles, furniture, toys, perfumery, and so on and so forth. The lorries come back empty, because at present the Pamirs have nothing to export except wool, dried fruit and meat, and the meat goes on the roof’ (Belkina 1966, 222). Within the larger picture, in 1991 Moscow still financed 40% of Tajikistan’s state expenditures (Rubin 1993, 73).

In 1990/91 subsidies for Tajikistan gradually fell and, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, by and large state provisioning was to terminate (Bliss 2006, 278; Rubin 1993, 77). As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, at this point it became obvious that the consequences of the Pamir region’s integration into the Soviet economic and welfare system in the twentieth century were twofold: On the one hand, the general standard of living in Gorno-Badakhshan was significantly enhanced (Bliss 2006, 248) and resulted, among other things, in a significant increase of people living there (Bliss 2006, 152). On the other hand, in consequence of comprehensive state-funded provisioning and neglect of both self-sufficiency and non-agricultural production, a persistent dependency of Gorno-Badakhshan on supplies from the outside, in order to allow its inhabitants to exist was sealed – be it state subsidies in Soviet times, humanitarian aid during the civil war in the 1990ies (see below) or purchase of essential (and other) consumer goods produced elsewhere in the current time of market economy.

With dependency comes vulnerability. In the summer of 2015 Gorno-Badakhshan found itself temporarily cut off from outside provision. Heavy rainfalls and unusual high temperatures had caused floods and mudslides that blocked the Pamir Highway (among other roads). Thus, the region’s main artery linking it to commodity supplies from Kyrgyzstan, China and Dushanbe, became impassable at several points, as bridges and stretches of the highway were washed away. In search for an alternative, trucks were forced to opt for the southern route via the Wakhan valley. In sections dangerously narrow, rain-sodden and with sharp turns, the Wakhan dirt road proved to be unsuitable for heavy vehicles. Consequently, many trucks got stuck in the mud while some even slipped off the road (*fig. 1*) (Maertens/Saxer 2015).



Fig. 1. Mastering the terrain poses a difficult challenge. Here, a truck trailer slipped off the narrow Wakhan road but fortunately did not fall down the cliff, the driver survived unharmed (Photo by the author, 2015).

Apart from this kind of vulnerability, in today's increasingly globalised economies dependence on imports alone is nothing remarkable, but things get complicated when dependence conspires with lack of means to obtain what is produced elsewhere. In the Ishkoshim region of Gorno-Badakhshan, people do not only seek consumer goods from the outside but also search for income sources somewhere else, mainly in Russia. Ironically, erstwhile 'Moscow provisioning' has actually not vanished but, consistent with requirements of the transition towards market economy, underwent adjustment as well and continues at the present time in its privatised variation of remittances sent home by Tajik migrant labourers.⁶ I cannot refer to particular figures of Gorno-Badakhshan Province, let alone Ishkoshim, but the World Bank's estimation of the inflow of remittances regarding Tajikistan as a whole, amounting to an equivalent of 51,9% of the gross domestic product by April 2014, does not seem to be far away from Ishkoshim realities⁷ (World Bank 2014). Yet, remittances do not penetrate far and pass through Ishkoshim rather in transit, in part financing local trade on either side of the sales counter and thus the turnover of unknown producers: Remittances go into investments in retail trade, into purchase of consumer goods and into pay off of bank loans that in turn often pre-finance both business and consumption. One bank manager put it in a nutshell: 'No debt, no business' (*qarz nest, savdo nest*).

Apart from the termination of 'Moscow provisioning', the end of the Soviet Union represented a caesura of yet another kind for the majority of people living in Gorno-Badakhshan, as they witnessed the reemergence of their religious authority in the shape of the Aga Khan IV, the 49th hereditary Imam and spiritual leader of the Nizari Isma'ili community (a branch of Shi'a Islam), to whom the great majority of the inhabitants of the Pamir region adheres (Daftary 2011, 10).⁸ Throughout history, contact between the respective Imams and the geographically scattered Nizari Isma'ili communities was

6 According to a report of the Tajik news platform Asia-Plus, quoting the Russian Federal Migration Services, there were more than 1.1 million Tajik citizens in Russia by August 4 2014, <<http://news.tj/en/news/number-tajik-men-russia-growing-while-number-tajik-women-reducing>> (last access 21.09.2014). For the increasing significance of remittances for securing livelihood as well as their impact on social mobility and inequality see e.g. Reeves 2012; 2014, 103–105, 110–115, 123–127.

7 World Bank, Annual Remittances Data. Inflows, <<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPETS/0,,contentMDK:22759429~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html#Remittances>> (last access 21.09.2014).

8 The majority of the inhabitants of the *rayon* Murghab and the *rayon* Darvoz in the province of Gorno-Badakhshan belong to the Sunni branch of Islam (cf. Bliss 2006, 93; cf. here references in footnote 1).

interrupted time and again.⁹ As for the case at hand, it was not until the 20th cent. that regular contact with and command over Isma'ili communities living in the mountainous regions of today's north Pakistan (Chitral, Hunza, Gilgit), northeast Afghanistan (Badakhshan) and east Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan) was established. In 1923 Aga Khan III, Sultan Muhammad Shah, grandfather and predecessor of the present Imam Aga Khan IV, sent his emissary Sabz Ali from his residence in Bombay to these remote areas in order to enquire into the state of affairs of Isma'ilis there, as well as to actually inform them that he is their leader and consequently claims their allegiance to his imamate, including the adherence to questions of faith and the delivery of tithe (*zakat*). Yet, as for the Isma'ilis in the Pamir region, who reportedly welcomed the Imam's leadership, their inclusion into the increasingly consolidated transnational Isma'ili network was to be postponed due to the Soviet intervention. The visit of the Imam's envoy Sabz Ali in 1923 was to become the last (official) contact of the Pamiri Isma'ilis with their Imam of the time; during the Soviet period direct contact was, by and large, disrupted until the late 1980s when ties were officially re-established in the time of *perestroika* (Ioliev 2008, 41, 50 footnote 47; Mastibekov 2014, 83; Steinberg 2011, 53). Under Stalin's regime (1927–1953) Gorno Badakhshan's borders with China and Afghanistan were closed in 1937 and local Isma'ili religious leaders (*pir*), who maintained the connection between the Imam and his followers, were persecuted and killed if they had not managed to flee into neighbouring countries, mostly into Afghanistan (Mastibekov 2014, 83, 91–98; cf. Bliss 2006, 227–228). Reportedly, by the beginning of the 1940s there were no more *pir* in Gorno Badakhshan (Mastibekov 2014, 92, 150). Unlike religious education, which was officially forbidden, religious practices were not banned by the constitution and could still be performed, although this bore a potential risk, especially for members of the Communist Party (Mastibekov 2014, 99, 140). On certain occasions (e.g. marriages, funerals) respective rituals were conducted, sometimes in secrecy, under the guidance of a *khalifa* who, formerly a subordinate to a *pir* within the Isma'ili religious hierarchy, remained the only officially sanctioned – designated and closely observed – religious figure (Mastibekov 2014, 100).¹⁰ However, the concrete stance of the Soviet leadership towards religious faith and practice varied significantly over time and, consequently, so did respective measures. In addition, since religious faith and practice were in

9 For a comprehensive study of the history of the Nizari Isma'ili communities, see Daftary (1990); for an overview see e.g. Steinberg (2011, 33–58); for an account of the history of the Nizari Isma'ili of Central Asia, see Elnazarov/Aksakolov (2011).

10 In contrast, according to Bliss *khalifa* were subject to official ban as well (Bliss 2006, 228).

part subject to secrecy, it is hard to assess how effective certain measures were at a certain time and in the long run (cf. Nourzhanov/Bleuer 2013, 231–235). Eventually, there are contradictory accounts in regard to the question which Pamiris were how much aware of their Isma'ili background and the existence of the Imam of the time – ranging from complete ignorance, a vague idea of the Imam, to clandestine reception of information on the accession of the present Aga Khan IV in 1957 and even the secret collection of tithe (cf. Bliss 2006, 227–228; Mastibekov 2014, 98–100; 103–104; Steinberg 2011, 141, 183). The contradictoriness of conclusions drawn by different authors might reflect the variety of Isma'ilis' experiences during the Soviet era, which were not only shaped by shifting policies of the Soviet leadership over time but also by locality as well as persons' social status, profession, official position, attitude towards Soviet doctrine etc. In the case at hand, elderly people in Ishkoshim (born after the creation of the Tajik Socialist Soviet Republic) emphasised their lack of what they perceived as religious knowledge (e.g. how to pray) and a very vague notion of the Imam during the Soviet time, while the younger generation stated that they were completely ignorant of the Imam until his 'return' in the 1990s. This is somewhat consistent with Steinberg's account on views of people from Ryn, a village neighbouring Ishkoshim, according to which only old people knew about the Imam, while it was only due to his visit that people realised that they 'had a guide' (Steinberg, 2011, 183).

However, the (re-)arrival of the Imam in shape of the Aga Khan IV after the collapse of the Soviet Union was marked by circumstances that decisively shaped Pamiris' deeply felt veneration for their Imam, which, I argue, encouraged acceptance of standardised religious doctrine¹¹ and appreciation for modernist development schemes that were to transform life in Gorno-Badakhshan profoundly. Thus, the reemergence of the Imam is preceded by the onset of a fierce civil war in 1992 that was caused by rivalries for state power in the aftermath of Tajikistan's independence in 1991 (Bliss 2006, 275; Rubin 1993, 78). The war, which has seen heaviest fighting during 1992/93, was officially ended with a peace agreement in June 1997 (Bliss 2006, 297). The consequences of this war were disastrous for the entire country; apart from

11 Which is not to say that there was and is no deviation or open resistance. Steinberg, for example, describes the controversy over a movie that depicts diverse local religious practices, which are considered to be Isma'ili by its performers, while criticised by the primary Isma'ili religious authority in Badakhshan for not being in accordance with Isma'ili doctrine, that is, as decreed by the Imam (Steinberg 2011, 156). On the other hand, Kicherer provides an insightful account on how the Aga Khan's modernist course, emphasising 'economisation' of material means and encouraging individual effort, informs practices and conceptions surrounding *barakat* in Gorno-Badakhshan's upper Bartang valley (Kicherer, this volume).

causing violence, displacement and ten thousands of fatalities, the conflict led to the near total destruction of infrastructure and to the total collapse of the economy (Bliss 2006, 75; Nourzhanov/Bleuer 2013, 3–9, 325–335). There was no fighting in the mountainous Pamir region, but from December 1992 to September 1993 it was cut off from previous supply routes due to a blockade imposed by the government, which resulted in a hunger crisis in the winter of 1992/93 (Bliss 2006, 276, 297; Rubin 1993, 78; Steinberg 2011, 130, 202). These dramatic circumstances did not escape international attention, most prominently that of the Aga Khan IV, who intervened to save those who had almost forgot him.

Although it was not until May 1995 that the Aga Khan IV paid his first personal visit to Gorno Badakhshan, he (re)entered the scene and Pamiris' consciousness in March 1993, at the point of black despair in face of civil war and famine, in the shape of emergency food aid (Bliss 2006, 298; Steinberg 2011, 169).¹² Despite substantial contributions of donors and organisations other than those of the Aga Khan to the aid programme (Bliss 2006, 298–299, 304) – a fact people are aware of – it is the Aga Khan IV in person who is remembered and praised for having saved their lives (cf. Steinberg 2011, 130), as many people in Ishkoshim told me, prompted by mere mentioning of the Imam.

Subsequently, the Aga Khan's intervention gradually shifted from provisioning of aid supplies to encouraging his Pamiri followers to take matters in their own hands (cf. Steinberg 2011, 170). Since then, a variety of development projects were launched under the auspices of the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (MSDSP) and different agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in diverse fields, such as agriculture, health services, education and, not least, 'promotion of private-sector enterprise',¹³ on which I will henceforth focus.

In summary, the arrival of the Aga Khan IV in Gorno Badakhshan in 1993 was decisively momentous for two reasons. First, it was in a situation of greatest desperation when he appeared and granted relief, delivering not mere food but a performance of 'salvation' that certainly contributed to his seemingly unquestionable authority. Second, the Imam's and his development agencies' arrival coincided with 'the very moment that those areas opened up to capitalist market economies' (Steinberg 2011, 170). Thus, one can fairly argue that, mediated by the ever since omnipresent MSDSP/AKDN, particularly

12 Previous to the delivery of emergency aid, staff of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) was sent to Gorno-Badakhshan in order to assess people's need (Bliss 2006, 298).

13 AKDN, <<http://www.akdn.org>> (last access 28.12.2015).

the Isma'ili Pamiris experienced the transition from a Soviet planned economy to a market based economy as transition from provisioning and relief supplies to a development scheme that 'intentionally promotes participation in wider capitalist systems and thus socializes its participants to capitalist ideologies, aiding the entry of those members of the Isma'ili community previously isolated in feudal or Communist polities into the global economic sphere' (Steinberg 2011, 170). Following the path of his predecessor, Aga Khan IV is committed to a decided 'Islamic modernity', which, although borrowing substantially from 'European modernity', nevertheless sets itself apart (Steinberg 2011, 53–54). The following section traces this Islamic (Isma'ili) approach to modernity, which is rooted in religious conceptions and not only provides a self-description to the transnational Isma'ili community but the fundamental moral-religious framework that defines and rationalises all activities of the Isma'ili institutions. In addition, I will briefly reflect on the religious sources of authority of the Imam in Isma'ilism and how this is consequently related to his worldly leadership within the Isma'ili community.

'Muslim' Market Economy

The Aga Khan IV early on advocated a clear vision of the role that the Muslim (Isma'ili) approach to development and modernity, prosperity and progress, was to play in Tajikistan's future, that is, a vision of how to relate it to the 'ex-Communist and Western world'. In this respect, his meditation on Tajikistan's transition in his commencement address at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's graduation exercises in May 1994, hence still at the beginning of his engagement in Tajikistan, is central to my argument and therefore reproduced here in some detail:

'Tajikistan has become the focus of one of the most interesting encounters of the day. It is here, and in the other Central Asian republics, that three great cultures encounter one another: the ex-Communist world, the Muslim world, and the Western world. [...] Each of these three cultures has something to bring to the solution of the problems of Tajikistan. The West has many strengths, but prominent among them are science and democracy (with their public mechanisms for self-correction) and also private institutions, liberal economics, and a recognition of fundamental human rights. The Muslim world offers

deep roots in a system of values, emphasizing service, charity and a sense of common responsibility, and denying what it sees to be the false dichotomy between religious and secular lives. The ex-Communist world, although it failed economically, made important investments in social welfare [...]. These are a powerful array of strengths and goals. Just how to combine them to solve Tajikistan's problems is not clear. But if the outcome is to be sustainable, it seems necessary to concentrate resources on the development of private institutions, of accountable public institutions and of human potential. But how to get from here to there without inflicting cruel damage on a people already buffeted by shortages and change? Again, the way is not entirely clear, but one should strive to retain the powerful ties of mutual support that – in different ways – bind individuals together in Muslim and Communist societies. And one should see that the impressive gains in health and education are not lost in the transition, for it would be unconscionable to allow, for example, the equality of men and women that has been achieved in Tajikistan over the last 60 years to be erased in the transition to a market economy' (Aga Khan 1994).

In this view, 'Communist and Western worlds' are depicted as diametrical different, featuring complementary advantages and shortcomings: The Western world's economic success is contrasted with the ex-Communist world's economic failure, while the emphasis on the latter's social welfare points to social deficiency of the Western world. 'The Muslim world', then, emerges as a possible, inclusivist alternative to either of them if it comprises the merits of both while rejecting their respective shortcomings: The Western capitalistic world, lacking sufficient social solidarity, is balanced by a 'system of values, emphasizing service, charity, and a sense of common responsibility' as well as by 'powerful ties of mutual support' – features that 'Muslim and the Communist societies' have in common. The 'economic failure' of the Communist regime, in turn, is to be corrected by the introduction of 'private institutions' and 'liberal economics'. In regard to Tajikistan's transition then, the Muslim world (modern Isma'ilism) is situated on a transitional continuum that links and mediates between a communist past and a market economic future. Moreover, in rejecting 'the false dichotomy between religious and secular lives' – a misconception held by the Communist and Western world alike – the 'Muslim world' offers as it seems a unique approach to the challenges Tajikistan faces in the course of transition; it offers an alternative to

the country's failed past as well as to a seemingly inevitable market economic future that potentially threatens social cohesion.

The Aga Khan's explicit rejection of 'the false dichotomy between religious and secular lives' and his concern with the very worldly progress of his followers resonate with the explicit model of leadership embodied by the Isma'ili Imam who is accordingly responsible for both the spiritual guidance of his followers and their material well-being (cf. Mastibekov 2014, 130, 142; Poor 2014, 174), because 'history and the correct interpretation of the Imamatus require that the Imam, while caring first of all for the spiritual well-being of his people, should also be continuously concerned with their safety and their material progress' (Aga Khan IV 1976, cited in Poor 2014, 139).

This view, finally, is rooted in the integrative conception of *din* and *dunya*, literally faith and world, thus '[o]ne of the central elements of the Islamic faith is the inseparable nature of faith and world. The two are so deeply intertwined that one cannot imagine their separation. They constitute a 'Way of Life'. The role and responsibility of an Imam, therefore, is both to interpret the faith to the community, and also to do all within his means to improve the quality, and security, of their daily lives' (Aga Khan 2006a; cf. Mastibekov 2014, 1, 130, 150).

Through the lens of the ritual economic approach as presented by Hardenberg (this volume) the notion of an 'inseparable nature of faith and world' corresponds to the first variant of interrelation between the social and cosmic field. Here, the social field and the cosmic field constitute one 'largely undifferentiated' socio-cosmic field within which 'social and cosmic relationships are intimately linked by actions and can hardly be separated in terms of values and categories' (Hardenberg, this volume). Furthermore, taking into account the 'system of values, emphasizing service, charity, and a sense of common responsibility' as well as 'powerful ties of mutual support', as suggested by Aga Khan IV (Aga Khan 1994; cf. above), values structuring the social field emphasise 'social obligation' rather than 'individual autonomy' ultimately aiming at the realisation of rather 'holistic social entities' (Hardenberg, this volume).

The need of continuous interpretation of 'the faith to the community' (Aga Khan IV 2006a) is a further important aspect of the Isma'ili Imam's leadership and grants him and his conclusive remarks, claims, advices and orders indisputable authority. Furthermore, it allows both to directly link the interpretation of Islam to worldly matters, that demand continuous adaptation, and to endow the Aga Khan's worldly activities with religious significance, if

not downright authority.¹⁴ As in other branches of Shi‘a Islam, in Isma‘ilism there is particular emphasis on the distinction between the outward, apparent (exoteric) meaning of religious texts and prescriptions (*zahir*), and their inner, hidden (esoteric) meaning (*batin*), which is consequently disclosed only by allegorical interpretation (*ta‘wil*) of the literal wording (Daftary 1990, 559–567; cf. Lashkariev 2014, 163–164; Steinberg 2011, 10, 103–105, 204). Moreover, in Isma‘ilism ‘[i]t is only the *ta‘wil* of the imam that can reveal the true, inner meaning, the *batin*, of religion’ (Steinberg 2011, 10, cf. 104–105; cf. Mastibekov 2014, 25–27, 40, 130).

In conclusion, because of the Imam’s exclusive mandate to ‘reveal the truth’ in a continuous process of interpretation (Steinberg 2011, 104–105) combined with the view that faith and world, the cosmic and the social field (Hardenberg, this volume), are inextricably intertwined, his authoritative interpretation of Islam is simultaneously an authoritative interpretation of the world and of what needs to be done. What’s more, his exclusive claim to religious-spiritual guidance is mirrored in his exclusive claim to leadership in the social field, manifested in the Aga Khan IV’s personal presidency over all administrative institutions and development agencies of the Isma‘ili community, which are, thus, endowed with religious authority and significance (Poor 2014, 10, 18, 79).

It is this all-encompassing, superordinate role of the Aga Khan IV that one needs to bear in mind when following his speech held in October 2006 on the occasion of the inauguration of the bridge near Ishkoshim, connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan over the border river Panj and facilitating a cross-border market, which was opened soon after. As in 1995, people experienced the personal visit of the Aga Khan as a religious and deeply emotional event of outstanding significance in their lives. People would not only emphasise the importance of personally having seen the Imam (*didor*) but recall in detail how they walked for days to attend the ceremony and how ‘all villages were empty’. The actual speech of the Aga Khan taught the audience, including most of the traders that I met in 2013/14, about the benefits that this bridge would bring to them:

‘Each of the [other cross-border] bridges [in Tajikistan] I have mentioned has had a considerable moral and symbolic value, inspiring a

¹⁴ Discussing the origin and kind of ‘authority and leadership’ of the Isma‘ili Imam, Poor describes the relation between the figure of the Imam and Isma‘ili institutions as ‘a transmutation or a transcendence of the person of the Imam into the office of the imamate’ (Poor 2014, 79).

spirit of confidence, progress and hope. But these projects also have a very concrete economic value, allowing for a substantial expansion of productive exchange. People in both countries are granted unprecedented access to markets beyond their immediate frontiers. [...] The Iskhashim Bridge is not only a transit point, however. It is also a meeting place. Like the other bridges, it is a place where people from more remote settlements can gather to trade in goods and services. A widening variety of peoples can have access here to a widening variety of products. [...] It is my hope and desire that what is carried across them – in whichever direction – is done for the purpose of creating happiness and health, wisdom and prosperity – in both the economic and the moral realms’ (Aga Khan 2006b).

It is difficult to miss the centrality of the ‘economic value’, realised in the shape of trade, that represents the most prominent benefit. Mentioned first as kind of ‘productive exchange’ facilitated by the bridge, ‘economic value’ is seconded by ‘trade in ideas’, ‘food security’ and ‘medical support’. Though the ultimate ambition, ‘happiness and health, wisdom and prosperity – in both the economic and the moral realms’, integrates material objectives and immaterial aims, it is successful economic activity that, in this specific context, appears to be the prime means on the way towards a more holistic well-being (Aga Khan 2006b). In the terms of Gudeman (2001), here it is the market that serves the community (cf. Hardenberg this volume).

Primarily addressing an audience of commoners, this speech eventually leads me to the crucial question of how to evaluate the actual impact of Isma‘ili doctrine, as outlined above, on everyday life. More specifically, how does the Isma‘ili approach towards (market) economic activity (which implicates market trade) – with its moral-religious underpinnings, epitomised by the Imam, promoted and implemented by MSDSP/AKDN in numerous projects – relate to everyday transactions at the market?

The introduction of market economic structures and principles (cf. above on transition) is inextricably related to the Aga Khan IV, Isma‘ili doctrine and the activities of MSDSP/AKDN – in terms of temporality and discourses as well as practical support. For example, according to Steinberg, it were the Village Organisations¹⁵ introduced by MSDSP/AKDN that, ‘at the first (very

15 Ideally, Village Organisations are democratic councils for self-governance on the village level, which constitute a central link between local communities and the Aga Khan Foundation (cf. Steinberg 2011, 164–177).

tentative) contact with larger market systems, [...] in fact [...] helped facilitate early and small-scale attempts at capitalist activity’ (Steinberg 2011, 170). Steinberg further recalls the telling words of ‘one villager in the Ishkashim region [who] explained to me that it was through the MSDSP of AKF that they *‘accepted the market economy’*. The verb used (*qabul kardan*) was the same as that used to describe the acceptance of Islam’ (Steinberg 2011, 171, original emphasis). While I did not encounter such explicit reference to the Aga Khan IV’s encouragement in Ishkoshim Markaz, the acceptance of trade as a matter of course hints at a rather implicit, nevertheless pervasive, impact of his embracement of business in the sense of what Steinberg qualified as **socialisation** ‘to capitalist ideologies’ (Steinberg 2011, 170).

In fact, while it has been demonstrated for other post-Soviet contexts that trade-for-profit condemning Soviet doctrine¹⁶ continues to inform negative attitudes towards trade and traders, I did not come across such views in Ishkoshim. This is not to say that people in Ishkoshim (and elsewhere in Gorno-Badakhshan) simply adopted a capitalistic attitude – a nostalgia for the good Soviet life, for ‘Moscow Provisioning’, a more even distribution of material means and, not least, for participation in ‘modernity’ itself, is maintained here as tenaciously as elsewhere (cf. Bliss 2006, 243; Mostowlansky forthcoming; Reeves 2014, 113–114; Steinberg 2011, 140). But, on the one hand, there was not much of a choice other than to engage in market economic trade in order to obtain basic provisions as well as to generate some income. Yet, on the other hand, significantly and irrespective of the lack of alternatives to market exchange, people do not criticise trade for-profit as such, or traders for aiming at profit – the core concern of Soviet anti-trade doctrine. Rather, this is widely acknowledged as a matter of fact – traders need to make (some) profit as people need to buy. Instead, people even lamented the lack of knowledge and skills of how to do business properly as, for instance, compared to – otherwise ‘backward’ – Afghans from across the Panj who were assigned these capabilities without negative moral judgment. Furthermore, the lack of business skills was evaluated as deficiency that needs to be overcome, rather than as moral superiority.

However, in respect to complaints about market economic trade another much more essential deficiency comes to the fore: Lack of money that, according to my interlocutors, is the most pressing problem. In order to

¹⁶ Which promoted a decisively negative image of trade, denounced the figure of the trader as *spekulant* (cf. e.g. Heyat 2002b, 172) and fostered a definition of (social) status hierarchy according to kinds of occupations wherein trade ranked low (Kanefff 2002; Heyat 2002a, 25–26; Bruno 1997, 68–69).

handle this challenge it is often relegated to the future via bank loans, private credit arrangements and the practice of *qarz*, while promises to pay debts off are substantiated by expectations of arriving remittances, wages and pensions. The particularity of private credit arrangements and especially the practice of *qarz* is that they are mediated by personal relations, moral imperatives and social commitment that resemble the virtues of a ‘Muslim’ approach to market economy as promoted by the Aga Khan IV. Yet, as I will show below, imperatives of mutual support and obligations in regard to market transactions – as much as they might be appreciated as moral-religious demands – are not unanimously embraced in a setting of notorious scarcity, particularly not by those who need to refuse too great a generosity in order to make ends meet, that is by traders.

In the Aga Khan’s vision of a ‘Muslim’ market economy, as sketched in his commencement address at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1994, a ‘system of values, emphasizing service, charity, and a sense of common responsibility’ as well as ‘powerful ties of mutual support’ do not oppose market economy but rather balance its potential shortcomings. Yet, in a context like Tajikistan where state welfare – which would organise societal solidarity – is insufficient and where economic conditions are not too bright, people are mostly left to their own resources to meet demands of both moral-religious and social righteousness as well as making a living. Against this background, the practice of *qarz* does reflect a conflict between the demands of the community and the market, which, in face of financial scarcity, cannot easily be resolved or integrated. At this point, *qarz*, represents a means to mediate between these conflicting realms. Before turning to particular types of *qarz* relations, I briefly introduce main features of Ishkoshim’s trade business.

No Debt, No Business

Ishkoshim is the largest settlement within the rayon of the same name with about 3.300 inhabitants (IDA 2013).¹⁷ The town, as its dwellers insist, owes its existence to a Russian military post that was founded between the (today adjacent) villages Nudh and Ryn early in the twentieth century (Kreutzmann 1996, 405 footnote 3). The composition of Ishkoshim, with its rectangular roads, disturbed only by pathways weaving through living areas, and the design of

17 According to official numbers, in 2013 the *rayon* Ishkoshim counted 30.600 residents (Агенти омори назди Президенти Ҷумҳурии Тоҷикистон 2013, 16).



Fig. 2. View on Tajik Ishkoshim (in the front) and Sultan Ishkashim in Afghanistan, separated by the Panj river (Photo by Tobias Marschall, 2013).

many buildings, some multi-storey housing blocks among them, clearly reflect both its rather recent foundation¹⁸ and the Soviet taste that established it (*fig. 2*).

In contrast to the continuous inflow of consumer goods, Ishkoshim's choice of monetary income sources is as meagre as elsewhere in Gorno-Badakhshan and almost limited to governmental employment in state institutions like schools, the kindergarten and *rayon* hospital, as well as the *rayon* government and military offices. Thus, only a small portion of the population benefits from money channelled from Dushanbe through governmental budgets to the *rayon*, which in addition, often provides salaries insufficient to maintain a core family. Within the private sector, the number of paid jobs in Gorno-Badakhshan is still negligible and hardly existent in regard to Ishkoshim, while most of the comparatively well-paid employment opportunities with NGOs are contracted in Gorno-Badakhshan's province capital Khorugh. Apart from labour migration, for those who remain self-employment is an alternative strategy to

¹⁸ Its Afghan counterpart, Sultan Ishkashim, which is located a stone's throw away right across the Panj, represents a century old settlement and is the original bearer of the name.

generate income. Here, retail trade is the most popular type. In 2014, Ishkoshim accommodated fifty-one retail enterprises: Twenty-four (47.1 %) are primarily engaged in trading groceries, which are exclusively brought from wholesale markets in Dushanbe by trucks that belong to non-local logistics companies. In part, these function as traders themselves, purchase goods in Dushanbe and resell them to shopkeepers *en route* through Gorno-Badakhshan. In contrast to traders in grocery, the fourteen entrepreneurs (27.5 %) specialised in ready-made clothing are engaged in shuttle trade, travelling personally to markets in Dushanbe, Osh or Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan in order to choose and purchase the respective items on their own and to send them to Ishkoshim either by truck or on the roof of a shared taxi. It is these, predominantly female, traders that I met *en route* between Dushanbe, Khorugh and Ishkoshim. Depending on financial resources, size of business and finally sale, these traders undertake their journeys in different intervals, ranging from once a month to three times a year. Another fifth of all entrepreneurs (9.8 %) focuses simultaneously on groceries and clothing. Besides, four enterprises trade primarily in housewares and electronic devices while there are two shops mainly offering stationary and one shop that, by the trader's own proud account, has the local monopoly on perfumes and gifts. Although other shops offer a range of perfume and gift items as well, he definitively provides the greatest and most sophisticated selection of these goods and therefore enjoys great popularity especially among young women who appreciate his informed advice on how to apply specific make-up tools, which colours match best and so forth. If necessary, a 2007 issue of the Russian Glamour magazine is at hand to be consulted. Two days before International Women's Day on March 8, a public holiday and very popular in Ishkoshim, his shop was much sought out by husbands, sons, brothers and, occasionally, secret boyfriends. He apparently enjoyed running his business, which was indeed one of the few lucrative ones. In contrast, most traders' biographies and self-evaluations reveal that retail trading is primarily perceived as survival strategy rather than personal choice.¹⁹ Coming from various professional backgrounds that reflect their Soviet past, most entrepreneurs started their business during or shortly after the civil war in the 1990s, when state subsidies had ceased and people were left without any prospect of further employment (or receipt of wages) in their respective

19 The view according to which retail trading is often perceived as survival strategy rather than driven by entrepreneurial aspirations is repeated by other anthropologists working in post-Soviet contexts. For Russia see Bruno (1997); for Azerbaijan see Heyat (2002a, 2002b); for Bulgaria see Kaneff (2002); for Kazakhstan see Werner (2004). In regard to Gorno-Badakhshan and female vendors in particular, Kanji arrived at the same conclusion (Kanji 2002, 145).

professions. Among the traders I got to know, there are former teachers, nurses, drivers, bookkeepers, as well as a few shop assistants and housewives to whom trade did not mean an improvement in their life.²⁰ Consequently, most would have preferred to continue their previous occupation, which was directly related to security of income and better working conditions. Perhaps engaging in trade would be evaluated more positively if doing business were financially more rewarding. Instead, entering the realm of retail trade not seldomly means running into debt, often with one or more of the four banks in Ishkoshim that entertain a buzzing credit business. Loans for trade business rank among the most popular types of credit,²¹ although annual interest rates are very high. Ranging roughly from 26 % to 37 %, depending on the bank but more significantly on the type of credit, repayment terms and currency,²² they easily gnaw away already meagre profits. Given these high interest rates, the popularity of credits appears remarkable and, once more, indicates the lack of – and need for – cash. According to one bank manager, there is no trader in Ishkoshim who has not taken out a loan; and, I add, there is no trade business that does not operate with *qarz* in its various forms. Simultaneously, there is no trader who does not complain about *qarz* and its side effects, though, after a closer look, most traders adopt a rather ambivalent attitude towards the subject admitting its advantages as well.

Complaining about *qarz* while granting it with the same regularity (fig. 3), traders experience *qarz* as a dilemma, which is frequently expressed by shopkeepers, sighing that ‘It doesn’t work with nor without *qarz*’ (*be qarz namesha[vad], bo qarz ham namesha[vad]*). The dilemma is twofold: First, and in respect to entrepreneurial considerations, *qarz* is as much a curse for business as it keeps it going. Second, and in regard to socio-moral concerns, the need to run a business profitably forbids privileging customers beyond a certain degree or on a too regular basis, be they poor, close friends, or relatives.

²⁰ In regard to difficulties Pamiris had with farming their land in the time of civil war Steinberg notes that ‘people had grown accustomed to obtaining food through the Soviet system of distribution [...]. Food had come from Moscow and other places throughout the USSR. Villagers were doctors and engineers and academics and had no need to learn how to farm and herd’ (Steinberg 2011, 130; cf. Kreuzmann 2007, 178–179). This confirms the privileged position of Gorno-Badakhshan within the welfare system of the Soviet Union, which enabled Pamiris to pursue careers in fields requiring higher education.

²¹ According to the information given by one bank about total volume and number of issued credits in 2013, business loans for trade ranked first in regard to volume (44.5 %), followed by consumer credits (25 %) and private construction projects, e.g. building, renovating and repairing houses (21.2 %).

²² Credits issued and re-paid in Tajik Somoni demanded higher interest rates than those taken out and liquidated in US-Dollar.



Fig. 3. In one of the grocery stores in Ishkoshim. The announcement of the signboard, '*Qarz dodah nameshavad*' (*qarz* is not granted here), was usually ignored by both shopkeeper and customers (Photo by the author, 2014).

Yet, treating the socially close like socially distant, relatives like any clients, potentially evokes disapproval on the part of those with whom one shares obligations prior to and after a market transaction.

In his article on the moral evaluation of money lending within the domestic realm of moral economy, Gregory (2012) departs from Peebles' (2010) conclusion that he drew from a review of anthropological contributions on credit and debt, according to which there is a general 'moral stance that credit is considered beneficial and liberating for the creditor [...] whereas indebtedness is more likely to be seen as burdensome and imprisoning for the debtor' (Peebles 2010, 226 cited in Gregory 2012, 381). Leaving aside Gregory's discussion of the reasons behind this finding, I rather focus on his insistence to analytically distinguish the moral evaluation of transactions concerning debt and credit from that of the transactors (Gregory 2012, 381). In Gregory's view, transactions of credit and debt represent general (and opposed) moral registers whereby credit is good and debt is bad (Gregory 2012, 381–382, 385). Furthermore, '[this] moral valuation is a general one because the commercial principle on which it is based is general. To make a profit one must 'buy cheap and sell dear'' (Gregory 2012, 385). In contrast, 'the morality of the transactors [...] of lender and borrower' (Gregory 2012, 384) is subject to a 'historically specific moral evaluation' (Gregory 2012, 386). The analytical distinction between a moral evaluation of transactions on the one hand and of transactors on the other is helpful in the case at hand, albeit in a broadened way including the evaluation of profit generation through transactions. Thus, as mentioned above, at first and in principle trade for-profit is morally not

condemned but widely accepted in Ishkoshim. Yet, when it comes to concrete transactions involving granting *qarz* and thus the transactors as social persons, the morality of traders and clients comes to the fore, which eventually (re-) frames market transactions involving credit and debt as an exchange in socio-moral obligations.

In his analysis, Gregory limits himself to the domestic moral economy, 'that domain where profit and loss and virtue and vice form an inseparable whole' (Gregory 2012, 380). In Ishkoshim, the entanglement of 'profit and loss and virtue and vice' in regard to debt and credit transcends the socio-moral boundaries of the household, extending into the market and, to this effect, personalises market transactions.

Personalisation of Market Exchange

Before turning to the socio-moral complexities of *qarz*, I briefly point out pragmatic circumstances other than lack of money on part of clients that shape trade and render *qarz* preferable to other alternatives and, thus, need to be taken into account. Hence, it can be observed that merchants trading in clothing, especially those who offer their ware at bazaar stalls, actively encourage customers, who slowed down and examine the merchandise, to take a piece and to pay later. Like elsewhere, trade in clothing has to follow the annual rhythm of fashion, which turns last year's winter coats or summer dresses into shelf warmers in the subsequent season. Therefore, traders are eager to sell out their ware before it falls out of favour.

Another incentive that prompts traders to concede *qarz* is the constantly growing number of trade businesses and its effects. A common phrase reads: 'There are many sellers, but no clients' (*forushanda ziyod ast, [lekin] kharidor nest*) and traders frequently express their concern that, if they refused to grant *qarz*, they would lose their clients to other vendors offering the same goods for the same price. Though this explanation is a valid point, it requires some qualification since clients cannot simply receive unlimited *qarz* everywhere, as for instance personal relationships precede as I will show below. In addition, traders are acquainted not only with the habits of their own client base but in part with those of others as well. In some cases where a client was refused *qarz*, the trader argued that the respective person had already run into debt with other merchants.

However, apart from entrepreneurial calculations, there are important non-commercial factors that inform traders' handling of *qarz* and moreover,

render doing business in Ishkoshim a potentially moral and social venture. This view rests on the requirement of ‘knowing a person’ (*nafarro shenokhtan/donestan*), which applies in various degrees and meanings but, nevertheless, poses **the** prerequisite to concede *qarz* at all or to engage in further considerations whether *qarz* shall be granted or not. Yet, ‘knowing a person’ does not imply to be acquainted with a person face-to-face in each case. Instead, the line between knowing and not knowing a person is generally drawn between those perceived to be locals and strangers (*begona*), that is, between those who are linked to Ishkoshim (or the region) by origin and kin and those who are not. Significantly, in traders’ numerous narratives about defaulting customers only strangers were considered to have finally not met their obligation to pay and thus, were convicted of theft that is, designated as thieves (*duzd*), which poses a serious insult.²³ In contrast, locals who have not paid off their debt for several years and furthermore do not show any signs to do so, never joined the ranks of thieves, that is, they were never said to finally have not met their obligations. Even though they might have left Ishkoshim for Russia or elsewhere²⁴ – their return being as uncertain as their fortune – their debts are well remembered (and documented). The locally embedded defaulter remains potentially sizeable, since he or she is linked with the place, if not by residence, at least due to enduring relationships with those who are present. From this perspective, knowing a person seems to provide traders with a kind of guarantee to recuperate a loan eventually. Yet, it remains unclear in which way this circumstance could ever be made use of because traders in general do not possess effective means to enforce payment: Accounts of defaulters hiding from traders – admittedly not an easy task in Ishkoshim – are numerous; and if traders put clients under pressure they risk losing them once and for all. In addition, asking clients directly is at least an embarrassing if not downright shameful act, while appealing to officials is not considered to be an option either. From the clients’ point of view, it is basically perceived to be shameful to run into debt instead of paying – although shame (*sharm*) seems to grow with its publicity. Clients I talked to, hardly ever admitted to shop on *qarz* (though I knew better) and declared it to be acceptable only under special circumstances (e.g. poverty) or on special occasions that

23 The apparent contradiction between the minimal requirement of ‘knowing a person’ and narratives about strangers who were granted *qarz* was resolved by the explanation that such an instance dates back years and one has learned her lesson and never again conceded *qarz* to strangers.

24 Indeed, many migrant workers go abroad in order to pay off their debts, including loans taken out from banks and relatives as well as outstanding bills with traders.

demand greater expenditures (such as weddings), and thus allow to run into debt without appearing to be either penniless or incapable of managing one's finances (read: to live beyond one's means).

To know a person refers furthermore to her or his position within the local social context and, hence, to the linkages and resulting forms of commitment that lie beyond individual preferences and have to be taken into account. When asked whether they make special concessions to relatives, traders initially often denied such privileging, for half of Ishkoshim's inhabitants be related to each other. Yet, on further enquiry, shopkeepers admit doing so and give examples that depict acts of favouritism exclusively as enforced by persistent relatives and, hence, as a burden on their business.

Anthropological accounts on trade in post-Soviet contexts frequently emphasise the benefits of 'mutual indebtedness' (Werner 1998) that extends to the market realm thus, constituting a 'space in which relations of different degrees of social distance were reproduced through exchange' (Kanefff 2002, 45), clearly echoing Sahlin's (1972) famous take on the social significance of forms of reciprocity and the correspondence of social relations and 'modes of exchange' (Sahlins 1972, 191–197). Much less though is said about possible tensions and conflicts resulting from social commitment, as, for example, depicted in Stafford's (2006) account on traders in China and Taiwan. Here, clients prefer the shops of relatives, who on their part prefer non-relatives as clients towards whom they do not have to entertain relationships beyond business (Stafford 2006, 5–8). In regard to Ishkoshim *rayon* of the 1960s, Kreutzmann (1996) refers to similar circumstances, according to which operators of cooperative shops run their business deliberately in villages to which they were not linked by close kin relationships. Prior to this strategy, reportedly many shops went bankrupt because (too many) client-relatives rejected the concept of credit that requires a timely and equivalent return and instead reframed their debt as rightful and permanent redistribution of resources (Kreutzmann 1996, 179 footnote 40).

Though the traders I met did not report such a straightforward claim on the part of their kin, they still preferred non-related clients to relatives, since the latter were likely to insist on their relatedness and, hence, on their implicit entitlement to ask for *qarz*.²⁵ To deny these privileges is to some extent to deny the relation and the very norms it represents. That is not to say, that this does not happen, indeed it does, but possibly at the expense of one's moral integrity

25 One trader commented on such insistence, 'The stranger who is loyal is my relative' (*begona agar vafo kunad xeshiman ast*), implying that a good relative is supportive not exploitative.

which surely is debated afterwards (cf. Fehlings/Hardenberg 2013, 8). Still, as Sahlins pointed out, 'to observe that a society has a system of morality and constraints is not to say that everyone acquiesces in it' (Sahlins 1972, 204).

Once *qarz* is granted, its pay off remains potentially uncertain, for it appeared to be a most delicate affair to remind relatives of their (commercial) debt and to demand its liquidation. It is difficult for traders to insist on the return of a specific debt without risking to be exposed to accusations of acting shamefully, greedily, selfishly or otherwise in violation of rules of proper conduct. Here, the logic of the market and socio-moral imperatives blend into each other, the latter providing a powerful framework to appeal to in order to morally judge action that takes place at the bazaar. Again, this is not to say that people do generally perceive merchants, trade business and making profit as immoral – quite to the contrary. Yet, the appeal to obligation toward relatives poses a strong moral argument that cannot rightfully be disclaimed by reminding a relative that it is just about business. On the other hand, a client who favours a socially distant trader over a related one risks to upset her trading relative for 'supporting' the other one.

Eventually, to be socially related in a meaningful and effective way is not a privilege of relatives alone but rather extends to neighbours, friends, friends of friends, friends of relatives, relatives of friends and so on. In this respect, 'knowing a person' does not necessarily mean to know a client personally but to relate him or her to someone one knows and trusts or to someone one is committed to. Thus, I frequently came across instances and traders' explanations that hinted at contexts and interdependencies lying outside the realm of the market yet informing the conduct of its participants. In this regard, I want to suggest yet another possible reading of *qarz*: According to the market principle, market transactions take place in the mode of commodity exchange, which 'establishes a quantitative relationship between the objects exchanged' (goods and money) and renders participants (traders and clients) as impersonal actors 'who are in a state of reciprocal independence' and thus, socio-morally not obliged (Gregory 1982, 100; cf. 12, 71). Yet, because it is commonly acknowledged, the market principle simultaneously represents the very precondition to act socially and morally meaningfully within the market setting – although precisely by undermining it due to demonstrative generosity, that is, to privilege customers, concede *qarz* and grant discount.

Finally, 'knowing a person' also means to be informed about a client's living conditions and, particularly, about his or her financial situation. While most traders are reluctant to concede further *qarz* to customers who have outstanding debts, traders hesitate to reject requests of poor persons

(*bechora*).²⁶ The common explanation on the part of traders points to the general lack of resources (rather than lack of ability on part of persons in need), a condition summarised in the often heard phrase ‘here, there is no work, no money, no business’ (*dar injo kor nest, pul nest, savdo nest*). Being aware that people have to buy, most traders stated to feel personally obliged to grant *qarz* to poor clients.

In general, it is considered to be extremely immoral, actually unthinkable, to reject a person who is severely in need, especially concerning food, if one possesses the means to help. To request repayment in such a case would be nefarious (*gapi ganda*, literally ‘bad words’). Though an everyday situation in a shop may not demand to take a stand in regard to such extremes, still, an appeal to a shopkeeper’s moral obligation to be generous with those in need implicitly resonates in the request for *qarz* itself. In consequence, merchants tend to grant *qarz* to poor persons, though being aware that it is rather unlikely to receive money in return. Yet, this generosity is not unlimited, as traders point to their own struggle of maintaining themselves and their families when being approached repeatedly. Despite this justification, to reject a poor person remains a shameful act and makes one feel uncomfortable (*sharm kardan*).

However, many everyday market exchanges that are based on *qarz* are not negotiated at all, but rather taken for granted and documented in notebooks without a comment. This does not imply that *qarz* is granted here without any distinction. Rather, less obvious regulations are at work that render explicit negotiations needless (or even embarrassing) and result from routine itself. Here, ‘knowing a person’ literally means to know the client very well, his or her financial situation and limits, income sources and repayment habits, etc. Clients on their part have proven over the time to be reliable and trustworthy, that is, to pay back in time, to announce an unexpected delay before the time limit is exceeded and so forth. Usually, these client-customer-relations exist for years in a well-established way, since clients tend to do their shopping in the same few shops, or better to say, with the same few shopkeepers. Here, transactions are delayed but regularly completed, that is, an actual debt-relationship is dissolved frequently. Adherence to this discipline poses the precondition to perpetuate a *qarz*-relationship, which is personalised and rests on mutual trust and predictability that, in turn, are based both on long-standing experience and information about the current state of affairs. Often,

²⁶ The term does not only refer to poor persons in a material sense but also expresses a general pitiful state of affairs.

traders refer to this category of loyal clients when pointing out the benefit of *qarz* allowing clients to make purchases with money not yet at hand but expected with some certainty, while traders can exchange their merchandise for *qarz* with trust in a client's ability (and willingness) to pay the debt within a reasonable period of time.

Significantly, these routinised *qarz*-relationships predominantly occur between traders and clients who are neither closely related kin nor friends, while mutual trust, based on experience and information, remains essential. Here, the significance of social categories and the current state of a relationship are not negotiated but predestined and thus not part of the commercial transaction. Yet, gestures of preference are frequently exchanged; a small but in any case announced discount is granted to a loyal client, who on her part might add some extra Somoni to the (re)payment at the end of a month.

Conclusion

Qarz, I argue, functions as an intermediary to integrate contradictory demands of the community and the market: Of being a good person meeting social obligations and making profit or just ends meet. As such, *qarz* mediates a conflict of inconsistent requirements of life in Ishkoshim – or at least postpones it for a while or to the indefinite, as *qarz* books document. On the part of traders, *qarz* forces – or allows – to adhere to social and moral obligations towards clients who are also relatives or neighbours or persons in need, while simultaneously demonstrating entrepreneurial self-interest and maintaining the claim to be paid – in the end, at least. Acting as a device of brokering, *qarz* itself remains an essentially contradictory phenomenon: A curse that slows down business while also a prerequisite to continue it at all, a trader's nightmare and a client's shame (or hope, or both), a further perpetuation of complex exchange relations that transcend the market, a strategy to make socially significant statements or, still, just a mode of payment.

From a wider angle, *qarz* exemplifies the personalisation of market transactions in Ishkoshim. The personalisation of market exchange, I argue, represents an effect of and a response to conditions of pecuniary scarcity, which is a result of both the design of former Soviet provisioning and the introduction of market economic structures in its aftermath. Although organised by socio-moral concepts that resonate with Isma'ili ideals (generosity, mutual support and obligation etc.), these do not constitute the reasons for personalisation but the medium through which the shortage of money, and consequently debt, is

managed and rationalised. Mediated through personal relationships, scarcity is transformed into debt, which is distributed and forwarded, finally, to a considerable extent, to migrant workers whose destinations indicate the persistence of structures of dependency.

Within the Soviet redistribution system, the responsibility to organise and secure livelihood was with the state, on various levels of institutional integration. State provisioning, that is, relations of large-scale exchange and redistribution between regions within the Soviet Union, was, in principle, arranged according to impersonal schemes – whatsoever the reasoning behind specific designs (e.g. political, ideological or strategic; cf. 'Moscow provisioning', Reeves 2014, 113–114). That is not to say that there were no forms of exchange based on personal relations; in fact, those were decisive in multiple ways, not least in respect to dealing with challenges posed by the planned economy (cf. Humphrey 1983). But central to my argument is that provisioning schemes did not, in principle, rest on personal relationships. In this sense, with the end of provisioning and the dawning of market economy, responsibility for securing livelihood was privatised – in principle, as well as practically enforced through measures taken in the name of transition. In fact, responsibility was reversed, exchange relations consequently reorganised and, in many respects, both were scaled down to the level of individual liability. The alliance of reversion and persistence (or legacy) is epitomised most poignantly by the privatised migrant worker following the routes of former subsidies in the opposite direction.

In the case at hand, the fundamental reorganisation in the course of transition appears less as a moral challenge in its own right. The Ismā'ili doctrine renders doing business in general and trade for-profit in particular a legitimate activity to earn a living, and so do people in Ishkoshim. The promotion of market economy and commercial activities is, on the one hand, substantiated by their conceptual and material facilitation through MSDSP/AKDN (bridges, markets, microfinance institutions, trainings), and, on the other hand, lent force by the moral-religious authority of the Aga Khan IV. Momentous occasions like the inauguration of the cross-border bridge near Ishkoshim combine these two aspects effectively in a powerful performance. Rather than moral objection or stubborn cultural habits, the issue, then, is at first of a pragmatic kind in the face of financial predicament. Yet, it is precisely at this point that pecuniary insufficiency turns into moral dilemma, privatisation into personalisation and profit into outstanding debt.

My depiction of personalised market transactions and *qarz* as response to scarcity requires some further elaboration as it perhaps runs the risk of suggesting – I paraphrase Marshall Sahlins – zombie Marxist ideas that

refuse to die.²⁷ Sahlins, one of the most prominent advocates for culture's emancipation from material determinism, is for decades²⁸ at pains to demonstrate that 'economy is [...] the material functioning of a cultural state of affairs' (Sahlins 2013, 170). I fully agree. The moral values and social obligations that I found to be at work balancing lack of money to some extent are not the causal result of this particular state of scarcity but form the cultural framework within which it is managed and within which transactions at the market are (in part) realised.

One might further insist 'that here scarcity is a function of value rather than value of scarcity' (Sahlins 2013, 188). Yet in my view, the kind of scarcity prevailing in Ishkoshim must be distinguished from a form of (artificial or given) scarcity of highly valued 'things'. Lack of money in Ishkoshim affects all kind of purchases, mostly those made on a daily basis. In short, here scarcity lacks the quality that can enhance the value of a thing being (made) scarce. While the introduction of market economic structures and the state of pecuniary insufficiency surely cannot be credited to cultural dispositions, the handling of lack of money through the personalisation of market transactions and *qarz* represent the 'material functioning of a cultural state of affairs' (Sahlins 2013, 170), 'as it is the cultural order that makes the material action rational' (Sahlins 2013, 164).

Finally, the personalisation of market transactions points to the extension of community values to the market, realised by traders granting *qarz* and migrant workers sending money to their relatives. Vice versa, the market reaches into personal relations; eventually, market transactions became as personalised as social relations and the values governing them became 'marketised', that is, constituted through and expressed by market and monetary transactions.

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27 The original quote is: 'This banishment of materially-relevant 'exogenous factors' is one of the more fateful 'zombie economic ideas that refuse to die' (to adapt the telling phrase of the Australian economist John Quiggin [2010a; 2010b])' (Sahlins 2013, 163).

28 See for example Sahlins 1976.

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***Barakat*, the Small Change of God, in the Tajik Pamirs¹**

Keywords: Tajikistan, Pamirs, Isma'ilism, blessing, ritual economy, Islamic everyday practice, transmission of divine/sacred qualities, Post-Soviet transformation

'Ritual' and 'economy' – these two socio-cultural realms combined in our volume's title may at first sight seem quite at odds with each other from a conventional Middle-European perspective (Hardenberg, this volume). The interlocutors in our researches in turn, at times quite deliberately resort to metaphors borrowed from the economic sphere, in order to explain to the slow-witted researcher complex issues regarding their cosmology. However, when my host father in the Tajik Pamir Mountains defined the notion of *barakat* (divine blessing) for me as being 'God's small change',² I was not yet fully aware that this was much more than just a metaphor tailored for me: During the course of my field research I came to understand that *barakat* is indeed the link *par excellence* between what we may term the cosmic field and the social field, providing a framework of values for a distinct kind of economy that connects both of them – the '*barakat* economy'. The intriguing point is that *barakat* is actually not a local Pamirian concept, but one of the most universal ones in Islam (Clancy-Smith 1995, 199). It is a very flexible framework

1 For intense discussions on the meaning and implications of *baraka(t)* in different cultural contexts, for useful comments on my paper and/or consultation in issues of spelling and etymology, I am indebted to (in alphabetical order): Avazbek Alifbekov, Louise Bechtold, Roland Hardenberg, Yanti Hölzchen, Amrisho Lashkariev, Hanifa Madimarova, Tobias Marschall, Magnus Marsden, Katharina Müller, Shahlo Nekushoeva, Lutz Richter-Bernburg, Markus Scholz, Nazrulo Toirbekov, Saradbek Toirbekov, Baktygül Tulebaeva and my many patient and helpful interlocutors and friends in Bartang. The theses of this paper, however, do of course not necessarily reflect the exact opinion of each of them. The underlying research has been financed by the SFB 923 'Threatened orders' at the University of Tübingen, the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), the Anna Ruths Foundation Frankfurt and the Geo magazine (Bertelsmann Group).

2 'Change' in monetary sense.

of values and ideas that integrates diverse notions and concepts, local as well as ‘global Islamic’ ones.³

Theoretical Framework and Scope of this Paper

Westermarck’s comprehensive description of the *baraka*⁴ concept from 1926, encompassing 226 pages(!), is still the standard introduction to the topic. He meticulously catalogues the modes of transmission of *baraka* from God to human in Morocco, touching many aspects I also deal with in this paper (Westermarck 1926, 35 – 261). Most of the later ethnographical works on *baraka* refer as well to Northern or Western Africa,⁵ yet with a thematically more narrow focus: *Baraka* tends to be discussed mainly in the context of ‘Maraboutism’, the Northwest-African mode of saint veneration. Mittermaier’s recent ethnographical work on charity institutions in Egypt is spatially and thematically rather an exception (Mittermaier 2013).⁶ In a similar vein, in ethnographies on (formerly Soviet) Central Asia, *baraka* is covered mostly in the context of *mazar* (revered graves of saints),⁷ if at all. Maybe the reluctance

3 Though strictly seen not being a symbol itself, *barakat* takes over the functions of what Ortner terms **elaborating key symbols** of a society. Ortner mentions two sub-types, and *barakat* resembles both of them: **Root metaphors**, which are ‘valued primarily for the ordering of conceptual experience, i.e., for providing cultural ‘orientations’,’ and **key scenarios**, which are ‘valued primarily for the ordering of action, i.e., for providing cultural ‘strategies.’’ (Ortner 1973, 1344).

4 The Arabic source term is spelled *baraka* without the final /t/ that occurs in the Pamiri loan. In all likelihood the Pamiri form reflects the Arabic construct state, sounding the *tā’ marbūṭa*, but omitting the desinential vowel. Another theory could be that the ‘t’ is a remainder from the feminine plural form –*āt*, derived from the Quranic usage, where, as Colin has noticed (Colin 1960, 1032), *baraka* only appears in plural form. Here I will use the Arabic spelling in references to *baraka* in the literature, and the Pamiri form when I present and analyse ethnographic evidence from the region.

5 For example Eickelman 1976; Geertz 1968; Gellner 1969; Jamous 1981; Munson 1993; O’Brien/Coulon 1988; Waugh 2012.

6 Further essays analysing *baraka* by looking also at everyday phenomena – however, mainly on the base of existing ethnographic material – are von Denffer 1976 and Tsuyoshi 2012.

7 See for example Féaux de la Croix 2010; Kehl-Bodrogi 2008; Louw 2008 and Privratsky 2001. O’Neill Borbieva (2013) is rather exceptional in that she puts everyday *baraka*-related phenomena into the focus of her research, mainly in the field of hospitality. It is astonishing that no ethnography on Central Asia deals with *baraka* exhaustively, though Louw states that it had ‘often been identified as the most important aspect of popular Islam in Central Asia’ (Louw 2008, 44). There is but one caveat: Several ethnographies on Central Asia actually do deal with phenomena similar to those described in this paper, however they do not do so under the keyword ‘*baraka*’. I hypothesise that the subsuming of such a wide range of phenomena under the *barakat* complex is indeed a phenomenon that is maybe specific for the Tajik Pamirs or even just for Bartang.

to deal with *baraka* is a result of the concept's vagueness, as it seems to encompass everything and nothing, and even one's interlocutors do not always agree regarding which phenomena it is associated with, and which not. One objective of this paper is to investigate the specific elaboration of the *barakat* concept in Bartang, a valley in the very heart of the Tajik Pamirs in Central Asia. I describe the local *barakat* value complex in its own right, and develop a theoretical framework for its analysis. I assume, however, that my terms could be used to grasp the respective *baraka(t)* or equivalent concepts in other Islamic societies as well. Whereas in the first half of my paper I frame the *barakat* value complex in an 'idealised' model, in the second part I will shift to a more diachronic perspective. Most ethnographic works on Post-Soviet Central Asia highlight the massive transformations these societies have undergone since Perestroika. From this perspective, the following questions are close at hand: Did the conceptualisation of the *barakat* value complex, and the fields in which it structures behaviour, change as well? And if so, did these changes happen 'smoothly', or did they bring about 'ruptures' in society?

Hardenberg develops a useful framework for investigating dynamics of value change: His ritual economy approach looks at 'socio-cosmic fields', i.e. the dynamic interplay of social and cosmic values (Hardenberg, this volume). 'Field' he conceptualises as a 'sphere of activities based on relations'. The socio-cosmic field is constituted by two sub-fields: In the social field economic actions and exchange take place. The relations central to this field are relations between humans. The cosmic⁸ field, in turn, is the site for ritual actions, and the relationships enacted there are not between humans, but between humans and cosmic forces. The specific way in which the relationship between the social part and the cosmic part of this field is configured can according to Hardenberg serve as a criterion to distinguish societies: In one type, inter-social relations and those between humans and cosmic forces are both subject to the same set of values. In actions by members of that society, cosmic and social field are strongly intertwined. The example Hardenberg provides for this kind of society are the Dongria Kond, an ethnic group living in the Highlands of Orissa, India. In the second type of societies, social and cosmic values often differ and do not form a consistent integrated system (or not anymore). This leads to a strong sub-differentiation of the socio-cosmic field into different realms with their own dominant values. Hardenberg identifies the Post-Soviet Kyrgyz society as prototypical for this type.

8 On the reasons why Hardenberg prefers the term 'cosmic' to 'religious' in his model, see Hardenberg (this volume).

According to Hardenberg, whether the configuration of a socio-cosmic field resembles the ‘Dongria-’ or the ‘Kyrgyz type’ influences the way people deal with transformative forces from outside or within. Conversely, the transformation process may also change the configuration of the socio-cosmic field. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to present a thorough analysis of the Bartangi society in all aspects, in order to determine whether it resembles one of the mentioned types. Instead, I investigate only a particular segment of the socio-cosmic field – the *barakat* economy and its related value complex. However, it is a quite significant one, as *barakat* can be considered a key value⁹ of Bartangi society. Before laying out the basic principles of the *barakat* value complex, I will first provide a short introduction into my research region. Then I will describe the ‘idealised’ form of *barakat*, its source, beneficiaries, efficacy, the ways it gets transmitted, its character as a very specific kind of resource, and its ‘application’ in traditional economic activities in Bartang. This part will be concluded with a short analysis of whether the ‘classical’ *barakat* concept shows similarities with one of Hardenberg’s two examples. In the second half of the paper I will raise the issue whether recent value changes, especially those accompanying the economic transition to a market economy in Tajikistan, affect the *barakat* value complex and the way it moderates economic activities. Subsequently, I will investigate the Aga Khan’s role in moderating this transition, leading me to the question whether the configuration of the socio-cosmic field is currently about to change. Finally, I will see what effects these changes and their moderation through the Aga Khan have on everyday life.

A Society of ‘Petty-Anthropologists’: My Field Location in the Tajik Pamirs

The Autonomous Oblast Gorno-Badakhshan in the Tajik part of the Pamirs, and in particular my research site in the Bartang Valley are characterised by an extreme geographical isolation that fostered a mosaic of divergent

⁹ According to my understanding, any cultural concept which is regarded as the general ‘Good’ of a given society can be considered as a ‘value’, for the realisation of which everybody ought to strive. As a ‘key value’, in turn, I consider a value of paramount centrality from which many minor values are derived, which then together with the key value form a value complex. From values, guidelines for moral behaviour, economic activities, the conduction of rituals etc. can be deduced. Especially key values, directly or indirectly via derived values, structure acts in the most diverse spheres of everyday life and are present in all kinds of symbols, rituals, evaluations and discourses.

socio-cultural units. The Pamiri people see themselves as an ethnic group distinct from the Tajik dwelling in north-western Tajikistan. They speak idioms belonging to the Southeast-Iranian language family of the Pamiri languages, which do not exist in official written form and differ from each other significantly. They adhere to the Muslim Shi'a confession of Isma'ilism and regard the so-called 'Imam of the time' (currently Aga Khan IV) as the closest male descendant of the prophet Muhammad, and accept him as their spiritual leader¹⁰ whose orders (*farman*) are absolutely binding.¹¹

Although the official annexation of the Pamirs by the Tsarist Empire in 1895 (Middleton et al. 2012, 320) and the Russian Revolution had profoundly transformed Bartang's socio-cultural structures, the changes since independence in 1991 have been equally drastic. A decisive factor of change was the completion of the first road connecting the Upper Bartang valley with the rest of Tajikistan in the 90s, bringing a sudden mobility of people and ideas.

Besides locals moving between Bartang and urban parts of Tajikistan, another important global channel are the numerous NGOs implementing development projects. Many of them operate under the umbrella of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), the secular branch of the Aga Khan's institutions. The secular and religious institutions under the aegis of the Aga Khan cannot be underestimated as influential actors in the ongoing reshaping process of Pamiri socio-cultural order (Keshavje 1998; Steinberg 2011; Lashkariev 2016). While in Soviet times the communication between the Imam and his adherents in the Tajik Pamirs had been cut, contact has been restored and intensified since the re-opening of the region in 1991. The religious branch of the institutions began to successively institutionalise local beliefs and religious practices, and to some extent adapt them to the standards of the global Ismaili community. Until some point - approximately between 2005 and 2010 - more concrete measures were taken by the religious administrative board of the Ismailis (Isma'ili Tariqah Religious Education Committee, since 2011 -Board, short ITREB) in Tajikistan to adapt for instance rituals to the new circumstances,¹² whereas today this institution seems to refrain from too directly enforcing changes of traditional practices. Rather, they promote the image of Ismailism as the *mazhab-i aqloni* – 'the rational confession': Religious practice should not be an economic burden, and it should be adapt-

10 I have actually never met one single person in the Pamirs (and especially not in Bartang) who would have doubted the authority of the Aga Khan. Even people who are not very determined religious practitioners would not put his authority into question.

11 On details of Ismaili dogma and history, see Daftary (2007).

12 On ritual change in the Pamirs in general, see Lashkariev (2008; 2016).

ed to the needs of each era. The locals readily accepted this as a maxim to assess their practices and traditions, even non-religious ones. With a high degree of reflectivity they themselves use to discuss their own culture and evaluate which customs are still useful and appropriate, and which are, according to their view, 'irrational' and should therefore be abandoned.¹³

Source, Beneficiaries and Efficacy of *Barakat*

The Pamirian term *barakat* is derived from the Arabic word *baraka* (بركة). Conventionally, *baraka* is translated into English as 'blessing'. The Encyclopaedia of Islam further specifies *baraka* as a 'beneficent force, of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order' (Colin 1960, 1032). Geertz interprets *baraka* as a 'conception of the mode in which the divine reaches into the world' (Geertz 1968, 44). Following this line, I would suggest that *baraka* is a manifestation of divine power when it pervades the mundane realm of everyday life and becomes tangible. Akahori adds that the 'bestowal of *baraka* depends on God's discretion, thus, it is impossible for a human being to control it' (Akahori 1996, 110 according to Tsuyoshi 2012, 77) – a view I will later partially contradict. It is believed that people who have received *baraka* are able to fulfil their needs for well-being, material as well as spiritual, and their family will prosper in happiness (Eickelman 1976, 158; O'Neill Borbieva 2013, 510).

The Bartangi are often even more precise than anthropologists when it comes to explaining the efficacy of *baraka(t)*. According to local explanations, *barakat* removes all obstacles out of one's way. One can try to achieve something in life and fulfil one's needs merely through hard efforts (*mēnat*¹⁴), but the more *barakat* one has accumulated previously, the more effectively one will be able to achieve one's goals in life. Obviously, *barakat* can be considered as a resource¹⁵ that God distributes to humans. This resource is not an end in itself, but necessary to obtain other resources, tangible (such as a good

13 This kind of argumentation might have been not completely unfamiliar to those Bartangi who grew up in Soviet times, especially to those who enjoyed a university education.

14 Loans from Tajiki, Russian and English I transliterate according to the local Roshorvi spelling (thus it is here '*mēnat*' and not '*mehnat*' as in Tajiki).

15 As resources I consider both 'means that create, maintain or change relationships' (Hardenberg, this volume) **as well as** (closer to more classical definitions) means for 'nutrition and economical production' (Duden 2011, 1447), and even means necessary for general individual success. See also Hardenberg (et al. in print) for a more detailed discussion of definitions.

grain harvest) as well as intangible ones (like good marks at university examination). *Barakat* is not directly transformed into another resource in the sense that it changes its substantial quality or quantity, proportionately to the frequency it is made use of. Rather, it functions as a **means** that facilitates a successful value creation. With the help of *barakat*, a few seeds are transformed into **a lot** of grains at the next harvest, and efforts to truly immerse oneself into the books should become transformed into **very** good marks at university. To conclude, *barakat* serves as a catalyser – as I would put it, an important category of resources in its own right.

Receivers of *barakat* can be individuals as well as collectives – families, houses, villages and regions, or even some temporary action group formed for a specific endeavour, for example a team of neighbours erecting a house. In the case of collective *barakat*, the efforts of each member can add up, and the group profits from the *barakat* accumulated collectively. For example, in terms of hospitality, *barakat* is acquired by treating guests well. The positive effects of this treatment not only accrue to the person who acts as the host, but to the whole house associated with her or him. The same applies to sacrifices performed inside a house, which also fill up the common ‘*barakat* account’ of the household and all its members.

However, the field in which *barakat* is effective, has also limits: Though being a system of gratification originating from another world, *barakat* enfolds its efficacy with a focus on **this** world. As my host father’s definition of *barakat* (‘*Barakat* is the small change of god’) makes clear: *Barakat* can be comprehended as a system of divine gratification. Still, it seems that God gives *barakat* rather as a kind of small reward every now and then, like a grandmother *en passant* giving some coins out of her petty cash to her grandchild for a good mark at school (my comparison). There are yet other, more overarching systems, partially complementary, partially intersecting with the *barakat* system, which are considered to determine the **grand** course of life and our final fate, such as one’s register of sins (*güno*) and good deeds (*sawob*¹⁶), and, above all, destiny (*awolā*).

16 Actually some people (and even my host father is among them) *do* relate *barakat* to one’s fate in afterlife as well. I believe that could be due to a conflation of *barakat* with the similar principle of *sawob*, divine reward for afterlife; a conflation which seems to be characteristic for Bartang (see also footnote 57).

Transmission of *Barakat*

Being Blessed by Nature: 'Transmission'¹⁷ of *Barakat* I – Intrinsic

I now want to turn to the most instructive aspect of *barakat*: The question of how it is transmitted from its divine source to its recipients in the mundane sphere. The acquisition/transmission of *barakat* can follow three basic principles. Inspired by an analysis of von Denffer (1976)¹⁸ I would like to introduce new terms for these principles. As a general rule, *barakat* is distributed from God who transmits it to beings, places or things. Some of these are containers of what I call **intrinsic** *barakat*. They were bestowed with *barakat* directly by God without doing or giving anything in return. One type of them are places, such as the high pastures in the Pamirs, and some holy places (*oston*). Other holders of intrinsic *barakat* are holy people and holy substances, such as milk¹⁹ and bread.

Clashing Heads with the Groom: Transmission of *Barakat* II – Proximic

Subtype 1: Hereditary transmission

Tsuyoshi points out another way of *baraka* transmission, which figures especially prominently in Morocco: the **hereditary** one (Tsuyoshi 2012, 73; cf. von Denffer 1976). It is assumed that saints (so-called Marabouts) inherit their *baraka* from their forefathers. In Bartang, some patrilineal descent groups (*awlod*) constitute a similar case of inherited *barakat*. In several villages men of a distinct *awlod* are responsible for opening the water channels for the first time in spring (*wod atčëg*) (fig. 1). It is said that if they perform this ritual, the

17 In this case, it would of course be more accurate to speak of 'acquisition' or 'bestowal', than of transmission.

18 Analysing Westermarck's material, von Denffer distinguishes as ways for the 'Acquisition of *Baraka*' (von Denffer 1976, 171): 'a) *holding baraka per se*' (in my nomenclature: intrinsic *barakat*), 'b) *descent*' (which I subsume under hereditary *barakat*), 'c) positive action (piousness)' (my term: meritic *barakat*) and 'd) negative action (theft) [of *baraka* itself, S.K.]' (which seems not to exist in Bartang). Though he does not include it in his list, elsewhere (von Denffer 1976, 170) he mentions 'physical contact between the holder and the receiver of *baraka*' (which I shall term contagious *barakat*) as another way of transmission. His examples subsequently, however, fail to provide material for c) positive action (except a short note on hospitality).

19 Referring to the milk of cows, sheep and goats.



Fig. 1. Channel Opening in March performed by a distinct *awlod* (Photo by author).

yield of the whole village will become abundant, as members of this *awlod* are said to bear a specific *barakat* (bound to the agricultural sphere).

This works also the opposite way: The loss of *barakat* by one member can emanate to a whole *awlod* including the subsequent generations. For example, an eponymous ancestor of one sub-*awlod* in Bartang became deprived of his *barakat* because he did not recognise God in the epiphany of an old man and defied his order to make a fire on ice. Some claim that even nowadays members of this *awlod* are more likely than others to fail with their enterprises.²⁰

²⁰ This is still a sensitive topic, and it is avoided to mention it in front of members of this sub-*awlod*. Also the name of this sub-*awlod* has pejorative character, and its members rather identify with the superior *awlod*.

Transmission of *barakat* through inheritance plays also a role for the village clerics, the *xalifā*²¹ in Bartang. Traditionally, the office of the *xalifā* was passed on along a patrilineal line of succession. This is based on the idea that *xalifā* are bearers of *nafas*, which gets inherited. *Nafas* can be understood as a specific kind of *barakat* that does not just guarantee success, but entails specific capabilities: To perform certain ritual actions, to write protective amulets (*tumor*), and to engage in other forms of divination.²² On one hand, it could be argued that the *barakat* transmitted through inheritance is a special case of *intrinsic barakat*. However, a closer look at *nafas*, the specific type of *barakat* at work here, allows also another perspective: *Nafas* in the Pamiri languages (as well as its Arabic root, نفس) literally means ‘breath’.²³ Indeed, the wonderworking force of the *xalifā* can be passed on to other people or objects through his breath. By means of blowing (*puftow*) onto them, the *xalifā* puts his *nafas* in amulets. In the same way he blesses the knife used for sacrificing an animal, thus increasing its efficacy as a ritual instrument. By blowing on water he produces a liquid called *δam xac*²⁴, which has healing properties. It is said that until some decades ago *xalifas* had even such a powerful *nafas* that they could redirect floods that were endangering the fields, just by blowing on a stone and throwing it into the water.²⁵

We see that *nafas* (and thus *barakat*) can resume a quite physical quality and accordingly can also be transferred on a physical way. This matches with what Doutté (2013, 439) had already observed: That a bearer of *baraka* can transmit his *baraka* to other entities if both get into close contact (cf. von Denffer 1976, 169). In this sense, inheritance could also be understood as a kind of ‘contact’, here not so much in the sense of material tangency, but rather as genealogical proximity that allows that the ‘substance’ of *nafas*

21 For the transliteration of words from the local Pamiri language (Roshorvi), I draw on a system for transliteration in Latin script used by the Institute of Humanities (Academy of Sciences Tajikistan) in Khorog. X is pronounced as a very hard kh [χ] (like German ‘ch’, as in ‘Achtung!’).

22 Actually, the term for a person who writes amulets is *mullo*. Not every *mullo* is necessarily a *xalifā*, the latter being defined as the **official** village cleric responsible for leading rituals. In the past, however, most *xalifā* were at the same time *mullo*, which is why the terms sometimes get mixed in daily usage. Currently, these offices are successively diverging. For the sake of simplicity, I will here nevertheless use only the term *xalifā*. Interestingly, some of the most renowned *xalifās* of the past in Bartang had belonged to the above-mentioned sub-*awlod* that had allegedly lost its *barakat*. This hints at the fact that the discussion of issues on the base of the *barakat* idiom is not always consistent when different contexts are compared.

23 Cf. *nafas teždow* – to take a breath.

24 δ is pronounced as the English ‘th’ [ð] in ‘this’.

25 Actually, different kinds of religious healers in several regions of Central Asia use their breath to cure (a treatment at many places termed *dam*). See for example Kehl-Bodrogi (2008, 194).

may be passed on.²⁶ Thus, although it may well constitute a borderline case, I decided to classify the hereditary transmission not as an instance of intrinsic bestowal, but as a sub-kind of another category, which I would like to term **proximic transmission** of *barakat*, derived from Latin *proximus* – close.

Subtype 2: Contagic Transmission

Not only through substances emerging from the *barakat* bearers, as in the case of the breath of the *xalifā*, *barakat* can be transmitted: For a successful transmission onto an ordinary human, a place or an object, already a short direct physical contact with a previous *barakat*-bearer may be enough.²⁷ *Baraka(t)* obtained through this way of transmission I call **contagic baraka(t)**, derived from lat. *contagio* – contact, touch. In the Pamirs, wheat flour plays an important role for the contagious transmission of *barakat*. In several rituals, flour is dispersed on the shoulder (*putuk sedow*) of important actors of the ritual, such as the groom during a wedding. Also by visiting and kissing a place imbued with *barakat*, one can absorb part of it. This is a major motivation for pilgrimages to holy places (*oston/mazar*) (fig. 2).

When bearers of *barakat* transfer *barakat* on to other persons, objects or places, it is not necessarily of importance whether they themselves are bearers of intrinsic *barakat* or whether they are ‘secondary dispensers’, having themselves acquired their *barakat* from somewhere else. Many holy places function as ‘secondary dispensers’ of this kind. They have been charged with *barakat* when a holy person performed a certain act or was buried there (cf. Iloliev 2008).

But even ordinary people who bear some amount of *barakat* can become further dispensers. In many of these cases, the *barakat* seems to be bound to certain contexts and is not freely convertible. For instance, at Bartangi

26 When discussing the *nafas* of a particular *xalifā* whose own father had not been a *xalifā*, people would point to his more distant ascendants or agnates out of whom somebody might have been a *xalifā*, or even additionally to a *xalifā* among his matrilinear kin from whom he might have received some *nafas*. Alternatively or additionally, *nafas* can also be acquired through an encounter with a saint in a dream.

27 See Westermarck (1926), von Denffer (1976) and Tsuyoshi (2012), who report extensively on this with examples from Morocco. Like me, Louw also speaks about some ‘contagious blessedness’ inherent in Uzbek shrines (Louw 2008, 98). The idea that qualities are transmitted through contact is indeed by no means new and has been thoroughly developed in literature on ‘magical thinking’ since Frazer 1890 (cf. Rozin/Nemeroff 1990).



Fig. 2. Holy place (*oston*) in Bardara village. The sacred juniper tree is said to have been planted by Nasir-i Khusraw, the 11th cent. Persian poet and missionary who allegedly brought Isma'ilism to the Pamirs (Photo by author).

weddings it can be observed that bachelors clash their head with the groom's, hoping to acquire some of his *barakat* in order to find a wife themselves.²⁸

The contagious mode of transmission even allows for the dispersion of *barakat* by third persons, who serve as mere transmitters without becoming themselves bearers of *barakat*. This is possible through a 'medium' that becomes charged with *barakat* at a powerful dispenser and is then, by the third person, brought to the final recipient, without the original dispenser and recipient having to get in direct physical contact. For instance, when I was on my way to some holy place (*oston*), which was a tough two-days-hike away, an old lady asked me to bring her holy soil (*xok tudā*) from a place under that *oston*, as she could not walk up there herself anymore.²⁹ We see that the con-

²⁸ Tsuyoshi recounts in a similar case how some Moroccan students touched the back of another student who had performed well in his examination, asking him 'Please, give us a piece of your *baraka!*' (Tsuyoshi 2012, 82).

²⁹ This phenomenon is well-known: At many pilgrimage destinations of Islam, but also of other religions, a big business evolved around the selling of souvenirs, which are said to have absorbed some of the divine power of the holy place (such as the 'Berührungsreliquien' in Catholicism). Often these things are not used as one's own keepsake, but given away to friends and family members at home. In this form, *baraka* (or however that transmitted sacred quality is

tagic mode of *barakat* transmission allows even ordinary people to take the aggrandisement of *barakat* in their own hand. God is considered to be the source of all *barakat*, and only he can ensure that the contagious transmission of *barakat* works out in every instance. However, one can increase the likelihood to become vested with *barakat* by consciously seeking closeness with its bearers, which is why I would contradict Akahori's statement (Akahori 1996, 110 according to Tsuyoshi 2012, 77) implying that humans have no agency to control *baraka*.

Subtype 3: Simultanic Transmission

Finally, there is a third possibility to gain *barakat* in a proximic way: In this case, the prerequisite for the transmission is again not direct physical contact between previous *barakat*-holder and recipient, but the sheer physical presence of the latter at a distinct time and at a distinct place when and where the former is also present. Therefore, I term this subtype of the proximic the **simultanic transmission** of *barakat*. One prominent example from the Pamiri context is the determination of the auspicious time (*soat*). There are distinct weekdays that are auspicious for doing certain things (such as cutting one's hair), which most people know by heart. For extraordinary occasions, such as spring rituals or weddings, the *xalifā* determines the auspicious date and hour. He does this through astronomical calculations according to tables in the old books he inherited from his predecessors. The auspicious times are marked by the rising of good stars (*sitora-i nīk*), which can be regarded as intrinsic bearers of *barakat*.

termed in the specific instance) can even become a gift for exchange, not between God and man, but in this case between humans. On this phenomenon in Islam, see for instance Kenny (2007) and Moufahim (2013). Bechtold (this volume) describes a very impressive instance when hajjis, returning Mekka pilgrims, in Southern Kyrgyzstan bring with them water from the holy spring Zamzam in Mekka, distribute it back home and thus let partake of the sacredness of that place those who could not afford a pilgrimage to Mekka. Referring to Bunn (2013), Bechtold points out to the particular prominence of water as a capable medium that can be charged with sacred qualities and transmit them to further recipients (Bechtold, this volume). An example from a different religious context where yet similar principles are at work is provided by Lisa Züfle (this volume). She describes how at the Jagannath temple at Puri (Orissa, India) *mahaprasad*, special ritual food is first prepared at the world's largest kitchen, then offered to the god Jagannath and later distributed to the devotees or sold to them at the market, allowing them the 'internalisation of divine qualities' (Züfle, this volume) via the medium of the sacrificed food.

Generally, during rituals we often find an accumulation of *barakat* dispensers, including the *soat*, actors who are bearers of *barakat*, and ritual instruments imbued with *barakat*.³⁰

Sacrifice, Volunteering and Virtuousness: Transmission of *Barakat* III – Meritic

The intrinsic bestowal and proximic transmission form the bulk of ways to become imbued with *barakat* that are described in the ‘classical’ *baraka* literature on Northern and Western Africa. Usually other modes of transmission that figure prominently in Bartang are not mentioned or play a minor role: When God bestows humans with *barakat* as a reward for certain actions. I would like to call *barakat* acquired through this mode as ‘**meritic *barakat***’ – from Latin ‘*meritum*’, effort. In contrast to contagious *barakat*, which is often received indirectly through non-divine sources, meritic *barakat* is directly bestowed by God. The core acts for generating meritic *barakat* are benevolent deeds (*kor-i sawob/saxowat*) such as sacrifices (*niyozi*), giving donations (*šilon šēdow/sadaqā čegow*)³¹, good deeds towards those in need, or work for the sake of the community (*hizmat-i iftixori/volontyori*).

In the meritic mode of *barakat* transmission, God and man are involved in an exchange relationship. Man as benefactor receives *barakat* from God – God receives from man obedience to his command to be generous and help those in need. But not only God receives. The main benefactor of the action is the person to whom the benevolent deed was directed. He or she, however, reciprocates only indirectly to the giver in that he or she is grateful to him. This gratefulness has to follow certain patterns. A plain colloquial ‘thank you’ (*quloy*)³² is not enough. A beneficiary should instead utter ‘*barakat viray* – find *barakat!*’ With this phrase, he confirms that the good deed was really *kor-i sawob* and exceeded a mere fulfilment of duties. By uttering this phrase as a kind of performative speech,³³ it becomes clear that no reciprocal relationship is established between benefactor and beneficiary. Instead, a triadic exchange

30 This can be considered as an instance of redundancy, which we often find in rituals (cf. Tambiah 1985).

31 *š* is pronounced sh [ʃ] like in ‘shine’, *č* like a hard English ‘ch’ [tʃ] as in ‘chest’.

32 *y* is a non-rolled glottal ‘r’ [ʁ], like the Arabic *ġ*.

33 In the sense of Austin et al. 1975.

relationship³⁴ is opened up, including God. Thus, the beneficiary of some benevolent work becomes a crucial actor in that he serves as an advocate on behalf of the benefactor in front of God.

The role of the advocate is also apparent in benevolent work other than performing a deed directly addressed to someone in need. In case of sacrifice, the benevolent deed is to feed the masses with meat. In this case, the role of the advocate is filled by the *xalifā* (or, in his absence, any old man) who after the consummation of the sacrificed animal prays a special prayer (*fotā*),³⁵ asking God to bestow with *barakat* the one who ordered the sacrifice, and his house. *Mehmondori*, hospitality, is a highly esteemed virtue, and hosting guests is one of the fastest ways to earn *barakat*. Here, the guest is the advocate who has to confirm that he was pleased by the hospitality. He does so by speaking a prayer after having finished the meal. There is a big choice of prayers especially designated for this purpose. The most popular one reads ‘*Xayri barakat, xona obod, Allahu akbar!*’ – ‘Blessing blessing,³⁶ [the] house [be] ‘arable’, God is the greatest!’. There are, besides guests, other kinds of people who, when becoming beneficiary, are especially powerful advocates: Disabled people (*šöl*³⁷ [m.]/*šāl* [f.]), old people (*mu-i safēd* [m.]/*kampīr* [f.]) and *xalifā*. Disabled and old people are dependent on help, and in case of the former one could argue that they even do not have the possibility to enter a dyadic exchange relationship: They lack the means to reciprocate directly. The *xalifā* is pious by definition, and old people are usually also pious, so one may assume that they might have a ‘good connection’ to God, making them capable advocates.³⁸

34 For a similar model on triadic exchange relationships involving God in Muslim context, see Kochuyt (2009) on almsgiving (*zakāt*). For examples from an (African) Christian environment, see Klocke-Daffa (2001).

35 The prayer after a meal as request for blessing for the house, usually performed by an elder, is also common in other parts of Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan it is termed *bata* (cf. Féaux-de-la Croix 2010; Privratsky 2001 and Bechtold, this volume) and in the Khorezm province of Uzbekistan *potya* (cf. Kehl-Bodrogi 2008); perhaps all derived from Al-Fātiḥa, ‘the opening’, which is the name of the first sura of the Quran (though in Central Asian case it is not necessarily this sura that is spoken as a prayer on that occasion).

36 *Xayri* and *barakat* are synonyms, so the phrase is a hendiadys. Another synonym for them would be *faiz*, which is also often used in idiomatic expressions.

37 Ö is pronounced like the German ‘ö’ in ‘schön’, or the ø in Danish and Norwegian, as in the toponym Tromsø.

38 A very distinct kind of advocates for *barakat* are *arwo*, the ancestors. They not only advocate *barakat* if they themselves are remembered and venerated properly, but also if humans are kind and generous towards their own relatives (with whom they share these ancestors).

The *xalifās* fulfil a particularly crucial function channelling the abundant *barakat* of God into the mundane sphere:

- 1) They distribute contagious *barakat* by putting *nafas* on amulets (*tumor*), knives for sacrificing or onto the face of ill people (see above).
- 2) They do themselves benevolent work³⁹ and are remunerated from their beneficiaries by advocating (further) *barakat* on behalf of them,
- 3) They are a favoured target person for *kor-i sawob*, through whom other people have the opportunity to gain meritoric *barakat*.
- 4) And finally, they serve as professional *barakat*-advocates in cases of sacrifices.

However, not only benevolent deeds are repaid with *barakat*: Appropriate moral behaviour towards certain people is a way to obtain *barakat* as well. The parents are said to be the foremost advocates for one's *barakat*. They should be obeyed totally, and one should never 'anger their heart' (*wāf dil xafā nočegow*). This rule also applies to old people in general. If somebody upsets them, for example by not following their orders or not paying the required respect, they can even curse (*zuy čegow*). To anger one's parents and the elder relatives by deciding to marry someone whom they do not favour, is a constant worry of the youth. Although the significance of arranged marriages is played down and though hardly anybody nowadays becomes wed against his or her will, still no young person would dare to select a spouse to whom the parents, elder relatives or even older siblings object. There are cases when secret girlfriends were abandoned in favour of somebody suggested by the parents – explicitly due to the fear of a loss of *barakat*, as marriages enforced against the will of the elders are said to be likely to break apart soon.

To summarise, the principle at work in the meritoric transmission mode is illustrated by the diagram in fig. 3.

***Barakat* as a Sustainable Resource?**

Classic economic theory holds the assumption that resources are always perceived as limited, especially in reference to the unlimited human demands (Rössler 2005, 19). If we conceive of *barakat* as a resource that is indispensable to leading a successful human life, then the question arises: Is *barakat* also limited?

³⁹ Being *xalifā* is an honorary office and not paid by an institution. Usually *xalifās* nowadays have also a second profession.

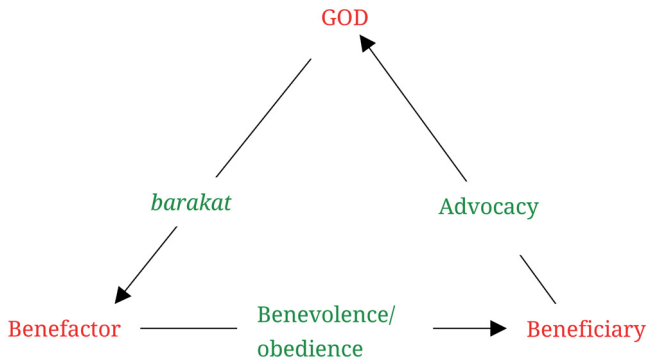


Fig. 3. Triadic exchange relationship in meritic *barakat* transmission.

The essence of *barakat* in reference to its finiteness or infiniteness is beautifully illustrated by the institution of dispersing *taboraki*,⁴⁰ a nice example for the contagious transmission mode: *Taboraki* consists of grains and water blessed by the Aga Khan and sent to his *murīds* (adherents). One could say *taboraki* constitutes a portion of the Imam’s (intrinsic) *barakat*. As the current Imam Aga Khan IV resides in Aiglemont in France, the *taboraki* has to pass a long chain of envoys until it reaches remote villages such as those in Bartang in Tajikistan. Of course, the Aga Khan does not send several hundred litres of water and kilograms of grains in order to supply all households in Upper Bartang. Instead, only a small portion of *taboraki* arrives in Tajikistan and is then diluted with other water and grains at some central place of the religious administration, and then again on the district level and in the houses of the village *xalifās*. In the end, every household receives a portion and mixes it with its own stock of grains and water. Nevertheless, it does not forfeit any of its *barakat*, though the end-beneficiaries may receive just a very little portion of the originally blessed water, and maybe not even one single of the original grains. *Taboraki* (via the *barakat* it contains) is the perfect emanation, constantly reproduces itself and transmits its quality to the surrounding substance in a contagious way, thus exponentiating its amount the further it gets dispersed.

⁴⁰ *Taboraki* is probably a derivative from Persian, the meaning of which is understood in Tajikistan as ‘something that is full of blessing’. Indeed it derives from the same Arabic root as *baraka*, *b-r-k*, and probably represents, in ‘persianised’ form, *tabāruki*, a nisha of the infinitive of the VIth form of the root *b-r-k*. (Thanks to Lutz Richter-Bernburg for this information).

Its capability to reproduce and exponentiate may be another reason why wheat and its derivatives are such a central representation of *barakat*, so important that they can themselves become dispensers of *barakat* when used as ritual instruments.⁴¹

In the meritic generation of *barakat* there are also obviously no limits. The more good deeds people perform the more *barakat* God transfers to the mundane world. Thus, the 'limiting factor' is not the availability of that resource itself, but the availability of channels to transfer *baraka* from the divine to the mundane sphere, and the readiness of the people to make diligent use of them.⁴²

Just as grains are a representation/metaphor of contagious *barakat*, meritic *barakat* is so strongly associated with a certain activity that the latter becomes itself a source of *barakat*: Eating together from one plate (*amtabaq*) shows the highest degree of sociality and becomes another 'metaphorical dispenser'. It is not a benevolent work in itself and thus no 'typical' genuine source for *barakat*, but still some people hold that by doing it, *barakat* can be acquired.⁴³

In a nutshell, activities/works in the socio-cosmic field connected with the *barakat* value complex represent a distinct kind of value creation,⁴⁴ either by further dispersing *barakat* and hereby increasing its amount, or by triggering the cosmic source to 'pour out' more *barakat* into the mundane world. I would like to term these activities related to the increasing of *barakat* the cosmic side of the *barakat* economy.

Barakat however, not only is infinite in its availability; once acquired it can also be infinite in its effects. Of course, it is good to acquire *barakat* again and again. However, as I was told once, the most important thing is that one's *barakat* is never fully consumed: At least one 'coin of *barakat*', as a friend of mine termed it, should be left in one's pocket. From this base one's *barakat* can again recover and reproduce itself.

41 This quality of wheat (which makes it metaphorically equal to *barakat*) is invoked by a saying that is uttered when spreading the seeds in spring: 'Az yak dona hazor, az hazor bešumor.' (Tajik, meaning 'From one piece a thousand, from a thousand endless'.)

42 An interesting instance of a case when even *baraka* transmitted on meritic way multiplies is provided by Müller (this volume): When a religious endowment is made in Mashhad, it is assumed that all people involved in this highly bureaucratic process (such as clergymen, lawyers or financial advisors, i.e. all people who contribute to the facilitation of the meritic *baraka* disbursement to this world) themselves are rewarded with *baraka* (in Persian *barekat*) and *tawāb* (*savāb*).

43 For the acquisition of *baraka* through communal meals, compare also Tsuyoshi (2012, 80).

44 Here I am referring to value creation in the economical sense, denoting an augmentation of an amount.

Equally *barakat* is not only unlimited in its presence; its efficacy points to a certain ‘sustainability’. It is not limited to a singular satisfaction of one’s needs, but provides the base for future prosperity. If, for example, somebody has plenty of healthy children or acquired a good mark in an examination thanks to *barakat*, the base for prosperity and future exponentiation of the success is laid. This idea is reflected in the above-cited prayer, which the guests speak to bless the house of their host. The guest wishes that the host’s house shall be *obod*. *Obod* can be roughly translated as ‘arable’, ‘cultivated’, ‘fertile’, ‘flourishing’ or the like. A person, a house or land that is *obod* has the ability to reproduce and exponentiate the own prosperity in the described way.⁴⁵

We see that divine grace in its manifestation as *barakat* is a resource that is incommensurable with arithmetic measures, as already suggested by Depont and Coppolani (1897, cf. Tsuyoshi 2012, 72), and thus not in accordance with the classical definitions of the term ‘resource’ in economics. This is interesting, because the *barakat* complex by no means forms its own isolated realm or ‘economy’, but is very much entangled with ‘classical’ economic activities. Benevolence and sharing, as modes of distribution, bring *barakat* for the giver. The recipient in turn can read the fact that he became beneficiary as a sign that God has already bestowed him with *barakat*.

In the field of production, cereal and dairy production are closely associated with the *barakat* value complex. Most work related to it, such as threshing, winnowing, putting the crops into the sacks, even taking out flour from the granary are accompanied by certain rituals, the purpose of which is to restore the *barakat* for the agricultural year that lies ahead, or for the next one. The fact that wheat is also a representation/metaphor of *barakat* and an important item in rituals to disperse *barakat* has already been mentioned several times. Besides rituals, there is also a bunch of everyday rules of how to treat wheat, flour, bread and milk properly, such as not putting them in

45 Making land *obod* (pers. *abad*) is one of the most virtuous deeds one can perform, which is understandable in a semi-arid landscape such as the Middle Pamirs. This idea is spread throughout the sphere of influence of the Persian culture and language, as it is visible in the nomenclature of cities: ‘Faizabad’ for example can mean ‘the place that [a person called] Faiz made arable’. In Central Asia, the Soviets took up this nomenclature in order to justify their claims, as with the cities Leninabad (former name of Khujand) and Stalinabad (Dushanbe). Once I was promised, rather jokingly, if I would succeed to find some donor or NGO who might help making a huge strip of land washed away by the river *obod* again, the place would be called ‘Steffobod’.

a non-clean (*nopok*) place. If these rules are not observed, the *barakat* is endangered.⁴⁶

Agricultural subsistence, benevolence and sharing are all imbued with *barakat*, bring *barakat* and are themselves dependent on it. One can grasp them as the ‘this-worldly’, social⁴⁷ side of the *barakat* economy.

Interestingly, the modes of production and distribution associated with the *barakat* economy were the dominant ones in the Pamirs in pre-Soviet times. It seems that achieving prosperity and growth through activities not directly involving God and thus not touching the cosmic field at all, e.g. by making a profit through trading with one’s fellows, is traditionally an alien concept in Bartang. The Bartangi decidedly uphold the claim that domestic trade had been unknown in pre-Soviet times. Goods that were not available locally were acquired through barter, in Bartang mainly with the Kyrgyz settling in the area adjacent to the East, on the high plateaus of the Eastern Pamirs. Central marketplaces (all of which were a several-days dangerous journey away from Bartang) developed only on the turn to the 20th cent.,⁴⁸ and even during Soviet time, most vendors there were Uzbeks and Tajiks.⁴⁹ Pamiris and especially Bartangis are still renowned for their underdeveloped aptitude to engage in trade and business, and some even speak about this with a certain pride.⁵⁰

All this underlines my assumption that the *barakat* economy cannot be grasped with classical terms of the economics and that it is not compatible with the market economy for which these terms were originally developed.

46 Not only production and distribution, but even the third economic field, consumption can be influenced by the *barakat* value complex: Some people hold that a prerequisite to become bestowed with *barakat* is to be ritually pure (*pok*). For remaining *pok*, certain consume patterns are essential, for example just eating *halol* (allowed by religion) and no *harom* (forbidden by religion) foods. A different issue related to consumption is that the first milk of a cow that has just calved has to be consumed within the family, otherwise the cow will loose its *barakat* and become dry.

47 It should, however, be noted that in the this-worldly side of the *barakat* economy, other than the term ‘social field’ denotes, not all activities are social in that they involve exchange between humans. Especially when usufruct is made from the resource *barakat* in the field of agriculture, this often serves as mere subsistence of one’s own family.

48 The first market places were in Tashkurgan in the Chinese Pamirs, and, though around the 1910s still rather insignificant, in Khorog and Murghab (at that time called Pamirski post) (von Schultz 1914, 54). See also Bliss 2006, 142.

49 Pamiri people engaged in trade are even sometimes pejoratively called ‘Tajiks’.

50 For a description of other Central Asian communities where market economy has rather ambivalent connotations, see Louw (2008, 153) and Maertens (this volume).

The Dongria-Model in Bartang

After the elucidation of the basic principles of the classical *barakat* value complex and the social and the cosmic side of the *barakat* economy, I now come back to my original question: Can the socio-cosmic field in which the *barakat* value complex is effective, be attributed to one of the models Hardenberg suggests?

I would suggest that the classic *barakat* value complex in Bartang clearly fits the ‘Dongria model’ in which the social and cosmic field are closely intertwined. First, when the Bartangi are active in the *cosmic* part of the *barakat* economy, by performing rituals, seeking contact with *barakat*-imbued places or people and adhering to religious traditions (thus pleasing the old people), they aim to animate God to pour out *barakat* from the other world into this world. By this, a resource comes into being that is a catalyser for value creation in all spheres of life: For example *barakat* helps to have good results in harvesting, bringing passengers in a stuffed car to Khorog, without facing problems on the road, or hosting a wedding feast where all guests get satisfied, so that the honour (*nomus*) of the host increases. All these works, though driven and eased by *barakat*, a resource of **cosmic** origin, are themselves situated in the **social** field. Yet, this works the other way round as well: When the Bartangi behave well in the **social** field by sharing, donating, doing voluntary work for the sake of community, paying obedience to their parents etc., in short, give something to other humans situated in **this** world, reciprocation can be expected in the shape of *barakat* coming as a reward from **that** world: **Social** exchange triggers a **cosmic** exchange. A third factor connecting the two fields through *barakat* is the possibility to use media charged with *barakat* as gifts in social exchange, as in the mentioned case of holy soil (*xok tudā*).⁵¹

We see that the social and cosmic *barakat* economy are mutually dependent on each other through the resource *barakat*, which is at the same time social **and** cosmic (belonging to neither side exclusively), and freely commutes between both fields. So in this case of the *barakat* value complex, indeed the social and the cosmic field are just two sides of the same coin (cf. Hardenberg, this volume).

⁵¹ Compare Bechtold (this volume), who describes a feast for returning hajjis in southern Kyrgyzstan. The new hajjis distribute blessed water that they brought from the well Zamzam in Mekka (which has, in my terminology, the capacity to transmit contagious *barakat*) among the guests of their hajji feast. Through this act of generosity they do not only gain *soop* (which would be equivalent of *meritic barakat* in Bartang), but also they reaffirm and strengthen their social relationships and gain prestige. Interestingly, Hölzchen (this volume) detected a similar ‘loop’ between social and cosmic fields in the Kyrgyz conceptualisation of *soop*. When enacting deeds aimed at gaining *soop*, social as well as cosmic motives play a role simultaneously.

Changing *Barakat* Conceptualisations in Bartang Affecting the Cosmic *Barakat* Economy

It is tempting to assume that the Post-Soviet transformations must have had a similar impact on Bartang as on Kyrgyzstan, as described by Hardenberg, Hölzchen and Tulebaeva (this volume), leading to a reconfiguration of the socio-cosmic field. In the case of Bartang this specifically concerns the way this double-faceted field is embraced and integrated by the *barakat* value complex. Do social and cosmic values successively develop apart, and is *barakat* as a bracket around both inevitably crushed?

Given the antagonism of the *barakat* and market economy, especially the introduction of the latter could be assumed to have had quite an impact on the way *barakat* related values are conceptualised and enacted.

Generally, due to its remoteness, many socio-cultural changes reach Bartang with a certain delay. Although on first sight concealed to the observer, however, there is actually already some market activity going on: Some so-called *komersants*⁵² have appeared on the scene during the last 20 years. And goods are not just flowing in, but there is even a petty export out of Bartang: Some people try to improve their livelihoods by selling home-grown tobacco and the famous hand-made Pamiri socks on the market in the provincial capital Khorog.

The School of Professional and Continuing Education within the University of Central Asia in Khorog, another project of the Aga Khan Foundation,⁵³ offers courses to obtain skills necessary, and the First Microfinance Bank (again belonging to AKF) provides micro loans for business start-ups. Although in Upper Bartang only few have followed these incentives so far and set up a small business, people are never tired to emphasise that the transition to capitalism is inevitable – and to complain how far they are still from its full implementation.

The Aga Khan in his *farmans* and speeches not only regularly emphasises the inevitability of the transition to capitalism of developing countries (cf. Manetta/Steinberg 2008), but also points out that it is paired with

52 *Komersants* are villagers who are usually related to one of the few car owners and thus have the possibility to transport goods from Rushan or Khorog to Bartang cheaply. Most of them do not have a shop in the strict sense of the word, but store their goods for selling in boxes in some small side room of their house, which they open on demand. The goods are basic things for daily use, such as oil, tea, sugar, biscuits, sweets, matches and, occasionally, some cheap household items, soap, clothes, plastic boots and toys of Chinese production.

53 <<http://www.ucentralasia.org/Schools/Spce>> (last access 9. 10. 2016).

meritocracy.⁵⁴ Many Bartangi who are aware of these messages analogously reiterate that everybody should strive for his own progress and the well-being of one's family. By individual efforts in commerce and the improvement of the family's living conditions, it might be possible to contribute to the progress of the whole community.

This discourse neatly fits the above-mentioned of the *mazhab-i aqloni*, the 'rational confession', in the course of which people discuss which religious practices should be altered to prevent a negative impact on economic development.

I believe that the successive infiltration by meritocratic values and the appropriation of the maxims of the *mazhab-i aqloni* resonate in a looming change of the *barakat* conception, affecting, for example, the concepts of how *barakat* can be acquired, and by whom.

In the 'classic' *barakat* conception, which I presented above, individuals as well as collectives figure as entities that can receive *barakat*. Although today still most Bartangi are acquainted with the case of the mentioned *awlod* that has lost its *barakat*, many reject the notion that a lack of *barakat* can be inherited. Many informants claim that it is solely dependent on one's own individual virtuousness in life, whether one is a bearer of *barakat* or not.

While I was in Upper Bartang in 2013, one incident puzzled the people: While driving to a funeral ceremony, a very reliable driver lost control over his car. It went over the edge of the road and turned over several times. Though the scene looked terribly dangerous, miraculously none of the thirteen passengers was seriously injured. After this, it was clear to everyone that each passenger should express his gratitude towards God and restore his *barakat* by making a sacrifice.⁵⁵ The people involved, however, came together for a discussion and concluded that it would be a waste of meat to sacrifice thirteen animals in a village comprising roughly 50 households. Instead, some sug-

54 'For much of human history, leaders have been born into their roles, or have fought their way in – or have bought their way in. But in this new century – a time of unusual danger and stirring promise, it is imperative that aristocracies of class give way to aristocracies of talent, to meritocracies. Is it not a fundamental concept of democracy itself, that leadership should be chosen on the basis of merit?' Aga Khan IV in his Peterson Lecture at the Annual Meeting of the International Baccalaureate (Atlanta, Georgia, USA) 18. April 2008, as reproduced on a poster with sayings of the Aga Khan about merit and meritocracy, <<http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/wp-content/uploads/documents/thematic-chart-15-merit-meritocracy.pdf>> (last access 10.10.2016).

55 The sacrifice out of thankfulness is of course a particular case: In this case, God was the first to give something (here: the 'gift' of survival of the accident), different from the cases when first humans sacrifice in order to ask God for the gift of blessing. However, the former case of a sacrifice as well contributes to the generation of *barakat*, as demonstrating thankfulness (*šukrat*) is a prerequisite to gain further blessing.

gested that it would be better to perform a sacrifice collectively. Additionally each of them should do some voluntary work or donate for a good purpose. The *xalifā* of this village, who is pronouncedly progressive, welcomed this idea. Then however, the general mood changed again: Some began to doubt whether everyone could restore the *barakat* of his own house without a sacrifice. One reason for this uneasiness with the reformatory suggestion could be the following: Doing some individual donation, they would have just 're-charged' their own *barakat*. With a sacrifice in each house however, the whole house and its inhabitants would become blessed by the confirmative *foṭā* spoken there by the *xalifā*.

Nevertheless, the fact that several of the near victims would have been quick to replace the sacrifice with a benevolent deed reveals that they saw the expression of gratitude and restoring of *barakat* as an individual issue, and that the restoration of the *barakat* of the *house* was of minor importance to them.

Another shift concerns the question which mode of *barakat* generation is considered as paramount. Most of the teenage schoolchildren whom I had asked to write essays⁵⁶ on *barakat* and the ways one can earn it, first of all mentioned obedience to one's parents and offering help to elders – thus meritoric modes of *barakat* generation. Grown-ups would answer similarly. Only if asked explicitly about the meaning of certain practices, such as paying attention to the auspicious time (*soat*) or going to holy places, many would explain that an additional purpose of these is to acquire *barakat*. However, it is telling that, when asked the other way round to define *barakat*, few people would mention the latter practices. This observation stands in sharp contradiction to the findings of other ethnographies about Central Asia, where 'contagic practices' to gain *barakat*, especially the visitation of holy places, feature most prominently. This leads me to the hypothesis that this distinctive

56 'Participatory methods' like this one are especially useful with interlocutors who are not easily eligible for 'classical' interviewing. In Bartang, I often faced problems when speaking with teenagers, who are generally very inhibited when talking to an adult person. To find out how familiar they are with the *barakat* concept, I resorted to a medium they were already used to for reproducing their knowledge about socio-cultural issues. In the course *soat-i terbiyavi* ('hour of education') students once a week have to write a small essay on a topic related to culture, morality, family life, patriotism or the like. They use to refer to their own knowledge on the issue and/or do a small 'research', asking older members of their family. Several teachers allowed me to provide a topic on which the students then wrote an essay until the next lesson. In the lesson they read their texts aloud, we discussed them together, and finally I gathered the written versions and took them with me to Germany.

emphasis on meritic practices for gaining *barakat* in Bartang could be a rather recent development – or at least a particularity of that region.⁵⁷

There is also a clear perception which meritic practices are considered valuable. After the car accident mentioned above, many people put forward

57 References that *barakat* can be a reward for good behaviour are rather sparse in Central Asian Literature. Louw (2008, 119) however, briefly mentions that modern Naqshbandi Sufis assume that they get bestowed with *baraka* for performing good deeds – a hint that ideas about a nexus between good behaviour and *baraka(t)* exist not only in Bartang, but also in other parts of Central Asia. However, it has to be kept in mind that in many Islamic societies the term for the religious merits acquired through benevolence, sacrificing, doing voluntary work, helping those in need and alike, is not *baraka*, but a term usually derived from Arabic *ṭawāb*, for example *sawob* in Tajik, *savāb* in Persian, *soop* in Kyrgyz, *sevap* in Turkish etc. (see also Bechtold, Hölzchen, Tulebaeva and Müller, this volume). *Ṭawāb* counts on the assets-side when one's fate after death is determined, whereas, as mentioned before, *barakat's* efficacy already unfolds in this world. This kind of distinction between the two kinds of merits is made quite clear in the case of religious endowments in Mashhad, through which both kinds of merit can be earned, as described by Müller (this volume). Katz (2007, 63–103) in contrast, sees the most decisive difference between *baraka* and *ṭawāb* in that the former is transmitted through contact (reflecting the idea of what I termed here contagious *barakat*), whereas the latter (and not *baraka!*) is the term of the reward for meritorious deeds. Taking all this in consideration, it could be possible that in other Islamic societies similar developments are visible as in Bartang, with an increasing emphasis on religious merits earned by benevolence, but not necessarily with *baraka* being the local term for the kind of merit striven for. To return to Bartang: Here the term *sawob* exists as well, however most people hold that it is a synonym for *barakat*. It would be interesting, but difficult to investigate, due to the lack of sources, whether this obvious conflation of *sawob* and *barakat* is an old or rather a recent phenomenon, in the latter case maybe indicating an increasing orientation towards **this** world, where traditionally *barakat* unfolds (in opposite to the afterlife, the classical locus of usufruct of *sawob* in the narrow sense). Interestingly, Hölzchen (this volume) for northern Kyrgyzstan as well mentions that *soop* eases life already in **this** world. It seems that there, in turn, *soop* implicitly encompasses what would be termed *barakat* in Bartang. In a similar vein, Müller (this volume) suggests that in Iran *savāb* can also conceptually encompass *baraka* (in Persian: *barekat*), yet never the other way round. *Savāb* is thus the resource ranked higher in a Dumontian sense. Generally, the occasional conceptual conflation of *baraka* and *ṭawāb*, which we encounter in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Iran in different ways, may have also logical reasons: If it is assumed that good deeds can lead to both *baraka* and *ṭawāb*, it is rather unlikely that somebody possesses the one but not the other (Müller, oral communication). For a third approach to distinguish *baraka* and *ṭawāb*, proposed by Amira Mittermaier (2013), which neither focuses on its efficacy in this or in the other world, nor on its relatedness to a contagious versus a meritic mode of transmission, but rather on the logics of its efficacy, see the subchapter 'Logics of *barakat's* efficacy: Arithmetical or incommensurable?' in this essay. Another term in the semantic field of blessings and merit, which is prevalent in Kyrgyzstan, is *yrysky*, which denotes, according to Tulebaeva (this volume) a kind of merit that is gained through piety and results in the abundant availability of food necessary for living, i.e. is effective in this world. Although the term is not known in Bartang, from all the above-mentioned examples of terms and their specific interpretation in other Islamic regions, *yrysky* has perhaps the biggest congruence with the concept of (meritic) *barakat* in Bartang, denoting the same source, *lieu* and mode of efficacy. One *mullo* even explained to Tulebaeva that *yrysky* is essential for life, and if somebody has used it up, he or she will die. However, I could never record such a strong statement in reference to *barakat*, and it is often stated about living people who have faced series of misfortunes that they are *bibarakat* – without *barakat*.

that performing a sacrifice is not useful to the community, as it allows just a short satisfaction when everybody's stomach is full. If however, everybody had given a donation, and this would have been used for example for new spare parts for the frequently broken generator, it would have contributed to the village's development.

As a valuable replacement for the out-dated sacrifice, *volontyori* (adopted from English 'volunteering') was suggested. In their short sermons after weekly prayers, the *xalifās* regularly remind people that the Aga Khan wants his *murīds* to do unpaid voluntary work for the community at least for one hour each day. Voluntary work in various forms is no new concept in the region: Common infrastructure is often repaired by unpaid collectives (*ašār*, equated with Russian *subbotnik*). Relatives and neighbours take over household chores of a house with bereavement, and for hard work such as house construction or threshing, people call relatives and friends (*koryar*) for help. Additionally, there are a few 'traditional' honorary offices, such as the already mentioned *xalifā* and the corpse washer (*zinayoč*).

However, in addition voluntary work has recently seen a formalisation of unprecedented degree. As a consequence of establishing a more institutionalised Ismaili congregation on the village level, which is pursued by ITREB Tajikistan, a multitude of new voluntary offices has been created: There is, for example, a head of women, a head of elders, a head of youth, a head of parents, a head of the library etc. Doing voluntary work became an essential part of being a virtuous person; for some even a component of an ideal biography: The corpse washer of one village mentioned that he decided to resume this difficult honorary appointment as he was 'still looking for a voluntary work for himself'.⁵⁸

In the modern *barakat* discourse, the aspect of **doing** something features prominently. Asked about the meaning of *barakat*, a lot of people replied by saying '*barakat az harakat*' ('*barakat* [comes] from moving').⁵⁹ By this they expressed that not only the achievement of goals is eased by previously earned *barakat*, but that additional *barakat* is granted as a reward for hard work. This is a special case of gaining meritoric *barakat*, in which the required meritorious act does not primarily aim at a social goal, but at individual self-optimising.

58 The office itself however is highly ambivalent: Traditionally, the *zinayoč* is not allowed to spread the seeds in spring, because it is said that there comes no fecundity from his hand.

59 It has to be mentioned, however, that people hold that this idiomatic expression is no innovation, but had been used 'in the past' as well. It is difficult to say whether the emphasis on this aspect is a recent phenomenon or had existed before as well.

The strong emphasis on meritorious work went hand in hand with an anti-proportional decline of proximic practices of generating *barakat*. Many people, for example, point out that checking the auspicious time (*soat*) is superstitious, and refer to the Aga Khan who, during his travels to Badakhshan, was freshly shaved at any time, and obviously had not stuck to the auspicious days for performing actions related to hair.

Several self-claimed modern minded people deny the efficacy of amulets containing prayers written by the *xalifā*. And when modern *xalifā* are selected (and appointed by ITREB) it is not considered whether the aspirant has inherited some *nafas* or not. The prerequisite for becoming *xalifā* today is to have a university degree (whereas the subject does not matter).⁶⁰ Finally, in contrast to most regions in Central Asia, people report that holy places (*oston*) are far less frequented than they had been during Soviet time.

The Logics of *Barakat*'s Efficacy: Arithmetical or Incommensurable?

Besides notions on *barakat* transmission, concepts of the efficacy and general mechanisms of *barakat* could be affected as well by the successive confrontation of the Bartangi society with 'capitalistic' logics. The work of Amira Mittermaier (2013) gives an impression into which direction this might lead. Mittermaier, who studies charity institutions in Cairo, is one of the few anthropologists who discuss the connection of *baraka* and religious merits. She contrasts *baraka* with *tawāb* which in the Egyptian case, other than in Bartang, is distinguished from *baraka* on the basis of its efficacy and degree of 'calculability':⁶¹ *Tawāb* as a reward for benevolent action is something that **can** be counted in the same way as bad deeds. Some of Mittermaier's informants, who work in charity institutions, in their personal 'account' offset bad deeds against the *tawāb* they gained, fearing that in the end of their life the former may outweigh the latter.

60 In Bartang, this often does not stand in contradiction with the old selection-mode: Due to the century-long endogamous marriages within the valley, everybody is virtually related with everyone, and thus nearly everybody has some *xalifā* among his ancestors.

61 She does however not discuss the distinction of *barakat* and *tawāb* on the base of the respective efficacy in this or in that world (which seems to be decisive in other regions). Also, she does not distinguish *baraka* from *tawāb* by pointing out to the former's predominant transmission by means of contagion (as Katz 2007 does).

The notion of *barakat*, in turn, is that of ‘miraculous abundance’ (Mittermaier 2013, 285), which cannot be grasped in arithmetical calculation. When performing benevolent deeds, *barakat* may show in the large output that exceeds the invested input of material and effort. She illustrates this point in an example from a soup kitchen, where the benevolent act of distributing food feeds a surprisingly large number of people. As Mittermaier puts it, ‘*Baraka* highlights the limits of human calculative reason and reminds the believer that God is the ultimate owner of all wealth’ (Mittermaier 2013, 287).

Although both principles of divine reward seem to have existed in Egypt for long, several of Mittermaier’s informants claim that during the last years the calculative logic of *tawāb* has gained the upper hand in the discourse on virtuous behaviour, benevolent work and divine rewards. They also trace this back to the increasing spread of neoliberal capitalism.

Hölzchen (this volume) even reports that she heard about a ring available in Kyrgyzstan that has an integrated counter for counting the amount of *soop* one has achieved during a certain period of time (I would imagine it to look somewhat like a stitch counter used for knitting). Leaving aside the specific distinction between *baraka(t)* and *tawāb* (*sawob*), which is not applicable in Bartang in this way (see footnote 56), one could hypothesise that nowadays a similar tendency to calculate one’s *barakat* like in a bank account may prevail in Bartang. The following second part of the story about the car accident hints into this direction: Amazingly, the section of the road where the accident had happened was not dangerous at all, in contrast to most other parts of the sometimes quite terrifying Bartang road. Some people concluded that this accident should anyway not have happened, at least not to this driver: He is a sociable man appreciated by everyone and does a lot of benevolent work for the sake of the community. It was thus evident to everyone that the indirect blame for this accident could not be traced back to the driver (and his possible lack of *barakat*).

Finally, one witness who had been in a second car remembered that one moment before the first car overshot the roadside, somebody in his car had uttered ‘Oh, now he has become really professional’ in reference to this driver. After this, it was clear to everyone that this person had inadvertently ‘made an evil eye’ (*cēm čüg*) to the driver. Everyone was relieved, as the logic and fairness of the ‘*barakat* economy’ appeared coherent again; the more because nobody had been seriously injured. This was, in turn, interpreted as owing to the driver’s *barakat*, which outweighed the destructive power of the evil eye. However, it is difficult to determine whether argumentations like these are a new phenomenon in Bartang. At least in Morocco, it seems, *baraka* has always

been used as ‘an explanation of why some things happen while others don’t’ (Eickelmann 1976, 158–159). While people in Bartang at times argued causally (good deeds = plenty of *barakat* = success in life), I never noticed anybody who reflected about his *barakat* in such strict arithmetical considerations as Mittermaiers (2013, 277 et al.) informants do in respect to *tawāb*.

In summary, I hypothesise that the recent socio-cultural changes affected the conceptualisation of the cosmic side of the *barakat* economy (i.e. the exchange relationship between God and man) in the following way:

- 1) More and more people consider primarily individuals and not collectives as ‘unit’ that can receive a portion of *barakat*.
- 2) The popularity (and believe in the effectiveness) of merit modes for gaining *barakat* is increasing whereas those of the proximic mode are in anti-proportional decline. The idea behind this shift is that God particularly rewards individuals doing some altruistic useful contribution for the sake of the community, whereas
- 3) there is a vivid debate as to what can be considered a useful contribution (with an increasing preference of long-term investments over short-term satisfaction).
- 4) There is a pronounced logic of ‘fairness’: It is assumed by many that good deeds should inevitably lead to a bestowment with *barakat* (whereas coincidence, such as the possibility of receiving ‘inherited’ *barakat* without individual efforts, is doubted by many).
- 5) All in all, we can conclude that the cosmic *barakat* economy quite smoothly accommodated the new values of meritocracy and the ‘rational confession’. But what about the social, ‘this-worldly’ side of the *barakat* economy, which in its ‘idealised’ type presents itself as notoriously contradictive to the market economy?

On second sight, as Mittermaier (2013, 286, referring to Schielke 2012) points out, the anti-arithmetical logics of *barakat* are not as incompatible with the capitalist system as it seems. It is a very exciting observation these two scholars have made: Indeed, modern financial processes often escape arithmetical commensurability, and the idea that input should stand in some reasonable and ‘fair’ relation to the output, is often not applicable. The miraculous self-exponentiation (or sudden loss) of money during speculative transactions seems to have some familiar likeness with *barakat*: Among two people, who invested the same amount of money and did the same efforts in observing stock market, one makes a gain amounting several times the original investment, whereas the other loses all – why?

The Social Side of the *Barakat* Economy Aligns with the New Market Economy: *Harom* and *Halol* Money

Interestingly, some ‘cosmopolitan’ Bartangi people resort to the idiom of *barakat* when discussing money issues: A friend of mine denoted the loss one inevitably makes when exchanging different currencies as a ‘loss of *barakat*’ that accompanies this process. I also overheard some young men who discussed the pay-off mode of a Tajik mobile phone provider, which had recently shifted from Dollar to the Tajik currency Somoni. They agreed that since that shift, one had the feeling that the balance one puts on one’s Sim-card vanishes faster than before, although the tariffs have remained the same. They speculated whether Dollars might hold more *barakat* than the equal amount of Somoni.⁶² Obviously, some people would not reject the idea that there may be some *barakat* – or lack of it – at work in transactions taking place in market economy.

It is even possible to detect a clear understanding under which conditions *barakat* can affect market activities: All works should be *halol* (allowed according to religious law). Money earned in a way that is not *halol* (i.e. *harom*) will never become *obod*. As it contains no *barakat*, it also does not have the capacity to exponentiate miraculously and is of no sustainable use. Instead, its owner will inevitably spend it quickly without any useful purpose that could ensure well-being in the long run. Drug trade⁶³ is clearly seen as a *harom* economic activity that does not hold *barakat*: Stories about people who quickly became rich in this way and lost everything afterwards are abundantly circulating in the Pamir as warning examples.

Some even hold the idea that, when *harom* money gets mixed with *halol* money, for example when put on the same bank account, the latter may – perhaps reflecting the idea of contagious transmission of qualities – as well forfeit its *barakat* and *obodness*.

As we see, values and concepts associated with the *barakat* economy have already permeated the discourse about processes and activities of the monetary and market economy.

⁶² However, I did not understand them to imply that the Dollar was more *halol* or had more blessing in the sense that God preferred this currency. I understood it rather as a kind of metaphor, which displays that people see similar logics at work in *barakat* and certain unexplainable phenomena in the market economy.

⁶³ One of the most important smuggling routes for opium and heroin out of Afghanistan runs through the Tajik Pamirs. Bartang valley however has currently no significance as a transport corridor.

The Re-Integration of Social and Cosmic Spheres by the Aga Khan

The impression may have arisen that the accommodation of the *barakat* value complex with new values went quite smoothly – and this impression is generally right. A major reason responsible for this is the Aga Khan. The Aga Khan holds the divine light *nūr*, which was transmitted to him from the prophet Muhammad through his patrilineage, the previous 48 Imams of the Isma'ilis. Thus being a kind of mundane extension of the divine, he is not only holder of intrinsic *barakat*, but might even be considered a genuine source of *barakat*.

Many people claim that in the moment he first left a 'footstep' (*qadam*) in the Pamirs in 1995 for the first official reception of his followers (*didor*),⁶⁴ the *barakat* of the whole region increased, as can be seen in the developmental progress that was made since then.⁶⁵

The Aga Khan provides contagious *barakat* not just when he stages a *didor*, but also when he distributes blessed water and grains as *taboraki*, as mentioned above. It seems, whereas in most fields practices to obtain contagious *barakat* have vanished, the Imam himself has acquired the monopoly to distribute it. This is also reflected in the explanation that many give for the successive demise of the holy places: Holy places had been a major communication hub with the divine (and thus also a *barakat* dispenser) during Soviet time. In this function, as many claim, they now have been replaced by the Aga Khan as a mundane extension of the divine sphere.⁶⁶

In the Bartang valley, I never came across anyone who would have doubted the authority of the Aga Khan's orders. Any potential of changes triggered by the Aga Khan to polarise the population is thus blighted: By definition, there cannot occur schisms in the Pamir *jamoat* if everybody puts the Aga Khan's orders into practice. The Aga Khan thus, by means of his directives, constantly calibrates the socio-cosmic field anew, in accordance with the demands of the respective present time. When he expressed in his

64 For more detailed accounts on how the people experienced the first *didor*, see Remtilla 2012.

65 This progress is not just indebted to the Aga Khan's religious programs, but to his developmental programs as well, which started as humanitarian aid measures during the Tajik civil war (Pamir Relief and Development Program) and in the aftermath were transferred to several more sustainable, largely grassroots development initiatives (such as the Mountain Society Development Support Program) (Steinberg 2011).

66 It is not my intention to enlarge on the philosophical and theological background of the concept of the Imamate. My sole purpose is to describe my interpretation of the effects which the re-emergence of the Aga Khan since the 90s had on the very local level, according to my subjective experience. Terms like 'contagious *barakat*' are part of my analytical model; they are not used by the Aga Khan or his institutions.

farmans that people should embrace the transition and engage in market economy, this had far-reaching effects: Whereas formerly profane economic modes such as trading were considered inferior to activities associated with the *barakat* economy, now they are even encompassed in it in some way, and it became a religious imperative to engage in market economy.⁶⁷ In this way, the apparent contradictions between *barakat* and market economy are dissolved and social and cosmic field are brought into accord again. However, the kind of market economy envisioned by the Aga Khan for the Pamir is not just ‘artificially’ made compatible with the local value system upon his order. The capitalism he envisions is not one of reckless competition serving individuals (Steinberg 2011, 54), but one that is in balance with collectivistic values of Pamiri village society. His ideas resonate in the local meritocracy/*mazhab-i aqloni* discourses, in which people emphasise that money accumulated through market activities (or saved through omitted sacrifices) may, for example, get invested into the education of children, who then, by means of the acquired skills, contribute to the development of the whole community.

Epilogue and Summary: A Smooth Transition?

Despite its neighbourhood with Kyrgyzstan and the similarity of historical processes, we saw that at least in reference to the *barakat* value complex, the socio-cosmic field in Bartang cannot be equated with the ‘Kyrgyz type’ as described by Hardenberg (this volume). With the Aga Khan constantly working towards reconciliation and balance between social and cosmic values, between tradition and transformation, the social and cosmic fields are re-attuned in a permanent process.

Barakat as a resource that is at the same time rooted in the cosmic and the social field, and the value complex attached to it, still remain the brackets that attach both fields to each other – with just some slight shifts in the concrete conceptualisation of the *barakat* complex, which makes it more compatible with ‘capitalist modernity’. Because of the intellectual debates of the local people about the maxims of the Aga Khan, the society is kept in a state similar to the Dongria model, with no contradiction between cosmic and social values.

⁶⁷ On the Aga Khan’s effect on moralising the local market economy, see also Remtilla’s chapter ‘Making money is not bad’ (Remtilla 2012, 79–103).

Yet, beyond the sphere of values on the level of daily life, did the transformation of *barakat*-related practices also proceed in such a frictionless way?

As we saw with the example of the sacrifice-debate after the car accident, obviously consent is not prevailing in every instance when it comes to the change of practices. One reason why there is some room for discussion is that the Aga Khan (and meanwhile also his institutions on the local level) do usually not give very detailed orders regarding religious practices, i.e. how they should be executed in detail. Therefore, opinions on the exact exegesis of, for example, the *mazhab-i aqloni* maxim in concrete situations may differ.

Especially in situations of contingency, such as the unexpected accident, people tend to resort to ‘traditional’ practices, as long as these do not directly contradict specific orders of the Aga Khan. The same applies to acts with long-term effects: Even people who in everyday life do not pay attention to auspicious times would not dare to marry without having the *xalifā* checked the *soat* before, and it would be noted with uneasiness if somebody who does not belong to the designated *awlod* would open the water channels in spring.

Also, I noticed a ‘gender bias’, with women tending to pay more attention to ‘traditional’ practices, such as contagic practices or sacrifices for gaining *barakat*. Adolescent men, several of whom wear bundles of amulets sewn in small textile pockets and strapped by rubber bands to their well-defined biceps (fig. 4), would coyly point out that it was their mother who went to a *xalifā* to obtain the amulet and subsequently obtruded it on her son to wear it.



Fig. 4. Young man wearing a sewn-in amulet (*tumor*) on his arm. He pointed out that the amulet had been acquired by his mother, when he had been still a young boy and had suffered from occasional fear (Photo by author).

Whereas in the (especially male) young and middle generation a generally positive attitude towards ‘modernisation’ prevails, older people are often less open towards changes. As the idea that elders can withdraw their *barakat* when angered remains unchallenged, this can lead to contradictory situations, when younger people want to push forward changes. To resolve this problem, sometimes deceptions are applied, for example sticking to old practices, but just as long as elders are in sight.

Even when new values are acknowledged, this does not mean that the practical implementation is easily possible without frictions. Although the transition to capitalism is meanwhile widely accepted and many are eager to try their luck as *komersant*, most of these small-scale enterprises go bankrupt after few months. Most clients buy their goods on credit, and the vendors are inhibited to ask them to pay back their debt – how can one enforce one’s relatives (and in Bartang practically all are related in some way) to pay back a debt, in particular if one is aware about the economically miserable situation most households are in? This is not a problem in Bartang in particular, but all over the Pamirs. Maertens even interprets the debts (*qarz*) accumulated in the Ishkashim region (despite the occasional grumbling of shop owners about notebooks with pages full of accumulated debts that have not been paid back for years) as ‘an intermediary to integrate contradictory demands of the community and the market: Of being a good person meeting social obligations and making profit or just ends meet’ (Maertens, this volume).

Finally, the fact that most Bartangi share the basic value system on which *barakat* is grounded does not imply that the way people refer to this value system is unequivocal. While in many contexts people professed that since the end of the Soviet Union *barakat* has increased, as can be read from improved living conditions, in other situations people for instance point to the milk yield, which has decreased since 1991. This, in turn, is interpreted by some people as an indicator of a loss of collective *barakat* in Bartang, due to immoral behaviour, which is said to have spread with the improved connection to the outside world.

Whether these minor frictions will be overcome in future or not, *barakat* as a powerful framework that merges and transcends artificial Western separations of different social and cosmic realms, has proven its capacity to remain – even in a society like Bartang that was catapulted into a modernity inspired by Western values out of a sudden. Its third way of dealing with these outside influences, neither foreclosure nor full acceptance and participation (Hardenberg, this volume), but fine-tuned integration into the local order of values, is possible because of the indirect moderation of the Aga Khan. This, in

turn, triggers exegetical debates and creative encounters with the own culture among the local population, with a predefined outcome: A religiously conform yet modern value system in a united community.

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ANNABELL KÖRNER

Moral Education in Georgian Orthodox Christianity

Striving for a Georgian Modernity

Keywords: Religious education, Georgia, orthodox Christianity, modernity, morality

Introduction: Creating an Orthodox Georgian Modernity

During my fieldwork¹ in Georgia, I regularly accompanied students to their school and spent time in teachers' lounges and classrooms. One of the schools I visited is subordinated to the Patriarchate of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church (*sakartvelos samotsikulo avt'ok'epaluri martlmadidebeli ek'lesia*) and aims to raise their students to righteous Georgian orthodox Christians. To my surprise, most of the students did not see much difference to secular public schools – except for religious education twice a week and, as they claimed, a stronger sense of social cohesion among the students. Nevertheless, one topic prevailed in many conversations with the adolescents who visited this school: Most of them were deeply displeased with the school's dress code. Georgian orthodox schools usually ask their students to dress similar to the way they would dress in church – long skirts, high-necked blouses in light colours and tied hair for girls, decent pants and white shirts for boys. Students tried to get around this dress code in many different ways: By wearing colourful pullovers on top of their white shirts,

1 This article is based on six months of fieldwork from September 2013 to February 2014 in Georgia's capital Tbilisi, which I conducted during my master's research on religion and moral education in Georgian orthodox families. Primary methods that were deployed are participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured in-depth interviews as well as focus group interviews and document analysis. All of the provided quotations result from interviews during this fieldwork, which were either conducted in English, Georgian or German language.

or by wearing tight and fashionable jeans underneath their ankle length skirts. Leaving the school's compound, I observed several girls getting rid of their long skirts and cramming them in their handbags as they passed the school gate.

When asked about his students' resentments, one religious education teacher emphasised the importance of outer appearance for a practicing Georgian orthodox Christian:

[...] Christianity thinks that the human being is the spirit and the flesh and they should live in harmony. And my inner world is revealed in the outer one. And my outfit can have an influence. I will give to you an example. There is a traditional dress, chokha, and it's not only the Georgian but the Caucasian national dress. And when you wear it, I won't say it's very comfortable, no! Because it makes you sit straight (sits up straight) you can't look like that (bends forward) because it pushes you how to sit, how to act. [...] So we just try to make them understand that how you look like [is important]. When you look at yourself in the mirror, who do you see? This can influence you, it can take you this way or that way. When they look into the mirror, we want them to see the people who – you know there is also some dress code in church. So I want my pupils, when they wake up and they dress themselves and go to school, to see the same person, who they see when they go to church. Because maybe the church is the house of God but he is in my heart. Or he isn't there.' (Religious education teacher at a Georgian orthodox school, father of three children, 33 years old, interview in English).

At first sight, the issue of a Christian private school's dress code may seem marginal. Yet for these young students, clothes as well as other parts of their outer appearance constitute an important means of expressing their participation in a modern Western lifestyle. In opposition, teachers, being concerned with the morality of their students, depict (decent) clothes as an important part of a Christian orthodox life, since they do not only express belonging, but are also a means to educate and discipline children. This conflict focuses on one point: In how far are aspirations towards a Western modernity compatible with cosmological conceptions as well as values, offered by Georgian orthodox Christianity?

In the Georgian orthodox families² I visited during my fieldwork, participation in a Western lifestyle is mainly expressed by the consumption of certain goods, as it will be evident in the following ethnographic descriptions. Here, the understanding of consumption is not reduced to the mere act of obtaining a product, but follows Daniel Miller's notion of 'consumption as work' (Miller 1987, 190–191), in which objects are transformed, appropriated, loaded with social meaning and used to express social belonging. In these families, the process of consumption is enabled and limited by conceptions about how a proper Georgian orthodox life should be led. Therefore, reflecting on the relationship between economy and religion, the notion of a socio-cosmic field (see Hardenberg, this volume) in which economic and ritual actions are connected to corresponding values becomes a fruitful vantage point for the analysis of moral education in Georgian orthodox families. While the social field is constituted by action between men, the cosmic field concerns 'the relationships between men and non-men' (Hardenberg, this volume). The exchange between men and non-men plays a central part in the life of orthodox Georgian Christians, since daily life is structured by ritual obligations, such as prayer, church attendance and fasting. However, Georgian orthodox Christians also take part in exchanges between men: They pursue professional careers, participate in economic exchanges and lead social lives. Both forms of action are guided by their respective values, which may or may not be compatible, as this article attempts to show, and therefore determine the constitution of the socio-cosmic field.

Following Andre Gingrich (2005), Roland Hardenberg employs a distinction of 'foreclosure, acceptance and participation' when generalising about the interaction of externally imposed values in the context of globalisation

2 My fieldwork was conducted in a network of families, who called themselves truly religious. I speak of a network of families, because they all are connected either through their belonging to the same congregation, or because they send their children to the same schools. Almost all of the families I visited know each other quite well. Most Georgians would confirm their affiliation to the Georgian Orthodox Church, since being orthodox is widely considered to be an integral part of the Georgian national identity (Fuchslocher 2010; Liles 2012; Pelkmans 2006). Nevertheless, actual religious practice, as measured by church attendance, regular prayer and fasting is comparatively low. While 85% of Georgia's population belongs to the Georgian Orthodox Church, only 16% visit church once a week or more often. 73% rarely or never fast and only 49% pray once a week or more often (Charles 2010). These numbers confirm my interview partners' statements, who consider themselves as part of a small group of truly practicing Georgian orthodox Christians, in opposition to those Georgians who call themselves orthodox 'out of fashion'. They estimated their number of around 20% of the Georgian population.

and local socio-cosmic fields. In this article, I focus on this interaction of a socio-cosmic field (a network of Georgian orthodox families) with an external value (Western modernity), although I question in how far this value is rather appropriated by than imposed on the people in this field. I argue that in this context of Georgian orthodox families, participation in a Western modernity is only approved as long as it does not question values of Georgian orthodox Christianity.

According to this local view on modernity, the appropriation of a Western lifestyle is possible without the process of secularisation – this opens the analysis towards Shmuel Eisenstadt's concepts of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2000), which questions classical development theories and grants as much legitimacy to local conceptions of modernity as to their Western reference point. While conceptions of a Western modernity certainly play an important role in the local interpretation of what is perceived as 'modern' or 'progressive', other elements of what is perceived as 'Western lifestyle' are rigorously rejected, and a 'Georgian modernity' is preferred. However, this 'Georgian modernity' should not be understood as an alternative or parallel, existing in addition and distinct from a Western modernity. Rather, it can be seen as the product of an on-going negotiation in which the desire for participation in a Western lifestyle creates contradictions with certain moral values of the Georgian orthodox community.

In order to analyse this process of negotiation, I apply Joel Robbins' reception of Louis Dumont's theoretical work on values (Robbins 2009). Dumont developed a concept of hierarchically structured, 'ranked value-ideas' (Dumont 1986, 252). Following this scheme, I assume that the 'life with God' represents, in the words of Dumont, the 'paramount value' (Dumont 1986, 32). Values, and, predominantly, this paramount value, determine 'the relative importance of elements of a culture' (Robbins 2009, 65). This dominant value-idea structures the entire value system, and 'confines' lower value-ideas, which are less elaborated, to those contexts where they do not challenge the paramount value in any way (Robbins 2009, 65). Robbins adds the possibility of conflict and change to this model by connecting Dumont's concept of value hierarchies with Max Weber's ideas of 'value spheres' (Weber 1986, 537). These value spheres stand in conflict with each other, since they are all governed by their own law, or in other words, by their own values. The spheres are seen by Weber as self-consistent, so their respective most important value can be fully realised in them, without being limited by the values of other value spheres (Robbins 2009, 67). Thus, Robbins' reception of Dumont and Weber enables us to analyse in how far, for the community under study,

the desire of participating in a Western modernity is in conflict with the paramount value of a 'life with God'.

In other words, in this paper the negotiation of a local Georgian modernity, as mirrored by the moral education of young Georgian orthodox Christians, will be considered within the framework of a hierarchy of values, in which a paramount value ('life with God') provides relative importance to other elements of culture. This paramount value is challenged by subordinate values related to Western modernity. Thus, this system of values can be seen as a socio-cosmic field, in which actions are oriented towards and evaluated by cosmological – or, in this ethnographic context, quite specific, institutionalised religious – values in a network of Georgian orthodox families.

The 'Good' Life: Religion, Education and Consumption

During my fieldwork, I stayed with a Georgian orthodox family. The father, who earns his income as an accountant and businessman, lives together with his wife, who works as an art teacher at a private school, and his six children in a multi-family house in Tbilisi's old town. Their children, three boys and three girls in the age between seven months and seventeen years, visit a private school or a nearby private kindergarten, except for the youngest daughter, who is still taken care of by the mother at home. While most of the family life takes place in the living room and the attached kitchen – this is the place where the family gathers to eat, watch TV, play or study – the boys' room constitutes a place where remarkable frictions and contrasts in the family's daily life became visible.

This room measures approximately twelve square meters. It is a walk-through room, more a corridor than a secluded space, which is connected to the girls' room, the parents' bedroom and the living room. The boys' room contains a bunk bed for the two older boys, two desks, and several boxes full of toys for the younger children, a basketball basket where the boys train their shots, and – between the two desks – the family's *khat'ebis k'utkhe* (icon corner). This conglomerate of icons usually faces towards east and has a place in most Christian orthodox households. The family's icon corner comprises around thirty-five bigger and smaller, framed and unframed images of Christian orthodox saints. They are located above a small console cabinet, on which prayer books, life stories of saints and religious children's books are placed. Further books are stored in the drawers beneath. In addition, candles and souvenirs, which were brought from different churches and places of pilgrimage,

are kept in this corner. During Christmas time, another, much bigger icon was placed here. This icon is not owned by the family but belongs to the mother's congregation, and is passed on from family to family. The icon corner is a central place in this family, since the icons are not simply images, but 'residue, presences, of holy persons and holy power' (Eller 2015, 199), manifestations of the saints they represent, and connections to the realm of God. They are seen 'as person-like agents with whom the human agent can engage in a social exchange' (Nielsen 2011, 229), thus, a communication through prayer is possible. In the evening, the whole family gathers in this room and speaks a joint prayer, and also in the morning the family members pray individually in front of their saints.

Most of the families I visited arranged such an icon corner in their apartment. The remarkable aspect of the above described corner is, however, the way it is situated in its surroundings. To the left, there is a huge world map attached to the wall. Above this world map, just about half a meter next to some of the most important Georgian orthodox saints, a poster of a well-known football club is hung up, towering even the icons to its right. On the desk beneath these wall decorations, children toys accumulate to a colourful mess – Barbie dolls, a Hello-Kitty bag, a plastic doll house. On the floor in front of the console cabinet which contains beloved souvenirs and books: Lego toy cars and imported basketball shoes from the USA. On the right side a second desk is located. Here, maths and German textbooks pile up next to Georgian translations of Thomas Mann's 'Buddenbrooks' and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's 'The Gambler'. While taking a picture (*fig. 1*) of this scenery, I recognised the sounds of an American blockbuster emerging from the living room; in the girls' room, the nine-year-old daughter of the family practiced the violin.

This picture summarises the major theme I am concerned with in this article: The room with its multiple representations of Western modernity belongs to family that assigns an important place in their life to Georgian orthodox Christianity. This family does not retrieve from the modern world due to their religiousness, but rather strives for a lifestyle, which allows them to participate in a particular form of Western modernity. This is defined by the consumption of specific products, as it is indicated by American or European movies and TV series as well as certain websites on the internet. Simultaneously, the importance of education is emphasised by the parents – in terms of a substantial academic education at a private institution, which promotes foreign languages from an early age on as well as a broad classical education, which fosters the study of instruments, art and canonical works of world literature.



Fig. 1. One family's *khat'ebis k'utkhe* (Photo by author).

The striving for a lifestyle and material standards connected to 'the West' is visible in various parts of the world, even though the local interpretation might differ (Knauff 2000, 1–2). For this usage of the term modernity, it is generally irrelevant if the society we are talking about has reached some kind of progressive or advanced state, however this might be measured. Rather, it is crucial that the term modernity evokes certain notions: 'modernity can be defined as the images and institutions associated with Western-style progress and development in a contemporary world' (Knauff 2000, 18). These images and institutions do not have to be (geographically) western in a strict sense, it is sufficient that they are perceived as originating from the West. For example, in Georgia people consider certain institutions and forms of public culture as modern (*tanamedrove*) and progressive (*p'rogresuli*). These include an up-to-date style of clothing, music and the usage of certain electronics as well as political institutions and economic system, which are associated with Europe or the USA.

The wish to participate in something locally depicted as Western modernity is not unknown to the Georgian orthodox families whom I studied during my fieldwork. It became manifest in their consumption of certain products

and media, may it be a pair of shoes or pants of an fashionable brand of clothes, MP3-player, smartphones, movies, TV series, computer games or the act of eating out at a famous fast food chain. Especially the youth does not spare any effort this consumption might take. Particularly popular are collective orders from the USA, so the high shipping costs can be split. Information about the newest trends is collected online. Posters of European and American athletes decorate the boys' rooms' walls, while girls' rooms are plastered with images of American and British actors and musicians.

Another aspect of Western modernity, which is mostly mentioned by adults, consists in the positive evaluation of certain developments. The desire to join Western economic and political developments and become a part of the European Union is a controversial, yet often discussed issue in Georgia. However, the challenges posed by this process are often referred to the next generation. Young people should receive a good education in order to support the country's future economic and political development. It is clear that the desire to participate in a Western, European modernity looms large in Georgia's youth. At the same time, this modernity is perceived by many as containing dangers and risks and as posing a possible threat to Georgian society, especially its moral integrity.

Morality in Crisis

For most of my informants, morality (*zneoba*) represents more than the value-based behaviour of individual persons. According to them, a human being can act morally (*zneobrivi*) or immorally (*uzneo*). However, in their view these actions will not only decide the outcome of a given situation, but affect the 'Georgian morality' in total. For example, a young woman once complained to me that the older generation evaluates juvenile misconduct as damaging the whole Georgian morality. In this perspective, *zneoba* is not merely understood as a collection of rules, but is transcended to a 'Georgian mentality', which can be threatened by moral misconduct.

The so-called 'crisis of morality' (Kääriäinen 1997, 3) represents a recurring paradigm in recent literature on post-socialist transformation processes. The time after the collapse of the Soviet Union is often described as a phase of disorientation, in which common patterns lost their validity, while the population was simultaneously confronted with new value orientations and concepts of identity. The absence of a binding moral order reinforces the

experienced uncertainty due to political and economic instability and often serious depletion (Stephan 2010, 18–19, Hann 2002). My interview partners described this period as one of chaos and uncertainty. Many parents reported that this was the time, in which they discovered religion for themselves, and settled for a religious life. On the first glance, these biographies support a common argument in the scientific literature on post-socialist religious transformation processes, namely, the explanation of the ‘return of religion’ as recourse to pre-Soviet traditions due to a vacuum of values (Stephan 2010; Khalid 2007).³ This initial moral crisis, triggered by the crash of an ideological system that penetrated most parts of daily life, appeared to be averted, in the eyes of my informants, a long time ago. The real danger to Georgian *zneoba* was perceived from a different direction – as a threat from the ‘liberal’ West.

A father of five children explained to me, in the presence of his daughter, what an ‘immoral life’ meant to him:

‘For instance, to start a sexual life before marriage. For us, for me it’s immoral. Also if they are married and they have an affair. That’s also immoral [...]. We call this kind of sins mortal sins. Drinking or smoking cigarettes are not [mortal sins], they are all called sins, but they are not mortal sins. There are some mortal sins, which are a problem, really a problem. For instance if they [my children] would have an abortion. I can’t influence them when they grow up, but for me this would be a very huge problem. I might go crazy if I learn about this, because it’s a really big problem. These are mortal sins. This is such a big problem for their personal whole and it’s catastrophically for Christians. I don’t speak about being gay or something like this, save god we don’t have this kind of [problem] – of course we have few percentage here in Georgia, but currently at least it’s no problem, in future maybe it’s problem, and therefore it’s also mortal sin, it’s really mortal sin.’ (Father of five children, 43 years old, interview in English).

These issues were repeatedly mentioned in other interviews as well. In particular, sexual intercourse before marriage, adultery, homosexuality

³ As Mathijs Pelkmans shows in his ethnography on conversion processes in the Georgian region Adjara, one should not assume that pre-Soviet customs and traditions, including orthodox Christianity, re-emerged unchanged after 70 years of socialism. Rather, they were subject to ongoing political interferences, manipulations and usages, and were appropriated in Soviet as well as post-Soviet times (Pelkmans 2006).

or abortion were not only considered as immoral, but as deadly sins (*momak'vdinebeli tsodva*), and therefore as serious offences that would entail not only the exclusion from the congregation, but also serious problems within the families. In addition, my interview partners contrasted Western societies with the Georgian society by putting a special focus on hospitality as well as social coherence and family ties, with Western societies being characterised as 'cold', and lacking these strong forms of social commitment and closeness.

With the Patriarch's Christmas epistle of 7th January 2014,⁴ a discussion about practices such as artificial insemination, surrogacy and abortion, but also homosexuality has been initiated in Georgia. The Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II. condemns these practices as sins and as threat to the morality of the Georgian people, and particularly their family values. He argues that Georgia, being a part of Christian Europe, strives for integration into the EU, but this should not take place without considering the Georgian 'tradition and mentality' (*t'raditsia da azrovnebis ts'esi*). In his message, the Patriarch claims that the country's non-Christian minority fights against traditional beliefs, education and morality (*t'raditsiuli shekhedulebebis, aghzrdisa da zneobis ts'inaaghmdog*), and that the Georgian family is most heavily attacked by them. These statements led to sharp criticism in some parts of society, yet most of my informants could not share this criticism, but supported the Patriarch's resentment towards misguided tolerance from the West, which allegedly imposes a threat to Georgian moral integrity. Several parents expressed their fear of no longer being able to tell their children what is right and what is wrong, because under the influence of the West, orthodox Christianity might lose its moral authority in Georgia.

Hence, the desire for participation in a Western modernity does not imply a naive and exhaustive adoption of everything that seems to be 'Western' (Basu 2013, 401). Basu quotes Srinivas who, in his book 'Social Change in Modern India' (Srinivas 1966), describes the process of 'Westernisation' in India. To him, this concept captures a complex transformation process without taking the judgemental perspective of the term 'modernisation'. In his view, the term refers to the adoption of certain technologies, cultural practices and institutions, with different processes reinforcing or countering each other or developing independently (Srinivas 1966, 53). Therefore, it is not contradicting if the daily routine encompasses both the use of new

4 The complete epistle is available online in Georgian language (Patriarchate of Georgian 2016).

technologies and traditional or religious practices. Srinivas speaks in this context of ‘discreteness’ (Srinivas 1966, 57) between sectors. Thus, the adoption of individual elements does not have to be accompanied by the adoption of an entire cosmology. At this point it becomes apparent that the moral values of a society do not develop in isolation – as it is already apparent in Louis Dumont’s work – but are formed in the demarcation from and evaluation of others (Berger et al. 2010, xxxi).

It should be noted that a particularistic ‘Westernisation’ of individual spheres is possible, but it is always negotiated in the discourse between images of modernity and tradition. In the current debate within strictly Christian communities in Georgia this contrast seems particularly extreme, since the country’s general favourable policy towards the West goes hand in hand with ideas that some elements of what is considered ‘Western culture’ are mortal sins according to Christian norms.

A Life with God – Moral Education among Orthodox Families

Dumont’s concept of a ‘paramount values’, which structures all other values and thus the culture as a whole (Robbins 2009, 65–66), appears to be particularly fruitful for the analysis of the value system of a group in which a clear vision of a ‘proper life’ exists. The central element of such a straight, proper or right (*sts’ori*) life is a ‘life with God’, which was described to me in the following way:

‘What is our life, essentially? One second. The whole life. Life here in this country is just one second. But God gives you the chance to live a life with him. I am not an atheist. I believe in a life with God. I am orthodox, and we are the first. Unlike Catholics, Protestants, we are the first, because we follow the right path in life.’ (Father of six children, 50 years old, interview in Georgian).

When asked about the most fundamental ideas they would like to transmit to their children, parents listed various ‘traditional and religious values and principles’ (*t’raditsiuli da religiuri ghirebulebebi da p’rintsip’ebi*), which constitute the basis for a ‘proper life’. Ultimately, however, all these values subsume to a single principle, which determines both the current lifestyle and the purpose of their own and their children’s lives. In the first place was

always the 'life with God'. This can be understood as the one final goal of every Christian, who aims for an eternal afterlife in paradise with God, as is stated in the quote above. However, the term also refers to a life according to God's rules in the here and now, which represents the condition for an eternity with God. I argue, therefore, that the 'life with God' represents the paramount value within the Georgian orthodox community, which structures all other values, but also social practices and relationships. Georgian orthodox Christianity thus must become the 'way of life', since this paramount value influenced all elements of life.

This article puts the focus on the field of moral education in order to approach the negotiation of a Georgian modernity in the socio-cosmic field. Following Manja Stephan, I understand moral education as intended transmission of norms and values. Consequently, moral education pursues specific goals and is informed by distinct moral orientations (Stephan 2010, 25). Such a definition focuses precisely on the goals and moral orientations of the actors, and enables us to take a view on different perspectives on religion in society (Stephan 2010, 23). In addition, this definition centres on parents and teachers as the key actors in moral education. Any study in the field of the anthropology of moralities must question how much freedom of choice and creativity it grants to the individual in the decision-making process (Heintz 2009, 7–12). A number of studies have approached this question differently (Heintz 2009; Howell 1997; Fassin 2012; Zigon 2010). Stephan's understanding of moral education refers to Monica Heintz, who connects morality, as a 'set of principles and judgments based on cultural concepts and beliefs by which humans determine whether given actions are right or wrong' (Heintz 2009, 3) with social practice. Thus, she focuses on the negation of morality in society, rather than individual orientations and dilemmas (Stephan 2010, 30). This understanding of morality appears to be useful for the analysis of Georgian orthodox moral education, in which ideas about what is right and what is wrong are informed by Georgian orthodoxy, and the morality of a person is measured by its practical behaviour in society.

Education in Georgian orthodox families takes place at different levels. On the one hand, the transmission of religious and ritual knowledge plays an important role. Especially mothers engage in reading and praying with their children, and use different forms of religious educational books in order to teach prayers, life histories of saints and the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. This aspect is important since there is no strong tradition of Christian youth education such as Sunday schools in Georgian Orthodox Church (Schröder 2005, 171). This transmission of knowledge is understood as the basis of

orthodox upbringing. Crucial, however, is the moral education for becoming a ‘true Christian’, a process that includes much more than mere religious instructions. One is a Christian ‘with the heart’ (*gulit*); being Christian is perceived as an attitude towards life. Therefore, an orthodox Christian is characterised by a certain lifestyle. The Georgian word for ‘orthodox’ – *martmadidebluri* – implies, like the Greek roots of its English translation (*orthos*: right, true, straight; *doxa*: dual meaning of opinion and praise) a proper, correct belief and worshiping (*martali*: true; *madidebeli*: glorifying) (Harper 2016; Pizchelaury 2011). The focus is placed heavily on proper practices in worshipping, which is why daily religious practices are of special importance. This ‘proper, correct life’ is, according to my informants, characterised by two aspects. Firstly, it involves obeying religious prescriptions, such as fasting, as well as daily prayer, church attendance and confession. Secondly, the moral component of this ‘proper life’ is strongly emphasised.

Teaching certain values to children and raising them from early on as ‘moral human beings’ (*zneobrivi adamiani*) is considered to be fundamental. These essential values are in particular goodness/kindness (*sik’ete*), honesty/integrity (*p’at’iosneba*), respect (*p’at’ivistsema*), care for other humans (*zrunva*), helpfulness (*dakhmareba*) and calmness (*simshvide*). It is evident that all these values determine the social interaction between people, in particular within the family, which for many of my informants represents the second most important sphere of life, apart from church. The behaviour within the community is crucial for ‘moral human beings’. Therefore, each decision should take place against the background of these values:

‘Religion is the *ts’esrigi* (order) to your life. But not in a bad way, it is the guideline or frame.’ (Mother of four children, 28 years old, interview in English).

One of the adolescents put it even shorter when I asked about his way of decision making:

‘On every question of life, the answer can be found in the Bible. So I simply read the Bible.’ (Student of a Georgian orthodox school, 17 years old, interview in Georgian).

When it comes to teaching these values, parents are considered to be the most important example for children. Without setting a good example, it is not possible to convey these values to children:

'If you are living in the correct direction your children are looking at you and your children will be on your way and following your steps.'
(Mother of four children, 28 years old, interview in English).

Religion and Discipline: Rituals in Everyday Family Life

Everyday life in these Georgian orthodox families is structured by rituals. While some of these rituals are conducted within the family, some practices are carried out individually. Both, the collective as well as the individual rituals, are part of the daily duties of a Georgian orthodox person, and thus are often guided, or at least encouraged, by parents. The following part will exemplify the structuring character of these rituals, namely prayer, church attendance, as well as fasting and confession.

Prayer

The most important ritual in the everyday life of these families is prayer. In the 'Encyclopaedia of Christian Orthodox Christianity' the centrality of prayer is explained as follows: 'The striking metaphors – 'heaven in the heart', 'light of the mind', 'food for the soul', 'secret work of the heart', 'spiritual breathing', 'inner worship', 'standing before God' – richly suggest the meaning and value of personal concentrated prayer. Prayer's ultimate purpose is the transformation of daily life into a sacrament of the presence, power and holiness of God' (Stylianopoulos 2011, 455).

My informants describe the prayer as a moment in which they are completely with God and can trust him with all their life. Orthodox Christianity requires believers to pray seven times a day. While most of my informants mention this rule, many admit they are not able to meet this requirement, even though they would like to adhere to it.

'There are prayers you should recite seven times a day. At six o'clock in the morning, I almost never make it, because I oversleep. Then nine o'clock, twelve, and so on. And before sleeping unfortunately I can't – I'm just too lazy to do this sometimes, but I try to read the evening prayers, although they are much shorter. And then in the evening I usually read epistles.' (Mother of one child, 53 years old, interview in German).

Most of my interviewees say that they actually want to pray more often, but due to their circumstances or lack of discipline they are not able to do so. However, they all agree that at least the morning and evening prayer should always be recited.

'It is very difficult for crazy days, because morning starts from 'get up, get up, please!' and so on. But we try to pray in morning and evening, before we go to bed. On Saturday and Sunday we go to the service and it is like we are doing everything on this schedule. Saturday evening and Sunday morning is for this schedule only.' (Mother of four children, 28 years old, interview in English).

In these Georgian orthodox families, great emphasis is placed on the speaking of prayers. When joining the breakfast table, at first children are asked if they had already prayed. The younger children pray in the morning together with their mother. This way, they can slowly – *'nela-nela'* – learn the appropriate words. In one family, the evening prayer is always spoken by the mother together with their children. For this purpose, she gathers with her children in front of the icon corner. The girls put on their headscarves, and they read and recite from their prayer books while candles and incense are burning. In the morning, a small grace is spoken ahead of every meal. If the children are present, often one of them is invited to say the grace. The children are mostly proud and happy when they are allowed to do so. If one of the younger children is not able to say the words by heart on their own, it is assisted by the mother. Finally, the food on the table is blessed with the sign of the cross, which is marked with three fingers of the right hand. The younger children practice this usually only on their own plate, while everyone else performs the gesture on the entire table. Again, the mother emphasises that the child is just learning this practice, and it is considered normal that it still makes mistakes. During the prayer, all present persons should stand up next to the table. At the same time, however, other tasks can be performed, such as putting more food on the table, pouring tea or slicing more bread. Especially the children are often very impatient because they want to start eating. Most of my informants state that they usually pray together with their children, especially when younger children are present who have not yet learned the correct practice. Mostly, parents emphasise three elements when it comes to the question of how children learn religion: through discipline, through the example of the parents, and – most importantly – slowly and with much patience.

Church Attendance

Church attendance constitutes a point of contention in many of these families. This is a topic, which demands a great deal of discipline from adolescents, and a great deal of patience from parents. Service starts early Sunday morning and lasts, depending on the occasion, for about three to four hours. The previous day most families already take part in the evening prayer in church, which is performed in the afternoon on the day before service. Georgian Orthodox Christianity requires the congregation to stand during service, and the few benches on the walls are reserved for the elderly, for sick people or pregnant women. Both getting up in the morning on Sundays and the long period of standing inside the church lead to conflicts between parents and children. In particular, the teenagers in the families tend to oversleep repeatedly or refuse to get up in the morning. Parents' reactions vary from tantrums to resignation:

'Practical – ah. It is very difficult (his daughter, sitting next him, laughs). Again and again I remind them that it is time for Sunday service and the liturgy and – the small children, I call them and they come to me, but the older ones, it is difficult to influence them, and I just remind them. There is nothing I can do, but I remind them many times a day and sometimes it works.' (Father of five children, 43 years old, interview in English).

In some conversations parents admitted that this lack of discipline regarding church service constitutes a serious problem for the families. Which kind of behaviour within the church is expected of the children depends on the attended church as well as on the accompanying parent. In some churches, the percentage of attending children is very high since many families with five or more children are part of the congregation. On some days as many as thirty children take part in the service, many of them in infancy or early childhood. Here, the tolerance towards interference by the children is quite high. Many of the younger children sit on the benches, sleep or play there quietly. In other churches, more attention is demanded. A second church this family visited is located in the historic centre of Tbilisi. The audience fluctuates much stronger, and tourists visit this place frequently. At the same time only few children take part in this service. Short inattentiveness or slight restlessness on the side of the children was scolded immediately, since a different behaviour was expected.

Fasting and Confession

Fasting is another issue, which puts the discipline of Georgian orthodox children to the test. Orthodox Christians fast on Wednesdays and Fridays to commemorate the betrayal of Christ and his crucifixion. There are also four longer fasting periods per year, the longest in the time before Easter (Pizchelauri 2009, 61; Stylianopoulos 2011, 455). During my fieldwork, I was able to experience the fasting period before Christmas. During the fasting days, no animal meat and dairy, no alcohol and no oil are consumed. Depending on the holiday, there might be allowances for wine, oil and fish. In my host family, all family members fast, except for the two youngest children. With about six or seven years, the children are slowly introduced to this practice. Initially, they fast only one or two days per week or, during the longer fasting periods, a few days at a time, even though I heard different ideas about the necessity of fasting for children. Some parents claim that fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays is mandatory from the age of six, and only until the age of four children are not obliged to fast.

In a conversation about fasting practices one mother once again emphasised the importance of role models in parenting. She told me about the family of one of her acquaintances. The parents had left their child at home for some time during the fasting period. When they came home, they detected that the boy had eaten most of the sausages and the cheese. My interview partner did not put the blame on the child but on the parents, who tempted their son by having ‘prohibited’ foods at home during the fasting period. She told me that forcing children to anything is impossible, since the child would turn against you. Therefore, parents have to be good role models. For this reason, only vegan sweets are available at my host family’s house during fasting periods. Cheese and butter are still in stock, since the younger children use these products even during fasting, but the mother cooks only fasting dishes, which are to the children’s taste, so no frustration about fasting occurs – roasted potatoes and fried noodles being particularly popular.

Difficulties arise whenever the children are confronted outside the home with prohibited food, for example when visiting friends or attending a birthday party. Sometimes at such occasions, no food is served at all so that the children are not tempted. The easiest solution is to only visit families who are fasting as well. As a gift, small *samarkhvo*-chocolates or - waffles are brought. *markhva* is the Georgian word for fasting, and the vast variety of *samarkhvo*-products – especially of daily products such as mayonnaise, butter and chocolate – show the importance of fasting. Despite these alternatives, celebrations

and visits are often placed on non-fasting days. At Christmas, which also marks the end of the fasting period, the congregation celebrates with a large *supra* (Georgian feast), that is attended by the whole family.

Similar to fasting, children are gradually introduced to confession. Confession is a very personal matter, on which I have hardly received any statements. Nevertheless, I could observe confessions during the evening prayer in church. Confessions take place after evening prayers. The priest stands next to an analogon placed near the iconostasis, while his congregation patiently lines up and waits, so that, one after another, people can confess their sins in quiet conversation. Confessional boxes do not exist. Regular confessions, as well as fasting, are a prerequisite for receiving the Holy Communion (*ziareba*) during the Liturgy of the Faithful (*martalta lit'urgia*). However, this rule does not apply to children. Starting from baptism, children are allowed to take part in the full Divine Liturgy and even enjoy priority when lining up for receiving the Holy Communion. In the case of infants and toddlers the mixture of bread and wine is given by the priest while the parents hold the child in their arms.

It becomes apparent that religion plays an important role in the daily lives of these strictly religious families. The demand of a 'life with God' structures their whole life; it dictates the rhythm the family lives up to. This life requires a high degree of discipline, which can lead to conflicts within the family. Parents are well aware that only their personal exemplary behaviour can lead the children on the 'right way'. Nevertheless, they are also aware of the limitations, since religion is ultimately a personal decision for them:

'First, it [the right way] is very difficult to teach. But the first technique how you can teach them is your personal behaviour. If you speak and if you live like you speak. This is the first technique, which can be applied. And the second thing is to consider their current situation and current age and the current situation around the world and to isolate them in some way, not in any direction but in some direction to isolate them from the bad influences. I guess it's a very limited possibility to teach this but very effective. And you should know that every child and every person is a free person. If for instance my daughters personally don't understand these things [importance of religion], you can teach them. And you should try that she or he personally understands and personally starts (daughter: to find oneself) yes, and to think about it. Because if you influence them, they are at some age, after that you can't influence them anymore. You may spent lots of time without any success. This is it.' (Father of five children, 43 years old, interview in English).

Discipline and the Focus on a Proper Education

In all families I visited, education is seen as central asset and plays a major part in daily life. Almost all of my interview partners send their children to private schools, where they seek the foundation for their children's success in future. Often, children as well as parents aim for studying abroad, especially law or economics. For this reason, parents take intensive care of comprehensive language training. But even though many of the students are able to speak English or German fluently, none of them imagines a permanent future abroad. To migrate permanently is seen as a 'betrayal' of their own country. In fact, the knowledge acquired abroad should rather be used to improve the situation at home in Georgia. In general, parents were very keen to send their children to university, since this is seen as the only possibility to start a successful career. In order to secure the appropriate level of formal education, children received private tuition several times per week. Private tuition is a common practice in Georgia, which is used by all families who have the necessary financial resources. Therefore, the children's days are strictly organised. Most children and adolescents play sports regularly, such as basketball, dancing lessons in traditional Georgian folk dances or ballet, or learn a classical instrument, ideally flute, violin or piano. In addition to these scheduled activities, the children are always encouraged to work on their comprehensive education – to learn about art or read world literature – either the 'Buddenbrooks' by Thomas Mann or the works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's for adolescents, or Astrid Lindgren's children's stories for the younger children respectively. The children of most of the families attend private schools. For example, one such school put the focus on language education in German and Russian, and offered, in addition, a broad additional program of extracurricular activities, including chess lessons, swimming and a class on 'cultures of the world'. It is possible to understand this focus on comprehensive education as a legacy of the educational ideals of Soviet intelligentsia, which perceived itself as a 'role model in matters of education, culture and moral issues' (Oswald 2000, 287). At the same time, however, we need to consider that striving for monetary success and a career on the Georgian job market constitute an important incentive for education efforts within these Georgian orthodox families.

It thus comes as no surprise that religion plays an important role in this field of secular education. When asked about the 'benefits', which a child receives by an orthodox upbringing, many parents answer that daily religious practice will give children 'willpower' (*nebisqopa*) and 'discipline' (*ts'esrigi*),

skills that children are said to require in a world where they ‘can always have everything’:

‘Those who are religiously educated, are learning what is possible and what is impossible (prohibited), as in certain periods certain foods are not possible. They learn that they want to have this cake very much, but at this point they have to control their longing and they learn that it is possible, the cake will not be forbidden forever. But children who are not brought up religiously do not understand why it is not possible. I want it now and then I want it. I would now like ice cream and then I eat ice cream [...]. And the child who can sleep the whole week until twelve clock, until one a clock, it will not learn willpower (*nebisq’opa*).’ (Mother of six children, 40 years old, interview in Georgian).

Thus, according to this view, religion endows children and young people not only with a comprehensive concept of morality, teaching them ‘what is right and what is wrong’, but gives them additional strength of will and discipline, skills they need in order to achieve economic and material success in the future, but also to resist the threats of the modern West.

Conclusion

The teachers of the Georgian orthodox school which was described at the beginning of this article were aware that the ‘life with God’ is not always compatible with a ‘modern’ everyday life, so that conflicts arise which must be solved by their students:

‘How can you live in this world and not get into conflict with the upper world? And how can you live in that one without getting into conflict with this one? But the phrase I said before, that to be same time citizen of Georgia and citizen of heaven. On the first sight, they are totally different. And maybe for someone it is conflict, but we try to show that it is possible. If it is possible, it is reasonable to [do it]. This is the aim of this school.’ (Religious education teacher at a Georgian orthodox school, father of three children, 33 years old, interview in English).

For young people, these conflicts often appear to be very specific. For example, the school's dress code is one situation in which ideals of a modern lifestyle collide with the values of the children's religion. The search for a balance between the daily religious practices, the high demands by schools and other educational activities, and the desire of young people to self-determined time constitute a pervasive issue in Georgian orthodox families. Although I assume that the 'life with God' presents the paramount value within these families, I am aware that there are situations where this relationship between religious life and taking part in a Western modernity – if only for the moment – has to be negotiated. Not one of my interview partners has questioned the importance of religion in his or her life. Rather, people create spaces as a part of their religious daily lives, in which different values prevailed for a specific period.

Robbins notes that in the conventional interpretation, Dumont's theory of hierarchy is understood as a static model. Nevertheless, he also recognises the potential of this theory for analysing cultural change (Robbins 2009, 66; Robbins/Siikala 2014). He therefore proposes to join Dumont's model with Max Weber's concept of 'value spheres' (Robbins 2009, 66). The notion of different but coexistent spheres, which are independently dominated by their own order and thus their own paramount value (Robbins 2009, 67), seems appealing for describing the lives of these Georgian orthodox families. One could assume a sphere of religious life – a cosmic field, which is oriented towards the communication with God and which mainly encompasses the private lives of families, and furthermore an economic sphere – a social field in which careers are pursued, and the individual's success is measured by his material possessions on a 'modern' scale. The 'boys' room' described at the beginning of this article, in which the poster of an international football team is displayed on par with the family's icons, but is nevertheless spatially clearly separated from these, suggests such a duality.

However, there is no duality of equivalent spheres. A focus on conflicts and negotiations in children's religious upbringings and parenting strategies rather indicates that the 'life with God' constitutes the paramount value in these families. People create non-religious moments, which allow adolescents, but also adults, individual achievements and consumption in terms of a Western modernity. Consequently, some of the children visited secular private schools, which assure maximum chances of professional success. Other students attended Christian private schools, but once they leave the

school grounds break with the school's Georgian orthodox dress code in order to live their understanding of a modern appearance. Parents have to refrain from participating in the evening prayer in order to attend business appointments. And adolescents leave earlier from Sunday service since they have to participate in important exams or a sport competition.

None of these moments, however, questions the ultimate value of a 'life with God'. The desire of participating in a Western modernity can only be fulfilled as far as it does not threaten this paramount value. The mixing of conflicting values with no clear hierarchy, as Robbins describes them for 'hybrid' societies, which are in the process of cultural change (Robbins/Siikala 2014, 126), may therefore not (yet) be applicable, at least in these families. In the ethnographic context of moral education in these strictly religious Georgian orthodox families, the reaction towards the external value of Western modernity are both characterised by participation and foreclosure: Participation is only so far possible as it does not question the paramount value, which structures not only the cosmic, but also the social field. For Dumont, this 'encompassment' is one of the main characteristics in the ranked configuration of value-ideas (Dumont 1986, 252). Since this value derives from a cosmic order, or, as Hardenberg puts it, a 'relationship between men and non-men', the 'cosmic field encompasses the social field' – the cosmic order dominates the socio-cosmic field. The full implementation of what people perceive as 'Western lifestyle' can therefore not constitute the goal of these Georgian orthodox families, since this lifestyle includes elements, which violate Georgian morality and, thus, a righteous life with God.

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CORA GÄBEL

The Value of Ritual Feasting

Religious and Economic Considerations during the Renewal of the Deities and the Chariot Festival (Puri, Odisha)¹

Keywords: ritual economy, temple economy, resources, value, Hindu festival, ritual

‘Puri, being a pilgrim centre, is dependant [sic] on the arrival of pilgrims for its economic stability. [...] The economic relevance of the tourists and pilgrims for Puri is a crucial one – no pilgrim ... no Puri. [...] Every effort should also be made to keep the city clean and attractive in order that our guests leave with a good impression. Visitor management is the order of the day, since the economy of Puri depends on maintaining their good will’ (Patnaik 1999, 24–26).

Introduction

‘Religion costs a lot’, a representative of the Odisha State Government told me one Sunday afternoon at the end of our conversation. Without religion, people could save a lot of money and governments could save even more. This statement becomes comprehensible, when one reads that the State of Odisha spent almost two hundred million euros on infrastructural projects to prepare for a

¹ Besides the literature used in the present paper, I mainly draw on data acquired during my nine months of fieldwork in 2015. Many people contributed to my insights and understandings in various ways. I am deeply grateful to every single person, not least the numerous nameless pilgrims and devotees. For the information used in this article, I am much obliged to Narasingha Pati Mohapatra, Ramchandra Das Mohapatra, Durga Prasad Das Mohapatra, Nagraj Das Mohapatra, Siddheswar Mohapatra, Purnachandra Mohapatra, Kirti Ranjan Mohanty, Bhaskar Mishra, G. Mathi Vathanan, Arabinda Routray, the shopkeepers of Puri, particularly Purnabasa Nayak and Tafazul Khan, and my research assistant Sushree Sangeeta Sarap.

religious festival, the Renewal of the Deities (*Nabakalebara*²). The high amount is especially surprising, since Odisha is among the poorest states of India. The last Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) ranked Odisha as sixth poorest state in India.³

This ‘Renewal of the Deities’ is celebrated by various temples in the East Indian state of Odisha. Outstandingly famous is the celebration of one temple in Puri, which has a strong impact on the whole state. The rest of India does not stay unaffected by this event either. Therefore, even Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, took interest in the infrastructural projects in preparation of *Nabakalebara* and promised 50 *crore* (500 million) rupees to improve the conditions of the state in view of the festival (BJP Attacks Govt 2015, 5; Modi Reviews Rail 2015, 3). Process, content, and meaning of the ritual have been elaborately dealt with before (e.g., Das Mohapatra 2015; Hardenberg 1998; Marglin 1985, 263–281; Mishra 2014; Tripathi 1978b). The present article, therefore, focuses not on the ritual itself, but rather on the incidents and happenings occurring because of the ritual and the relationships emerging from it. Nevertheless, as initiator of these events and relationships, the ritual still takes a central position in the following paper. For the actual concentration of my study, production, distribution and re-distribution, and consumption play a major role. But the festival also reverses these dimensions so that for my examination destruction, accumulation, and non-consumption or abstinence are further central concepts. Not all of these can be included here, but they are crucial for the establishment, recommencement, and maintenance of the discussed relationships. I am further concerned with the values emerging from the relationships and the connection of these values with the mentioned economic concepts and their reversal.

During the festival, people from the whole stratum of Hindu (and in some cases non-Hindu) society come into contact with each other. Not solely

2 On terms of Indian origin: Personal names, group designations (such as socio-cultural groups), place names, and names of festivals in Indian languages have been treated like names in any other language and are accordingly written capitalised. On transliteration: I have used a simplified transliteration, which is premised upon the indological conventions of scientific transcription, but I have left out the diacritics for purposes of readability. Instead of the standard transliteration of the Anusvara as *m* (*m̐*) I have used the nasal sound as it is pronounced (leaving out the diacritics). The Candrabindu is correspondingly not transliterated as an *m* (*m̐*) but as the proper nasal sound. The fricatives *ṣ* and *ś* are both transliterated as *sh*, although pronounced as *s*. I have made one exception to these rules, transliterating the ligature *kṣ* as *ky* (instead of *ksh*) to highlight the local pronunciation. Nevertheless, titles of newspaper articles in Odia have been transliterated according to indological conventions.

3 See MPI’s Country Briefing 2015, s. v. India, 5–6, last updated 2015, <http://www.dataforall.org/dashboard/ophi/index.php/mpi/country_briefings> (last access 31.08.2015).

Brahmans are involved in the ritual; also Kyatriyas, represented by the king, and Shudras have to participate to make the renewal successful. The most significant position in this ritual is remarkably filled by those Shudra temple servants named *Daita*, who are supposed to be of tribal origin, but are tremendously elevated during the festival. One group of Brahmans called *Pati* holds the same elevated position, but does not enter the limelight in the same way. High- and low-caste, rich and poor devotees from Puri, Odisha, India, and abroad try to get as close as possible during the whole ritual process. Policemen and soldiers maintain law and order. The government gets involved on an administrative and infrastructural level. Last, but not least, the central actors, the deities themselves, form another element in the relationships maintained during the festival. These groups are connected with each other in a close meshed network, sometimes directly, sometimes via other groups, who are serving as intermediaries. Although a direct approach of the deities by devotees is possible, they often engage the assistance of ritual specialists during this event. The schemes of the state connect the pilgrims with the deities on a more mundane level via road or railway. While the above mentioned group of Shudra and Brahman priests, called *Daitapati*, is responsible for most services rendered towards the deities during the ritual, in some instances they do need the mediation of other ritual specialists.

These are only some examples of relationships formed during and because of *Nabakalebara*. In the following, not all of them can be elaborated. The next chapter initially gives a short outline of the festival and its context. This includes the temple city, Puri, the deities participating in the ritual, Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan,⁴ and the devotees. Subsequently, two chapters deal with the actions and events of two selected groups involved in the process. On the one hand, I have decided on one group of temple servants, the *Daitapati*, who are mainly responsible for and deeply involved in the ritual process. On the other hand, I have chosen the State Government of Odisha, which is, being a part of the secular state of India, supposed to be dissociated from religion. As a secular actor operating in a religious environment, the state takes a seemingly contradictory position. Before concluding this article, I analyse the relationships and the actions resulting from these

4 In my transliterations, I usually follow the pure Odia pronunciation, which pronounces the short *a* at the end of a word as in *Nabakalebara*. During my fieldwork, though, the pronunciation of the final *a* of some words had vanished, probably due to Hindi influences, so that I decided to rather follow the local usage instead of the grammar books. Accordingly, I do not write Jagannatha and Sudarshana, but Jagannath and Sudarshan. Balabhadra, on the other hand, kept the final short *a*, probably due to reasons of easier pronunciation.

relationships. For this purpose, I am using Roland Hardenberg's theory of socio-cosmic fields (Hardenberg, this volume).

Making Gods: The Renewal of the Deities

Nabakalebara, literally the 'new body',⁵ refers to a rare festival celebrated in Puri, a pilgrimage town at the sea shore of Odisha. Puri is particularly famous for its presiding deity Jagannath, the 'Lord of the World',⁶ who is regarded as ninth *avatar* (incarnation) of Vishnu. For others, Jagannath himself is the creator of everything, including the incarnations of Vishnu (Hardenberg 1998, 368; Tripathi 1978a, 484). He does not only accept everyone as he or she is – his distinctive appearance is further supposed to symbolise the tolerant position of Hindu religions (Tripathi 1978a, 490). During this festival, the wooden images of Jagannath, his siblings Balabhadra and Subhadra, and his weapon Sudarshan are renewed. In 2015, after an interval of nineteen years, the Renewal of the Deities was again celebrated by the Jagannath Mandir, the Jagannath Temple.⁷ The renewal finally culminates in the Chariot Festival (*Ratha Yatra*): The images of the deities are publicly displayed during an annual vacation. This constitutes a central event for the city as well as for Hindu devotees. *Ratha Yatra* is celebrated annually, but is particularly auspicious in the year of *Nabakalebara*. Therefore, millions of pilgrims set out for Puri to see the renewed deities.

Most pilgrims visit Puri in winter and summer season, with a climax for *Ratha Yatra*. They come to Puri since centuries to worship in the Jagannath Temple. Makhan Jha describes 'Jagannath Puri [as] one of the most sacred places of pilgrimage in India' (Jha 1985, 56). According to Andrew Sterling, the roads to Puri are full of human bones in a radius of fifty miles. These bones are the remnants of the many pilgrims who died on the roads around Puri (Sterling 1846, 140). As a central pilgrimage place for centuries, Puri is annually visited by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims (Glasenapp 1928, 97), Behura estimates seven to eight hundred thousand pilgrims each year (Behura

5 *Nabakalebara* is derived from Sanskrit *nava* – 'new', and *kalevara* – 'body'.

6 Jagannath is a Sanskrit *sandhi* (joining of two or more words, which can lead to phonological changes) formed with the words *jagat* – 'world, earth', and *nath* – 'lord'.

7 For a list of *Nabakalebara* festivals since 1575, including exceptions to this time interval, see: Das Mohapatra 2015, 15; Mishra 2014, 51.



Fig. 1. Balabhadra's chariot amidst thousands of devotees during *Ratha Yatra* 2015 (Photo by author).

1985, 108). Frédérique Apffel Marglin, writing at the same time, presumes indistinct hundreds of thousands of pilgrims exclusively for the Chariot Festival (Marglin 1985, 243).

For 2015, the people I talked to in Puri estimated between 25 and 50 *lakhs* (2.5 to 5 million) of pilgrims who would be attracted by the completely renewed deities. In the end, official sources spoke of 58 *lakhs* (5.8 million) of visitors for the thirteen days of *Ratha Yatra* (CM 2015, 3). When the aforementioned writers recorded their pilgrim numbers, they probably could not imagine the masses of pilgrims coming to Puri for that year's Chariot Festival (fig. 1). Modern transportation systems enable these crowds of devotees to set out for Puri. But before that, mass media reports and advertisements call the pilgrims' and tourists' attention to the festival. Ritually, the whole festival stretched over a period of four months in 2015, beginning at March 29 with the *Banajaga Yatra* (Festival of the Forest Sacrifice or Journey to the Forest

Sacrifice) and ending on July 30 with *Niladri Bije*, the last day of *Ratha Yatra*.⁸ The preparations for the festival by the Shri Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), the Puri Municipality, and the Odisha State Government have begun months, in some cases even years, before the ritual beginning.

***Daitapati*: Members of a Divine Family**

Ritually responsible for the deities' renewal are the *Daita* and the *Pati*, two groups of temple servants (*sebayat* or *sebaka*) united in a temple association, the *Daitapati Nijog*. Since they are acting as one group during *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*, they are regularly referred to as *Daitapati*. While the *Daita* are of legendary tribal origin and considered to be Shudras (Dash 1998, 43–70; Hardenberg 1998, 46–55; Marglin 1985, 245–247; Tripathi 1978b, 224), the *Pati* as Brahmans are located on the other side of the socio-religious caste system. Nevertheless, during *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*, Brahmans and Shudras work together as the family members of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra.

The *Daita* are divided into three groups, the *bada* (boundary): the *Bada Bada* (big boundary) for Balabhadra, the *Majhi Bada* (middle boundary) for Subhadra, and the *Mahaprabhunka Bada* (great lord's boundary) for Jagannath. Each *bada* is in charge of the according deity and has its own head during *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*, the *Bada Grahi* (leader of the boundary). The *Pati Mahapatra* of the Brahman *Pati* is held as the *Bada Grahi* of Sudarshan. His family members are free to stay in all *bada*, since they have ritual responsibilities for every deity. The *Dalapati* is the team leader of the *Daitapati* and assisted by the *Upadalapati* – or four *Upadalapati* in 2015. They are accompanied by the *Bishvabasu*, the symbolic king of the jungle, who is chosen among the *Daita*. His authority goes back to the legendary tribal chief, who is supposed to be the ancestor of the *Daita* and was worshipping Jagannath in his appearance as Nilamadhava during the deity's stay in the woods.⁹

⁸ On the last day of the Chariot Festival, *Niladri Bije*, the deities return to their throne inside the Jagannath Temple.

⁹ Before Jagannath was installed in the temple in Puri, he was worshipped as Nilamadhava, a blue stone, by the Bishvabasu's tribe in the jungle (Dash 1998, 39; Hardenberg 1998, 284). Also, see below.

The *Pati* select among them the *Bidyapati*,¹⁰ the legendary Brahman who found Nilamadhaba in the jungle and fathered the first *Daita* with Bishvabasu's daughter Lalita (Das Mohapatra 2015, 77–81; Hardenberg 1998, 46–68).

Their status as family members does not only make the *Daitapati* responsible for the deities, but also provides them with certain privileges. The Renewal of the Deities begins with the *Banajaga Yatra*, the 'Festival of the Forest Sacrifice' or the 'Journey to the Forest Sacrifice'. During this initial period, only they are able to find suitable trees, which are called *daru* (divine neem wood). Their search is initiated by dreams, which are sent to them by Goddess Mangala. These *daru* are used to carve the new *murtti* (images) of the deities. At the respective *daru* places, some of the rituals have to be done by *Daita* and *Pati*, not least the ceremonial felling strokes of the tree. After the tree is felled and cut into logs, they finally accompany each *daru* to Puri.

The next crucial responsibilities await them during the annual Period of the Deities' Illness, *Anabasara*, and particularly during *Maha Anabasara* (Great Period of Illness) in *Nabakalebara* years. As relatives, they take care of the deities, worship them, feed them, and give them medicine. Although the images are carved by the carpenters (*Badhei* or *Maharana*), the exact measurements for the *murtti* are said to be with the *Daitapati*. According to the *Daitapati's* claims, the measurements are kept secret with the oldest members of the community so that they have to instruct the *Badhei* in their creational work. Nevertheless, it could be supposed that the *Maharana* memorise the measurements.

Fundamental in the *Nabakalebara* rituals is *Brahma Paribarttan*, the exchange of the divine soul (*brahma* or *brahma padartha*) which has to be transferred from the old *murtti* to the new ones. Again, this is a duty which stays inside the family and is done by the *Bada Grahi*. In 2015, a delay in the ritual was caused by discussions among the *Daitapati* inside the temple. Weeks of dismay in the population, the media, and politics followed, with two *Daita* suspended from their *seba* (service, duty) by the temple administration (Mohapatra 2015c, 1).

Although the media was talking about a major delay in the ritual, one informant pointed out that the rituals take at least ten to twelve hours. He suggested the media exaggerated the delay for attention and thereby money. This delay in the exchange, or rather the *Daitapati's* dispute leading to it,

¹⁰ While at least in 1996 the *Pati Mahapatra* also held the position of *Bidyapati* (Hardenberg 1998, 67), an additional family member was selected as *Bidyapati* in 2015. Tripathi does not even mention the *Bidyapati* for the ritual in 1969, but, for example, describes the *Bidyapati's* ritual felling of the tree with a golden axe done by the *Pati Mahapatra* (Tripathi 1978b, 248).

shows another aspect of family life, at least according to statements made to the media by the *Bada Grahi* of Jagannath: The *Daitapati* are one family and one house and as in every other family, there are disagreements inside theirs as well (Mohanty 2015, 8).

Following *Brahma Paribarttan*, *Daita* and *Pati* observe the period of mourning prescribed for Hindus when a close family member dies. The renewal of the images requires the burial of the old *murtti*. For *Daitapati*, this is equivalent to a death of the deities and consequently initiates an inauspicious time. This practice, though, is not fully acknowledged by other inhabitants of Puri and, at least in some instances, the rest of Odisha. They cite scriptures relating to *Nabakalebara*, which would not mention this practice at all. Some people indicated *Daitapati* would follow these rituals to maintain their media presence and enhance their public appearance. This would finally lead to more donations directed to individual *Daitapati* and the *Daitapati Nijog*.

During the mourning period, *Daita* and *Pati* whitewash their houses and follow a restricted diet including the consumption of *mahaprasad*, which is considered to be exceptionally pure (Züfle, this volume). Nobody can enter their homes, not even their own sisters. After ten days, on *Dashaha*, the men and boys of the family go to the Markandeya Pond about one kilometre north-west from the Jagannath Mandir. At the pond, barbers shave their hair and beard and cut their nails. The women and girls of the family cut their nails at home. Nevertheless, in 2015 not all of them got their heads shaved. Some only got a haircut and their beards shaved. Others, on the other hand, also got their axillary hair shaved (fig. 2). According to one informant, merely the *Bada Grahi* have to shave their heads, while others could choose freely. This choice is usually made according to the extent of *bhakti* (devotion) the respective person feels.

Daita and *Pati* then take a ritual bath in the pond to purify themselves from the pollution occurring after a death. They discard their clothes and *tulsi mala*, prayer beads made from the wood of the Indian basil plant *tulsi*, both of which are collected by the barbers. Afterwards, the *Daitapati* clothe themselves in new, yellow and white coloured *dhoti* (piece of cloth of four and a half meters, wrapped around the waist) with accompanying *gamucha* (a cloth worn on the shoulder, wrapped around the head, or used as a towel), which are provided by the temple administration.

On the thirteenth day after the exchange of the deities' life essence, *Trayodashaha*, *Daitapati* feed devotees. In 2015, the *Daitapati Nijog* planned to feed 250,000 pilgrims with *mahaprasad* on the *Bada Danda* (Grand Road) in front of the temple. For this purpose, they asked devotees to donate money. Some



Fig. 2. Shaving of *Daitapati* at Markandeya Pond on *Dashaha* (Photo by author).

individuals asked devotees to donate directly to the *Daitapati Nijog* instead of the temple administration. Money given to the administration would not be used, at least not completely, for the feeding on *Trayodashaha*. Nevertheless, the temple administration also collected money. When the feeding on the *Bada Danda* was cancelled due to opposition from many people, the temple administration returned the money to the donators. Among the opposing people were not least the shopkeepers, whose businesses would be affected by the feast. But also the *Chatisha Nijog*¹¹ opposed the plan, since they regarded the feeding of *mahaprasad* on the *Bada Danda* as a desecration of the sacred food. The president of the *Chatisha Nijog* further pointed out that the distribution has no religious sanction. Since *Daita* and *Pati* did not want to completely forego the feeding, the *Daitapati Nijog* relocated the feast inside the temple premises. Due to the short-term change of arrangements, the manifold

11 The *Chatisha Nijog*, literally thirty-six associations, is the temple association heading the thirty-six associations of *sebayat* who perform a *seba* for the temple.

opposition, and even disputes with the temple cooks, the planned distribution of *mahaprasad* was uncertain until the morning of *Trayodashaha*. The *Nijog* was finally able to feed 8,000 devotees in the inner complex of the Jagannath Mandir ('Brahma Parivartan' 2015, 5; Mahāprabhuṅka 2015, 12; Mobile Phone 2015, 7; Trayodaśāha mahotsaba 2015, 9). Although the president of the *Chatisha Nijog* argued against the distribution with 'religious sanction', devotees have been fed at least during the last two *Nabakalebara* celebrations. In 1977, 12,000 devotees were fed inside the temple and 30,000 in 1996 (Das Mohapatra 2015, 99–100), a considerably higher number than in 2015.

After their illness, the deities go to their summer residence, Gundica Ghar,¹² on huge chariots. This is the time of *Ratha Yatra*, the sojourn of the deities, which has been enthusiastically anticipated by devotees from all over the world. During this festival, *Daita* and *Pati* accompany their divine family members on their journey to Gundica Ghar and back again to Jagannath Mandir. The *Daitapati*, with the help of other temple servants, bring the deities to their respective chariots in a movement called *pahandi*,¹³ including some utensils they would need during their voyage such as dresses and ornaments.

As soon as Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan have taken their seats on the *ratha* (chariots), *Daita* and *Pati* are staying with them. In earlier years, they assisted devotees to get a close *darshan*¹⁴ of the deities on the chariots. These services were mostly restricted to those who were able and/or willing to pay high '*dakyina*'. A *dakyina* is a kind of fee or donation to priests for their services to devotees and is traditionally supposed to be freely determined by the devotees themselves,¹⁵ according to their abilities and wishes.¹⁶ It is commonly told among Hindus that the given *dakyina* is usually considered as inadequate by the priests who frequently ask for more. For a simple ritual in the temple, devotees pay between 50 and 100 rupees, for life cycle rituals (*samskar*) like a marriage, the first feeding of a child, or a death

12 Literally Gundica House, also referred to as Gundica Mandir, Gundica Temple.

13 *Pahandi* is a kind of wavering motion in which the deities are pulled from the front and pushed from the back and thereby move slowly forward, wavering from front to back. Every time the images are moved from one place to another, they do so in this wavering mode.

14 *Darshan* literally means seeing or sight, usually used for the encounter with deities or people of high religious significance. The encounter centres on a reciprocal sight, which is critical to Hindu worship.

15 This *dakyina* is different from the ritual fee, which is paid in advance and is usually used for the management of the respective temple. These fees are publicly displayed in many Hindu temples and are thereby fixed fees.

16 Also cf. Raheja 1988; Parry 1986.

ritual between 101 and 5001¹⁷ rupees. During *Ratha Yatra*, the *dakyina* demands were rocketing high, with people said to pay between 100 and 10,000 rupees for *darshan* on the chariots.¹⁸

In 2015, the temple administration prohibited anybody except the involved persons from entering the chariots, which led to high financial losses for the priests. The administration took that decision, because the *ratha* were so crowded in previous years that devotees were not able to see the deities anymore (Mohapatra 2015b, 4). At least during *pahandi*, the *Daita* could compensate some of the losses: they did not let the deities take the straight way to or from the chariot, but carried them to the devotees at the barricades. For a short touch of the deities, a single devotee could easily pay 500 rupees.¹⁹

The Government: Administration of a Religious Festival

For festivals like *Nabakalebara* and particularly *Ratha Yatra*, when millions of pilgrims are expected, a number of preparations and arrangements need to be made. As one of the poorest states of India, road, rail, and air connectivity of Odisha is constrained. Puri, although a pilgrimage town for centuries, is not used to so many visitors and tourists at the same time, many of whom needed to stay overnight. But these are only topics directly related to the central needs of pilgrims: getting to and staying, where the deities are. Politicians and state officials were further concerned with topics such as security, traffic, and health.

Although these schemes mostly eased the pilgrims' visit, in the end, other actors also benefited from them – not least the state itself due to increased tourism. Hotels and lodges rented out more rooms, restaurants and food stalls sold more dishes and snacks (locally referred to as tiffin). Shops on the approximately three-kilometre-long *Bada Danda* (Grand Road), the road between Jagannath Mandir and Gundica Ghar, and shops at the beach side, the Marine Drive Road, where most pilgrims stay, had, depending on the products on sale, increased profits during *Ratha Yatra* time, selling ritual objects, small images of the deities, jewellery, and clothes. This applied

17 Instead of giving an even sum on occasions considered to be of high importance, Hindus usually give an additional rupee to make the amount auspicious.

18 Since 2014, the temple administration prohibits devotees to enter the chariots. Although people still went on the *ratha* in 2014, the ban was strictly followed in 2015. Therefore, it is difficult to gather exact data and I mainly have to rely on estimates made by the inhabitants of Puri. A few years ago, yet, one inhabitant gave auspicious 108 rupees as *dakyina*.

19 When I discussed this with another *Daitapati* informant, he judged the amount appropriate.

particularly to those sellers on the footpath and at the beach who displayed their products in temporary stalls or on blankets on the floor.

Ratha Yatra is in the middle of the low season, in the rainy season, which follows the similarly unprofitable summer season. The festival, which initiates the whole festival process with a public bath of the deities, *Snana Purnnima*, is at the end of the hot summer. Both seasons are marked by low profits, with one shopkeeper exaggerating it to having no income at all. During the most crowded days of the rituals, their shops even had to stay closed. The days before and after the rituals, nevertheless, show a comparably high income for some of the shops, with approximately two to three times more sales as usual in these seasons. Similarly, one seller of a locally famous snack at the beach also said to have a doubled to tripled profit during *Ratha Yatra*.

Officials and representatives on various different levels of the government participated in preparation, implementation, and management of *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*. The Odisha State Government took over responsibilities for various projects in the state. Some of these projects were initiated years before anybody thought about the next *Nabakalebara*, but were suffering from slow progress. With the festival approaching, state officials took advantage of the opportunity to accelerate their projects.

The Finance Department of the state applied in its report for the financial year 2015–16 the renewal theme of *Nabakalebara* to the mundane development of the state. ‘The symbolism associated with *Nabakalebar* holds greater significance to the process of renewing and revitalising the ever-flowing eternal spirit of Odisha and its people’ (Government of Odisha 2015, 4–5, original italics): the ‘renewal’ and ‘revitalization’ of Odisha sounds more important than the ritual itself. To promote this scheme, the department stated that ‘the Government machinery would be fully involved’, providing a ‘full-fledged budget’ for this *Nabakalebara* (Government of Odisha 2015, 5).

Because the government attributes centrality to Jagannath for Odias and globality²⁰ to *Ratha Yatra*, it intended to guarantee a successful festival. It implemented various projects ‘for infrastructure development and strengthening of existing services and amenities’ in and around Puri (Government of Odisha 2015, 27). In its report, the Finance Department mentioned five areas for which it provided a budget: 20 *crore* (200 million) rupees for *Nabakalebara* (this also included regular expenditures of the temple), 5 *crore* (50 million) rupees for other Jagannath Temples in Odisha, 3 *crore* (30 million)

²⁰ *Ratha Yatra* is globally celebrated in various cities. Nevertheless, I suggest the government speaks of the international interest in the festival with visitors from all over the world.

rupees for a Tourism Police, 40 *lakh* (4 million) rupees for free transportation from the newly built Malatipatpur Bus Stand, approximately eight kilometres from the Jagannath Mandir, to Puri during the festival, and 67 *crore* (670 million) rupees to ensure an uninterrupted power supply in Puri during the festival (Government of Odisha 2015, 28). Summed up, these amounts provided 954 million rupees or, depending on the exchange rate, approximately 14 million euros.

The official *Nabakalebara* homepage of the Odisha State Government lists 184 projects which were initiated in preparation for the festival. Ten state departments were involved in the development of the state for *Nabakalebara*, each department with several projects.²¹ The Finance Department of the government calculated 12,538,259,763 rupees as total budget for these projects. This translated to averagely 184,386,173 euros in 2015. Although the government labelled the projects as ‘*Nabakalebara* Projects’, most of the projects permanently improve the infrastructural condition of the state of Odisha.²²

Additionally, the central government in Delhi included the *Nabakalebara* festival in its ‘Prasad Scheme’ which is supposed to propel India’s tourism by promoting pilgrimage sites. This step is part of a more extensive strategy ‘to give a new international tourism identity to Odisha’s rich culture and heritage’, as Union Tourism Minister Mahesh Sharma is cited. For this Pan-Odishan goal, other funds have also been released, but mostly in sight of *Nabakalebara*. Summed up, the central government says to have provided 140 *crore* (1.4 billion) rupees (Centre Sanctions 2015). In mid-May 2015, nevertheless, the government had still not transferred the money to the government in Odisha (BJP Attacks Govt 2015, 5).

The Housing and Urban Development Department of the Odisha State Government, for example, was in charge of sanitation, solid and liquid waste, public health, cleaning, and drainage and sewage. The work of the department began in 2012 with the identification of necessary projects. This included the provision of drinking water during *Ratha Yatra*. The department estimated

21 Overview, cf. official homepage, last updated 2015, <<http://nabakalebara.gov.in/projects/projects>> (last access 28.08.2015). 1. Commerce and Transport (5 projects, targeted total costs of projects 3,657,400,000 rupees); 2. Energy (15 projects, 3,338,099,600 rupees); 3. Fisheries and Animal Resources Development (1 project, 19,500,000 rupees); 4. Health and Family Welfare (59 projects, 658,171,000 rupees); 5. Home (18 projects, 275,533,000 rupees); 6. Housing and Urban Development (16 projects, 1,228,179,465 rupees); 7. Information Technology (1 project, 2,904,698 rupees); 8. Tourism and Culture (4 projects, 80,976,000 rupees); 9. Water Resources (14 projects, 367,040,000 rupees); 10. Works (51 projects, 2,910,456,000 rupees).

22 Official homepage, last updated 2015, <<http://nabakalebara.gov.in/projects/projects>> (last access 28.08.2015).

a requirement of 30 million litres per day to meet the needs of the pilgrims. For this purpose, temporary water tanks were installed at various places in Puri and regularly refilled by water tankers continuously traversing the city. Running pipelines with approximately 350 taps were permanently installed on both sides of the *Bada Danda*. But the most lasting water project was the construction of elevated water storage reserve tanks which started early 2013.

The project for the disposal of liquid waste, on the other hand, already started in 2008 as a regular project. For official projects, the government usually issues an invitation to tender. The tender is then commissioned to the company which offers the lowest priced conditions for good quality. This tender for the liquid waste project failed three times so that it was delayed for years. Puri initially had no ample solution for the disposal of its liquid waste, which poses as a permanent threat to the inhabitants' health. The necessity of this project particularly entered the public awareness during *Banajaga Yatra*, some months before *Ratha Yatra*, when jaundice cases were reported in Puri. Officials and the media assumed that this outbreak happened because polluted water entered the city's drinking water pipelines. With *Nabakalebara*



Fig. 3. An open sewage drain opposite the north-eastern wall of the Jagannath Mandir (Photo by author).

approaching, the work was propelled (fig. 3). Such an occurrence had to be prevented during *Ratha Yatra*, when millions of people would live in very close proximity. Previously, only thirty percent of the project was completed. Due to the festival and the pressure arising from it, the sewage plant could be finished. Nevertheless, the connection of every single household would take more time and will be finished in the future.

All *Nabakalebara* projects were scheduled to be finished before the beginning of the festival, particularly before *Ratha Yatra* (Government of Odisha 2015, 28). The newspapers were filled with articles discussing the projects. Most of the articles

were complaining the slow progress, especially with *Ratha Yatra* approaching. Scheduled dates for completion of the projects were repeatedly postponed (BJP Attacks Govt 2015, 5; Projects Slow 2015, 3; Slow Work 2015, 3). People in Puri, but also many politicians of the opposition, accused the State Government and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik of negligence and lacking interest in the projects (Cong Cries 2015, 2).

In the previous chapters, I described two groups of actors who have a considerable impact on a successful execution of *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*. In the following two chapters, I will analyse these actors and their interactions with other actors. First, I will elaborate the familial relationships between *Daitapati* and the deities mentioned above. The ritual events and the value of the *Daitapati* during *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra* evolve from or centre on this relationship. The interactions of the different actors occur in various contexts and constellations so that I will finally interpret my data using Hardenberg's theory of socio-cosmic fields.

***Nabakalebara*: Networking with Deities**

As already mentioned, the *Daita* and the *Pati* are the family members of the deities. The familial bonds of the *Daita* are particularly emphasised during the festival, when they take on a new family name: *Daitapati* (not to be confused with the term *Daitapati* as group designation). Some *Daita* also use this name as a title, for example on their visiting cards, throughout the year. During the ritual process, they introduce themselves with this name instead of their official surname. This shared name increases their relationship with each other, but is particularly a symbol to outsiders. Not least, because this is not a name, anyone else can bear: it exclusively describes those, who are the deities' relatives. *Pati*, though, never refer to themselves as *Daitapati*. The *Daita* are the offspring of a Brahman (*Pati*) and a tribal woman (*Daita*). The *Pati*, on the other hand, are the offspring of two Brahmans and, strictly speaking, cannot use this title – they do not have *Daita* blood in their veins.

The unusual relationship between *Daita* and *Pati*, Shudras (sometimes regarded as tribal people) and Brahmans, is maintained by their *seba* (service, duty) for the deities or, depending on the perspective, produced by the deities themselves. But *Daitapati* are not only kin to the deities. Brahmans and Shudras are further agnatically related to each other. The usage of the title *Daitapati* by *Daita* highlights this relationship with the *Pati*. This relationship according to legend dates back to Jagannath's, or rather Nilamadhaba's,

time in the jungle and the encounter between Bishvabasu, the tribal king of the jungle, and Bidyapati, the younger brother of Indradyumna's *purohit*, a Brahman.

A very long time ago, Indradyumna sent Bidyapati out to find Nilamadhaba so the king could install the deity in Puri and worship him in the temple there. Bidyapati finally arrived in Bishvabasu's dominion and learned about Nilamadhaba. Bishvabasu worshipped the deity deep inside the jungle on a mountain called Nilakandara Parvata, fed him, played with him, and put him to bed. Due to his position as first devotee of Jagannath, he is regarded as direct relative of the deity. Since Bidyapati was not allowed to see Nilamadhaba, he stayed with the tribal people. The exact events leading to it vary with the version of the story, but Bidyapati finally married Lalita, the daughter of the tribal chief. Bidyapati was already married to a Brahman woman before. Their descendants are the Brahman *Pati*. The descendants of Bidyapati and the tribal Lalita are the *Daita* – the ancestral reason, why *Daita* are also considered to be tribal people. The shared fatherhood makes *Daita* and *Pati* brothers.²³

During *Banajaga Yatra*, some of the legendary proceedings are re-enacted. The deity (nowadays the deities) is searched in the woods. The search is once more headed by the Bidyapati. The Bishvabasu accompanies him, since the Bidyapati and the search party enter into the Bishvabasu's realm, the wild and potentially dangerous jungle. The team, people from the city, needs the Bishvabasu's authority to succeed in this remote space. As in the legendary beginning, the gods have to be rebuilt, or produced, and this can exclusively be arranged by the family members of the deities.

The *Daitapati* are entrusted with a very sensitive responsibility during *Nabakalebara*. The deities in the temple in Puri are about to die. But this cannot happen; the devotees fully rely on Jagannath's, Balabhadra's, Subhadra's, and Sudarshan's presence on their jewelled lion throne (*ratnasinghasana*) in the Jagannath Mandir. Without their beloved deities, the people would lack essential blessings, which are freely distributed by the deities. This lack may endanger the devotees' well-being, their prosperity, and even their lives. Therefore, the *Daitapati* stride into the 'wilderness',²⁴ searching appropriate

²³ For versions of the Indradyumna legend, cf. Acharyya n. d., 21–22; Hardenberg 1998, 423–425; Hunter 1877, 43–46; Jha 1978, 26–27; Kulke 1979, 36–37; Marglin 1985, 245; Mishra 1984, 23–25; Panda 1954, 11–14; Sterling 1846, 130–133.

²⁴ Originally, this wilderness may have been a deep, uninhabited jungle as the designation *bana* (jungle) suggests. Nowadays, it is a symbol for places outside the city, but usually in proximity to villages, temples, and streets.

replacements so that the divine rule in Puri will continue without disruption. The fears of the people about such a discontinuity strongly surfaced after *Brahma Paribarttan* and the ritual delay. With repeated strikes (*band*), the people paralysed the everyday life in Puri, in some instances even in the whole of Odisha (24ru band 2015, 9; BJP Protest 2015, 4; BJP 2015, 2; Saffron Leaders 2015, 3; Under Fire 2015, 1).

The Socio-Cosmic Field of *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*

Nabakalebara as such serves as a facilitator of relationships and can consequently be considered as a resource²⁵. To understand these complex relationships, Hardenberg's theory of socio-cosmic fields offers a framework for analysis (Hardenberg, this volume). Due to the *Nabakalebara* rituals, social and cosmic relationships are not solely created, rejuvenated, and maintained. The festival further combines these social and cosmic relationships as I will demonstrate subsequently.

For the recreation of the deities, old connections have to be strengthened; new ones have to be built. *Daita* and *Pati* have to work together, but they also need the assistance of others such as Vedic Brahmins,²⁶ the Deula Karana (temple scribe), or the police. Religiously more important, they are renewing their relationship with the deities. They are getting closer to the deities than anybody else, even the carpenters – the wooden structures are merely skeletons. Furthermore, the *Badhei* work under the guidance of the *Daitapati*, who are the sole caretakers of the exact measurements, at least from the *Daitapati's* point of view. Until the structures are transformed by the *Bada Grahi's* work during *Brahma Paribarttan*, they are not full deities, although they do have a divine quality. From that moment onwards, only *Daita* and *Pati* can finish the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan by applying seven layers consisting of different materials, forming them into the *murti* known to the devotees (Das Mohapatra 2015, 65–67; Hardenberg 1998, 389–397). Nevertheless, the final transformation into Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan takes place during *Netrotsaba*, the painting of the pupils by a Brahmin *sebaka*.

25 Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, 16–20, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 23.09.2015).

26 This group of Brahmins is different from the *Pati*.

Similarly, the *Daitapati* remove the layers from the old images, taking away the deities' familiar form, before they can bury them in *Koili Baikuntha*, the inner garden of the Jagannath Mandir. This disfigurement of the old images is essential. Their form has to be destroyed and the old *murtti* need to be buried before the new images are finished and installed on their throne. The production of the new *murtti*, the new deities, cannot happen without the destruction of the old gods.

The relationship between *Daitapati* and the deities can be described with Hardenberg's cosmic field. Due to their distinctive position, the *Daitapati* are responsible for the de-deification and burial of the old *murtti*. The old images cannot simply be discarded. The wooden structures have to be separated from the outer layers and the *brahma padartha* has to be removed. The thus reduced forms lose their divine appearances and their divine essence, in this manner being de-deified – or destroyed. Only *Pati* and *Daita* can transform the newly built wooden structures into the renewed deities. They produce the new images, which are so desperately needed by the deities' devotees. The deities freely distribute their blessings to devotees, but they cannot do so without a proper appearance. Without this creation by the *Daita* and the *Pati*, devotees cannot take *darshan* and consume the blessings of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan.

In exchange for their life- and form-giving work, *Daita* and *Pati* are granted an extraordinary, elevated position in the worship of the deities. They are as close to the deities as nobody else can be, although just for one lunar month every year or two lunar months in *Nabakalebara* years. They even see them in their reduced forms without the seven layers. This brings them into a position which is highly valued by devotees. As divine family members and exceptional ritual specialists, they are sought out for various services such as the above mentioned close *darshan* during *Ratha Yatra* or *prasad* from the *daru*. These services are usually rendered against a *dakyina*. Besides, the *Daitapati* are also worshipped themselves, at least like highly accomplished religious personalities, often like deities. Accordingly, *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra* as resources produce not only new deities. They further produce sanctified persons.

Then again many rumours about venality of at least some *Daita* also spread among the people, foregrounding another economic concept: accumulation. At the day of felling the *daru* of Jagannath, people said that the *Bada Grahi* of Jagannath got eight *crore* (80 million) rupees for the selection of this particular *daru*. It did not go unnoticed that the tree fell into the south-eastern direction

which is regarded as a bad omen. This, at least according to the rumours, was not a single case of venality, merely an exceptionally voracious one.

Daita and *Pati* gain their value for devotees due to their multi-dimensional relationship with the deities. No one else maintains such a close relationship with Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan as they do. For pilgrims, *Daitapati* establish their connection with the deities. They ease the devotees' access to the deities' blessings in the form of *darshan* or *prasad*. Therefore, they are rewarded with *dakyina*, which often transcend the *dakyina* given to priests at more common occasions.

In their highly elevated positions, devotees also seek out the *Daitapati* themselves so that they get the blessings of the deities' servants. In this relationship between deities, *Daitapati*, and devotees, a social dimension enters the cosmic field: *darshan* and *prasad* cannot necessarily be consumed freely. Devotees receive them against a 'voluntary' *dakyina* over which ritual specialists and pilgrims bargain as they may about mundane products on a bazar. These relationships between *Daitapati* and devotees mirror Hardenberg's first variant of the socio-cosmic field.

The Odisha State Government usually operates in a social field. As shown above, the state is a vital factor for the larger proceedings during *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*. Infrastructural projects generally serve the purpose to improve the life of the state's inhabitants. This finally has a positive effect on the government. Healthier people can work more, earn more money, and can therefore spend more money. This leads to a higher income through taxes. Better connectivity of and inside the state leads to increased tourism and again to more taxes. In addition, it has to be considered that people, who are satisfied with their government's work, will probably re-elect the same parties, confirming them in their office.

In the case of *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*, on the other hand, the lines cannot be drawn so clearly. The State of Odisha still seeks to pursue its own objective. But for the festivals, another dimension enters their considerations: religion. The government permanently improves the state's socio-economic condition and gains corresponding advantages in various forms such as the above mentioned taxes and re-elections. But the chosen point in time has been determined by the ritual.

Devotees and pilgrims directly benefit from these projects. For a successful festival, or a positive enactment in the cosmic field, the state therefore has to implement projects in the social field. The amplified number of trains and better roads ease the visitors' journey to Puri. Temporary, free of cost

accommodations built by the state did not only raise the number of accommodation facilities, but also let underprivileged devotees stay in Puri for *Ratha Yatra*. This means that the implemented projects also change the cosmic field, enabling virtually everybody to have *darshan* of the deities.

More pilgrims bring higher *dakyina* for ritual specialists and more revenues for businessmen. But since most of the projects have a lasting impact on the state's infrastructure, all inhabitants, particularly in and around Puri, enjoy an improved quality of life. Beyond that, the people of Puri and Odisha understood the successful execution of the projects as an expression of the government's, in particular of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's, interest in the festival. As mentioned above, many interpreted the repeated delays in the projects as disrespect towards the deities and their devotees.

In these instances, as in the activities executed as '*Nabakalebara* Projects', the state, operating mainly in the social field, and the cosmic field of the ritual renewal overlapped, displaying a socio-cosmic field of the second variant. Yet, the state is the non-cosmic actor in this case and not in fact a social one, although it is functioning in the social field. The state produces, re-distributes, and invests. The state is part of the social field, since its representatives have been elected by the people of the social field and represent them. But as a more abstract entity, the state is not a dimension explicitly covered by Hardenberg's theory, which encompasses people and non-human beings. Therefore, I would rather like to talk of a cosmic state field to highlight the state's role in this religious context.²⁷

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, I cited Sunil Kumar Patnaik who points out the dependency of Puri upon tourists. When his article with this quotation was published, the author of these lines was working for the Odisha Tourism Service, knowing of the significance of pilgrims for the economy of a city. He accordingly highlights the importance of the pilgrims' expenditures for Puri's economy, condensing it to a simple equation: 'no pilgrim ... no Puri' (Patnaik 1999, 26). The profitability of the pilgrim business is yet a known one since centuries, particularly pertaining to Puri (e.g., Gardner Cassels 1988).

²⁷ At this point, I would like to thank Roland Hardenberg for his suggestions.

The Odisha State Government therefore only follows neatly in its predecessors' footprints. It no longer imposes a pilgrim tax, collected from every pilgrim entering the city. They choose other means to benefit from the religious sentiments of the people – even though the state had to invest a considerable amount into infrastructural projects first. On a quantifiable level, this involves taxes gained through various expenditures of devotees, pilgrims, and tourists such as accommodation, food, and purchases. The festival may further add an intangible value, when the government is confirmed in its office during the next elections (in the end, leading again to a palpable value). The dimension of power unmistakably emerged every time when a failure appeared. After the delay of the *Brahma Paribarttan* ritual and after every postponement of infrastructural projects, voices in the media severely criticised the government; some even demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. These voices usually belonged to politicians of the opposition who tried to gain political mileage, but ironically accused the Chief Minister and his party of the same (BJP Seeks Removal 2015, 2; CM 2015, 3; Cong Cries 2015, 2; Mohapatra 2015a, 3).

Although the criticising voices were already audible during the process of the infrastructural works in and around Puri, they could no longer be ignored after the *Brahma Paribarttan* incidence. This critique was not solely displayed by the media. As illustrated above, people felt personally affronted and expressed their resentment visibly. The exchange of the deities' souls is a sensitive and dangerous act and has to be performed thoroughly. It is, after all, about the life of the deities, on whose well-being and benevolence every human being depends. That the Chief Minister did not take thorough care of the preparatory projects in the social field was bad enough. But that the government could not prevent the delay amounted to a mistake perceived as a sin. This 'sin' took place in the cosmic field; it could therefore be argued that the objecting majority ascribes a higher value to the cosmic field. The people's valuation in these fields confronts the state, who is acting in the cosmic state field, with a difficult question. Shall the government satisfy the expectations in the social field or in the seemingly higher valued cosmic field?

Daita and *Pati*, on the other hand, follow completely different purposes. They point out their hereditary *seba* for the deities, which they fulfil lovingly and proudly. Without their services, Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan cannot return to the *ratnasinghasana* inside the temple after the deities' illness. In *Nabakalebara* years, they are responsible for the whole recreation of the images; in other years, they take care of the deities' recovery.

They restore the deities to their throne so that the devotees can see them again to take *darshan*.

Devotees and pilgrims have an entirely different view on *Daitapati*, particularly on the *Daita*. Although they accept the essential, creational duty of these servants and therefore show them the proper respect, they are also critical. During the ritual process, people emphasised the heavy gold, which most of the *Daitapati* were wearing in form of earrings, necklaces, and rings. They were talking about high donations and *dakyina* which were directly going into the pockets of the *sebaka*. Additionally, devotees were speaking about expensive (golden) jewellery and cars given to the ritual specialists as gifts. Depending on the point of view (also among the devotees), these gifts were given sincerely out of devotion or with the expectance of some reciprocation – like the selection of a *daru* at a certain place. In either case, the ritual specialists accumulate these assets given for various purposes.

The critique of the people directed towards the *Daitapati* is similar to that towards the state. Here again, behaviour in the cosmic field is valued differently to that in the social one. Greed and overcharging are not reputable characteristics, whether in the social or in the cosmic field. During *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*, *Daitapati* and devotees are moving in the cosmic field. The display of the fruits of this self-interested behaviour is not favoured in the social field, in the cosmic field it gets intolerable. The cosmic field is obviously not perceived as an appropriate space for profit-oriented considerations.

It may depend on the perspective, but the persons and institutions involved in *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra* participate in the production, distribution, and consumption of various values. The Government of Odisha may have its main interest in the infrastructural development of the state, in social and economic values, but at the same time, it facilitates the religious values created during the festivals. *Daita* and *Pati* may gain a fundamental amount of money, assets, and ‘fame’, as people named it (even when speaking Odia, they used this English expression), but they actually did generate the religious values connected to the reappearance of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan. And whatever the perception of the *Daitapati* by devotees, devotees were also said to have a high amount of selfishness, only staying in contact with the ritual specialists as long as they could expect to gain something like *darshan* or *prasad*.

As shown above, these relationships and events take place in diverse directions and contexts. To illustrate these, I have applied Hardenberg’s socio-cosmic fields. Although I merely discussed a section of the relationships

maintained during *Nabakalebara* and *Ratha Yatra*, almost every variation of these fields could be located in the course of the festival. But being a religious ritual, a purely social field could not be expected. Even when state government officials made their socio-economic decisions for their infrastructural projects, they did not do so without considering the religious – or cosmic – dimension. In the end, the focal point of each and every action was the rebirth of highly valued deities: Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra, and Sudarshan.

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The two Faces of *Mahaprasad*¹ Ritual and Business in the Kitchen of Sri Jagannath

Keywords: Temple economy, Jagannath Tradition, resource, divine food, value

‘As we cross the main entrance on the east and ascend the flight of steps leading to the main temple, we find on the left-hand side, a vast kitchen area of the temple. Some tourists rightly observe that on account of this kitchen, the Puri temple may be described as the biggest hotel of the world. It can feed even one lakh persons with only two to three hours’ notice. The method of preparation is most hygienic and the traditional process of preparation of food for so many people in so short a time, takes many by surprise’ (Official Website of Sri Jagannath Temple²).

Introduction

In this article I will show what implications the preparation of divine food in the kitchen of the Jagannath Temple in Puri (Odisha, India) has for an understanding of ritual economies and the role of resources.³ I will reflect

¹ All expressions of Indian origin are shown in italics except for names (person, gods, places and festivals). On transliteration: I have used a simplified transliteration by leaving out the diacritics for purposes of readability. My transliterations present the pure Odia pronunciation by writing the short *a* at the end of a word. However the local usage of the prominent terms Jagannath, Sudarshan and (*maha*)*prasad* has changed and in most of my conversation the final *a* was not used any more by the informants. The way of representing the local pronunciation reflects my own experience in the field.

² <<http://jagannath.nic.in/?q=node/81>> (last access 11.07.2016).

³ Here I refer to the shared working definition of resource mentioned by the SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES, that understands ‘resources’ as the tangible and intangible means by which actors ‘create, sustain or alter social relations, units, or identities’, see Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, 17, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 23.09.2015).

on Hardenberg's theoretical approach of socio-cosmic fields by looking at the relationship between particular social networks, the respective values they are connected with, and how these values define and demarcate different complexes of everyday practices in the two kitchens.

As indicated in the above quote, the Sri Jagannath Temple is famous for the enormous quantity of *mahaprasad*, i.e. divine food (*maha* – big or great; *prasad* – sacred share or grace; *mahaprasad* – great grace) that is produced and distributed as well as sold and consumed every day in and around the temple. In one of the biggest temple kitchens in the world, an entire array of dishes is produced inside the kitchen areas of the temple for two reasons: firstly, for constantly supplying food (*bhoga*) to the gods (Rösel 1980, 98); and secondly, for meeting the needs of thousands of devotees who come to receive the auspicious sight (*darshan*) of the deities. This requires a highly elaborate system of daily rituals and procedures that are meticulously organised by specified groups of temple servitors. Profane food, by being offered to the gods, is transformed into a holy food item. Over the centuries the unique varieties of *mahaprasad* have acquired fame and the priests of the Jagannath Temple claim that nowhere else in India does such an elaborate and detailed practice of producing divine food exist.

Mahaprasad is one of the main reasons for people to visit the temple. The quantity of visitors of the Sri Jagannath Temple oscillates between approximately 15,000 and 35,000 people every day (see *fig. 1*).⁴ It is believed that by consuming the auspicious food, bad actions (*karma*) will be reduced and in the moment of death a person can attain salvation (*moksha*).

The whole temple kitchen is completely forbidden for women. Furthermore, non-Hindus are forced to remain outside the Sri Jagannath Temple in order to avoid pollution of the space, the actors, and the food. As a female German anthropologist I therefore depended on information given to me by local assistants and from trustworthy informants who I interviewed. Most data presented in this article is based on interviews with male cooks and other temple priests, as well as with people in and around Puri, who have expert knowledge about the topic.⁵ The current available publications contain hardly any detailed information about the organisation and structure of work inside the kitchen.

4 On very special occasions, like the *ratha yatra* (chariot festival) up to five Million devotees witness the annual festival and receive *darshana* – the auspicious sight of the deities (see also Cora Gäbel, this volume).

5 Cf. Hardenberg (2009) on doing blind ethnography without participation in his description of his fieldwork in Puri about the rituals of the kings' palace.



Fig. 1. In front of the main entrance of the Sri Jagannath Temple
(Photo by author).

The temple grounds and buildings are divided into different areas. To each of these, different rules of purity apply. These rules define who can enter which areas and prescribes the appropriate behaviour for each area. The kitchen is divided into the *kotha bhoga ghara* or 'house for the daily fixed offerings' and the *rosoi ghara* or 'cooking house'.⁶ The former is a rather exclusive place that can only be entered by those who possess an inherited right of access: a hereditary claim called *pali*. Food cooked in this part of the kitchen is used only for feeding the gods and for distribution among the servitors. The second part of the kitchen can also be entered by those who belong to the community of cooks but do not have a *pali*. From this part of the kitchen, the cooked food, after being offered to the deities, goes for sale on the market.

The general public is not aware of this division of the temple kitchen into two separate spheres of action. In public and academic discourse, the ritual aspect of *mahaprasad* is usually emphasised, while the selling of the food

⁶ The whole kitchen is divided into different rooms, some of which belong to monasteries while others are only used to prepare certain dishes for specific festivals. The *supakaras* (the people who belong to the family of the cooks) are authorised to enter all these rooms. Except for the *kotha bhoga* kitchen to which access is limited. By highlighting the division into two kitchens I want to emphasise the distinctiveness of both spaces in terms of use and valuation.

items on the market points to a commercial side of *mahaprasad* that is rarely written or talked about.⁷ In my view, however, the process of production, distribution, and consumption of *mahaprasad* is a business as well as a ritual and therefore both aspects of *mahaprasad* have to be considered.

As Hardenberg in his approach emphasises, the different spheres of action studied under the label of ‘ritual economy’ are ‘two aspects of a whole’ or ‘two sides of a coin’ (Hardenberg, this volume). He asks what both spheres have in common and what distinguishes or separates them and suggests for us to consider ‘actions, types of relations and values implied by these two analytical levels’ (Hardenberg, this volume). The cooks themselves differentiate two kinds of action, business and ritual, and therefore value two spheres of action. Taking Hardenberg’s ideas into account, I hereby present my data in order to understand how the temple cooks value and conceptualise their actions: When do they distinguish commercial from ritual actions, when do they unite them? What is the logic behind this separation?

This approach sheds light on aspects of the interrelatedness between values, practices, and socio-cosmic relationships. I analyse which role specific constellations of relationships as well as community as a value plays for *mahaprasad*. Further, I concentrate on the value of *mahaprasad* itself. What exactly is the value of *mahaprasad* and how is it embedded in the cosmological and social realms? For answering these questions, I analyse the different practices of provisioning and exchange of *mahaprasad* and examine how these practices are embedded in valued relationships.

***Mahaprasad* and its Community**

The servitors (*sebayats*) of the Sri Jagannath Temple take care of the presiding deities in an elaborated fashion by performing services (*seba*) or fulfilling an obligation (*khatani*) (Cort/Mishra 2012, 42). They bath, enrobe, feed, entertain, and protect the gods almost twenty-four hours a day. All these activities are routinized and constitute as well as maintain the daily practices of the temple. One particular group of *sebayats* fulfils one specific duty. The servitors, who

7 Jacob Rösel (1980) wrote about a division into three categories of stoves within the kitchen; stoves that are first used for producing *kotha bhoga*, second to make *mahaprasad* for the monasteries and third for the production of public *bhoga*. Thus, he also briefly mentions a ritual as well as a commercial practice and use of the divine food (Rösel 1980, 180–182). However, neither does he clearly refer to the difference in the use of these kitchens, nor does he mention rules regarding access to and behaviour in these different parts of the kitchen.

are responsible for the preparation and cooking of *mahaprasad*, are called *supakaras* or nowadays *suaras*.

The groups are differentiated into endogamous castes (*jatis*) whose members derive their identity from narratives describing their origin, status and occupational specialisation (cf. Werth 1996, 8; Tambiah 1973, 196). Narratives told by the different groups of temple servitors are quite similar and often tell about some ancestors who were selected by a king to take care of one specific duty for the gods. According to these narratives, Anangabhima Deba II receives a divine inspiration in a dream, in which Jagannath commands him to act in this way. The service for Jagannath is thus directly linked to hereditary and social bonds. By emphasising their origin my informants often referred to the temple chronicles named *Madala Panji*,⁸ in which a particularly famous narrative is preserved. This source tells about King Anangabhima Deba II., who completed the building of the present temple in the year 1230, settled Lord Jagannath in the sanctum on the platform *ratnasinghasan*, and engaged 36 Nijogs (associations) to serve Lord Jagannath (ORP Ms 48 *Madala Panji*, 20–25)⁹. For the servitors, this royal appointment by the representative of god is most honourable. To perform this *seba* to the deities of the temple is the first and highest duty a *sebayat* has to fulfil.

The four main deities in the sanctum of the temple are always positioned side by side in the same manner; from left to right first Balabhadra, then Subhadra and Jagannath, and last Sudarshan is placed. Balabhadra is the elder brother of Jagannath, and Subhadra is the younger sister. According to Ray (1998) Jagannath represents the absolute unity of all the three forms together. Sudarshan, the wooden log that stands to the left of Jagannath, is the fourth accompanying part of the Jagannath-triad. He is considered to be a disc, the weapon of Vishnu (Ray 1998, 238–239) which has the power of eliminating demons (Mishra/Misra 2005, 177). In the front row, also on the platform of

8 Special priests, the temple scribe *deula karana*, responsible for the historical remembrance, wrote these temple chronicles. The historical accuracy of this source hereby is questionable. It can be stated, that the chronicles were rewritten and reinterpreted in order to portrait a king in a certain way (see Kulke 1978). For this reason, different versions exist (personal conversation with Pratihari). Some of these documents are top secret and even the copy I used and that was translated into English by the Odisha Research Project in 1980 was collected under extremely difficult circumstances (personal conversation with Roland Hardenberg). The translated version I am working with includes three versions of *Madala Panji* and therefore give a basic idea about the existing variations.

9 Unpublished manuscript, translations compiled within the Orissa Research Project going on from 1971 till 1976 and carried out by scholars from the universities of Heidelberg and Freiburg. Available with special authorization in the Orissa Research Project Archive in the library of the South Asia Institut at the University of Heidelberg.

these main deities, three smaller images are arranged in the sanctum. Laksmi and Visvadhatri (Saraswati), the two wives of Jagannath are represented by two small silver images and placed to the right and left of Jagannaths feet. The statue of Nilamadhava III in front of Sudarshan, is a wooden replica of Jagannath. According to legend he was worshipped by a tribe in the jungle before the construction of the temple. His presence is a sign for the tribal origin of the Jagannata tradition. These seven gods together are said to represent the cosmic realm called the 'seven fold'.

Pali is the hereditary principle that regulates the most important services in the temple. This concept involves different aspects:

- 1) It means duty, the duty to fulfil one's service in the right way.
- 2) It refers to the way a person got its *pali*, i.e. as an inheritance, through Jagannath's calling. My informants always emphasise that a service is not their own property, but a duty that was given to them by their ancestors, who again had received it from Jagannath himself.
- 3) It derives from a common history and connects the present with the past. The common history and origin, the cooks refer to reproduces the religious tradition by continuing the duty of service.
- 4) It is understood as daily routine; a principle that structures everyday work. More precisely, one's *pali* includes the number of days a person has to work during a month or a year.

A father's *pali* can only be given to one of his sons and typically all male family members are involved in the temple business. Only very few servitors inhabit a *pali* for 365 days. Therefore, a man is usually not able to support a family with the money earned from this work. On average, a person has 1 to 4 *palis* a month. Just a few years ago, a payment in the form of cash currency (500 rupees per day) by the temple administration was established for those who have a *pali*. This amount was recently increased by the Temple Administration to a sum of 1000 rupees. In addition, the cooks preparing the *kotha bhoga* receive their traditional compensation in form of a share of the *bhoga*. After being offered to the deities this *kotha bhoga* continues to be distributed among the servitors who were engaged in the food preparation on that particular day. All the other servitors who perform their *seba* in the temple earn money through business with pilgrims: as cooks, tour guides, priests blessing the devotees, etc. However, these *sebas* too are inherited in the patriline. Only those who know the practices of cooking, inviting, and feeding the gods are able to offer *bhoga*. Both aspects – inheritance and occupational knowledge – are linked to each other.

To have a *pali* is highly valued as it is associated with tradition, inheritance, place and history, with a daily service in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen of the Lord Jagannath, and with belonging to a community. Hence, the value of a *pali* structures on one hand the relationship between god and humans, which is accounted for in local narratives, and on the other hand the value of *pali* defines the relationships in the social field, i.e. between people. Together these socio-cosmic relationships seem to constitute the main basis for the valuation of work in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen.

Daily Routine in the Two Kitchens of Lord Jagannath

A manifold menu is prepared in the temple kitchen during the day, which is offered as morning refreshment (*gopala ballava bhoga*), morning meal (*sakala dhopa*), public offering (*bhoga mandapa bhoga*), afternoon meal (*madhyahna dhopa*), evening meal (*sandhya dhopa*), and evening refreshment (*badasinghar dhopa*). Except for the morning refreshment and the public offering, all the meals are prepared in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen and are offered in the inner sanctum of the temple. In contrast, the public offering is mainly prepared for sale to the general public. The costs for the public offering are borne by the *supakaras* – those who fulfil their duty of cooking inside the temple. This food is cooked in the big temple kitchen and is further offered in the above-mentioned special offering hall (*bhoga mandapa*). Only those who belong to the family of Jagannath's cooks have the right to enter the temple kitchen. The morning refreshment is prepared by non-Brahmins in an extra kitchen called *ballava rosoi ghara* located near to the temple market (*ananda bazara*). All the costs for materials used in the preparation of *kotha bhoga* are covered by the Temple Administration.

The monasteries (*matha*) in Puri (Pattnaik 2005; see also Malinar 2011, 116–126) play a special role in the daily production of *mahaprasad*. Some of the monasteries' food is cooked daily.¹⁰ Special cooks called *matha suaras*, who also inherit their *seba*, are responsible for the preparation of these fixed meals. After being offered to the deities in the inner sanctum of the Jagannath temple, this food is brought to the monastery for a second offering into the sanctum of the monastery. These dishes are then distributed to the convent or sometimes to guests (pilgrims, ascetics, and beggars). Furthermore, parts of

¹⁰ For a list of the main *mathas* of Puri and their role in producing *mahaprasad*, see <<http://jagannath.nic.in/?q=node/113>> (last access 11.05.2016).

the *bhoga* are given to different animals, who live in the temple. For example, the Bada Odiya monastery shares a big amount of its morning meal with the cats as well as the midday meal with the monkeys. Pilgrims can also order *mahaprasad* to the monastery from the temple. This is organised by the monasteries, which in turn take the gain from selling the divine food. Their daily expenses for *bhoga* are mainly financed by donations and by their income through the accommodation of pilgrims.

In accordance with local traditions of food preparation, specific rules prescribe the ingredients to be used for *mahaprasad*. The standard menu consists of rice and dal. There are two specific categories; *kanika* and *dalma*. *Kanika* is sugared rice with raisins and nuts, while *dalma* is boiled lentils mixed with coconut and different vegetables. Other dishes are salted rice with ghee (clarified butter), sweetened lentil soup, vegetable with mustard masala (*besara*), spinach (*sago* and *mahura*), and salted ghee rice mixed with fruits and sugared dal (*khechudi*). Fat and sweets are signs of luxury and sensuality. The food consists – apart from rice and vegetables – of deep-fried, steamed and cooked pastries (*pitha*), dumplings made of desiccated coconut, roasted coconut pulp, fresh and dried fruits, milk and cheese etc.

Around midnight, after the evening refreshment, a special group of people cleans the kitchen and repairs the damaged parts of the stoves and the floors. The whole kitchen is cleaned thoroughly with water; first the floors of the kitchen rooms and the courtyard as well as the stoves are cleaned, next the stoves are repaired with a mixture of water, clay, and cow dung. At the end of the cleaning process a mixture of cow dung and water is sprinkled on the floors of the kitchen. Then, a cook, who supervises the cleaning process, carries out an inspection. He also invites a priest for purifying the fire and the kitchen with a ritual called *roso homo*, which is held inside the *kotha bhoga* kitchen. By chanting Sanskrit hymns (*mantra*), different gods are invited to purify the fire, which is then used for igniting all the 240 stoves of the kitchen.

The Production of *Kotha bhoga*

In this section, I will give a brief description about the production process of *kotha bhoga*. As mentioned above, the preparation of the holy food takes place in the section of the kitchen called *kotha bhoga ghara*. Every day, seventeen people are engaged from morning until midnight in producing the holy food. The temple administration supplies the ingredients as well as firewood, pots, and water. The so-called *bojhia* carry the utensils in baskets on their heads to

the storerooms inside the temple. For each and every task in the complex process of food preparation a specific group of workers is responsible: the *lenka* cut the vegetables, the *biribata* grind the gram and spices, the *pania* bring water, the *kathapela mahasuara* transport the firewood, the *angarna* and *gobarapania* clean the kitchen, and so on. Before the cooking begins, the above mentioned purification ritual (*roso homo*) is performed inside the *khota bhoga* kitchen by a Brahmin priest (*puja panda*). The cooks must take a bath in their homes and have to wear a new piece of cloth before their *pali* begins. Before entering the kitchen, this cloth has to be washed inside the temple and is then worn around the waist as a loincloth (*gamuchha*). In addition, the cooks completely cover their faces with a cloth called *fundi*, leaving only their eyes uncovered. Two reasons are given for this practice: it prevents the cooks from smelling the scent of the food, which may create an unwanted desire for eating; and it ensures that no bodily particles (e.g., hair, sweat) can fall into the food.

When all these preparations are completed, the cooking process may begin. *Mahaprasad* is prepared on earthen stoves (*chuli*), heated with firewood. The food is cooked in earthen pots (*handi*). Depending on the type of food, the stoves are divided into different categories: on one type of stove (*anna chuli*) only rice can be cooked, while on another stove (*pitha chuli*) cakes and sweets (*pitha*) are prepared. Lentil stew (*dal*) and vegetables are slowly cooked on special stoves (*aahiaa*) that are continuously filled up with embers (Fig. 2 gives an impression of the stove and the cooking process inside the temple). Specific persons are responsible for preparing these fifty-six types of dishes.¹¹ During the preparation the *chef de cuisine* (*mahasuaras*) takes the position of the overall kitchen-manager, he supervises and controls the stuff as well as the preparation processes and is responsible for maintaining a sanitary and hygienic environment for the preparation of food. The next group of the kitchen staff are the *chefs de partie* or senior chefs (*badusuaras*) who manage a given station in the kitchen. The other positions vary from preparing vegetables and grinding flour or spices to carrying the water etc; in short these positions are subsumed under the category of cooks (*suaras*).¹²

The cooking process strictly follows a traditional set of rules. Only indigenous ingredients may be used. Vegetables such as tomato, potato, onion, garlic,

11 See a list of these dishes online, <<http://www.fullodisha.com/chappan-bhog-of-shree-jagannath-mahaprasad-list/>> (last access 11.05.2016).

12 There are seventeen different jobs in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen, each of them clearly defined. Some are preparing the utensils, others carry water, some are helping to keep the kitchen free of animals and so on.



Fig. 2. Cook in Ananta Basudeba Temple, Bubhaneshwar, Odisha (Photo by author).

chilli, capsicum, etc. are prohibited because they were introduced to India only after the recipes of the divine food had been fixed. From the moment the different ingredients are added to the pots, it is prohibited to touch them, not even with an extra tool. Touching a pot by hand is also strictly forbidden. When the dish is completed, it is brought down from the stove to the floor by means of a special technique: the cooks tie a rope around the narrow part of the pot and with the help of a pole that serves as a lever brings the pot down to the ground. The pots are then hung on two ends of bamboo rods, which are carried by another group of servitors (*tolabudu*, *pankti suara*) on their shoulders to the sanctum. A *pratihari* (gate keeper of the deities) walks in front of this group and guards the *amuniha bhoga* (unoffered *bhoga*) up to the inner sanctum, which leads directly to the gods. In his hands he holds two sticks called *jodi beta*, literally meaning ‘twin sticks’. They are identified with goddess Subhadra and are said to protect the food against evil cosmic forces or any form of pollution while passing the common areas.

Inside the sanctum, the food is arranged on copper plates in front of every deity. The preparation for the worship of the seven gods is very detailed and aims to ensure the rituals’ successful performance. For instance, after a ritual cleaning of the inner sanctum a mandala (*muruja*) with square fields is drawn on the floor in front of each god. This mandala has a very complex spiritual meaning related to tantric practices of the Jagannath tradition (cf. Stietencron

1978, 13; Tripati 1978, 44; Bharati 1965). It also structures the display of the food because the pots of one particular cook are placed on specific squares of the painting.

Before offering the food to the gods, the priest asks the *mahasuara* if the arrangement (*panti*) of the pots on the mandala is perfect or not. '*Panti thik achhi ta palia mahasuara?* – Is the preparation of *panti* perfectly done, *palia mahasuara?*' The *mahasuara* has to answer: '*Manati* (the responsibility for the own work) *kariba heu.* – Yes, the work was done in the right manner.'

This small example shows that the temple servitors have to observe detailed directives for every ritual they perform inside the temple. By following the rules and acting within the prescribed guidelines they maintain the high value of purity. To put it in another way, this value of purity affects everything connected to the ritual: body, space, objects, and practices. For this reason, obeying the rules is fundamental for the functioning of the temple as a religious institution.

The offering of *bhoga* is part of the most important rite of worship called *puja*. In the Jagannath temple the *puja* consists of sixteen offerings or *upacharas* that include different items. These are: flowers, water, light, ash, air, uncooked rice, herbs and spices, food, etc. In every step only one item is offered. The deity is thus treated as an honoured guest. The offering of food is the fifteenth step within this sophisticated procedure and is accompanied by hand gestures, the reciting holy words, and the performing of various ritual actions. First the *bhoga* has to be ritually purified, because it is believed that the gods accept only pure food. According to the priests of the Jagannath Temple specific hand gestures (*mudra*) and sacred hymns (*mantra*) are recited to transform the *bhoga* into divine ambrosia (*amrta*) (Tripati 1978, 300). After feet and mouth of the god have been cleaned, the priest offers the food to the deity by reciting once more a special hymn, while he symbolically takes the divine energy (*teja*) down from the deity to the food. Last, a sip of water is offered to prepare for the final offer. While the Brahmin is reciting hymns, the deity is considered to consume the ambrosia (Tripati 1978, 300).

After the sixteen offerings have been completed, the temple scribe (*deula karana*) collects the *mahaprasad*. The supervisor is responsible for the distribution of the divine food; portions of it go to other gods situated within the inner compound of the temple and are again offered to them. Afterwards the food is transported to a special place (called *beharana*) near the inner sanctum. In that place the temple scribe performs the traditional form of payment by giving a share (*khei*) to every servitor who was engaged in the production of this food. Information about a servitor's due is listed in a book called Record

of Rights.¹³ The way of distributing is based on the value of *anna dhana* – to give or to distribute the rice. In the Jagannath Temple this concept is called *mahaprasad dhana* – to give the *mahaprasad*. This means that, on a practical level, every *prasad* needs to be distributed and shared among the devotees. This practice has been established in order to show that a kings' or saints' spiritual wealth is significantly based on community besides sages, gurus, and cosmic forces. It nourishes the relationship between the king or a saint and the people, and simultaneously enables the people to reinforce their own relationship to god.

Some part of the offered food is property of the king, who still is engaged in the temple affairs as the 'first servitor' (*adya sebak*) of Lord Jagannath. A person (called *pasaratia*) who is employed by the king, collects the kings' share and sells it on the temple market in a special shop (*kothabhoga dokan*). The proceeds from the sale are given to the king; additionally, the *pasaratia* offers to sell the servitors' share. The servitors then can decide to either consume their part of *kotha bhoga* on the temple market, or to sell it to the king's servitor or any other shopkeeper on the market. This is connected to a contract system, in which a servitor enables a vendor to sell his share over a period of one or two months. According to the information of a *mahasuara*, the servitors never sell their *kotha bhoga* share by themselves. The cost for *kotha bhoga* is approximately a third higher than that of *bhoga*. This points to a local market economy, which relates a re-distributional system with modern market-based forces, fixed contracts, prices, etc. This exemplifies how the ritual resource *kotha bhoga* is transformed into a commodity of the market to supply the social field. By inventing this practice, the cooks increased their personal income.

Interestingly, the practice mentioned last is based on an idea of market economy and is not just a selfless giving and sharing among devotees. This practice also includes and represents a social hierarchy, which derives from the access to spiritual goods. Exclusive rights and places are assigned to specific persons. These persons have the right to be nearest to the gods, because of their inherited position, which enables them to fulfil their duty to the gods and therefore have the first right to receive the religious resources.

13 This is a set of rules that lists every position in the temple service and its specific task. Further, it gives a comprehensive list about the daily routine of the Jagannath temple.

Values of *Kotha Bhoga*

To summarise, *kotha bhoga* is produced within a highly elaborated ritual process. I define that part of the kitchen where *kotha bhoga* is prepared as the ritual centre. This centrality becomes obvious if we take into account that the fire made for the purification ritual in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen is taken to other stoves in order to ensure the purity required for a correct cooking process.

The cooks form a specific community, whose service to the gods is inherited. Their rights of inheritance derive from a mystical narrative about the beginning of the relationship between god and men. According to this narrative they were once chosen by Jagannath to provide him with food in Puri, the place chosen by the god himself. Puri is one of four pilgrimage sites called the four abodes (*char dham*)¹⁴ in which Vishnu is worshipped in a particular way. Among these four abodes, Puri is famous for the preparation of *mahaprasad* offered to Jagannath and his relatives (Chakravarti 1994, 140). The cooking process in this place is said to meet the requirements for achieving the highest purity required for the worship of the deities.

Therefore, ensuring purity is important in each stage of this process. To avoid any kind of pollution of the food before the offering, every space needs to be ritually purified. According to informants only these Brahmin cooks are allowed to enter the kitchen. They have to follow certain rules in everyday behaviour e.g. special dietary restrictions. Furthermore, since Brahmins are believed to be particularly pure (Dumont 1970), they are the only ones who have the permission to enter the kitchen. According to local ideas, absolute purity has to be ensured so that Jagannath accepts the food offerings and transforms them into *mahaprasad*. Through this 'divine touch' the food is transformed and in a sense contains Jagannath himself.

The cooks identify themselves with the goddess Lakshmi, the wife of Visnu, who in Indian mythology is called *anna datri* – the one who gives food to everybody in the world. Like a Hindu wife the cooks take care of the gods' desire for food. In a way, the food itself is identified with the goddess Lakshmi. This nurturing relationship between the cooks and god resembles that of a wife providing for her family in a household.

¹⁴ These places are Badrinath, Rameswaram, Dwarka, and Puri. Badrinath (Badrinath Temple), Dwarka (Dwarkadhish Temple), Puri (Jagannath Temple), Rameswaram (Ramanathaswamy Temple) (Chakravarti 1994, 140; Bhardwaj/Lochtefeld 2005, 482).

What exactly creates the ‘greatness’ of *mahaprasad* compared to ordinary *prasada*? A former officer of the temple administration gave me the following answer:

‘In Hindu Vaishnava mythology, any offering to the Lord is known as *prasada*, which means grace, but that which is offered to the Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana is known as *mahaprasad*, great grace. In short *mahaprasad* is an extraordinary expression of oblation, applicable only to the *prasad* of the four principle deities of the great temple of Puri.’

According to this informant and to certain priests I interviewed, *mahaprasad* requires a routinized production process and must be offered to all the seven gods in the inner sanctum of the Jagannath Temple in Puri.

The Emergence of the two Kitchens

Under the rule of Purushottama Dep (1467–1497) a big offering hall, *bhoga mandapa*, was erected. This served the need of producing extra food to be distributed to the increasing numbers of pilgrims and monasteries (ORP Ms 48 *Madala Panji*, 57). To manage the growing crowds of pilgrims, an outer wall around the temple compound was erected in 1446. Later rulers developed an elaborate menu and increased the fame and wider distribution of *mahaprasad* (ORP Ms 48 *Madala Panji*, 57, 61, 64). As a result, the sacred offerings were associated with the welfare of the kingdom itself (Cort/Mishra 2012, 38–40).

After making the *bhoga* accessible to the public, an increasing number of families were recruited by the kings for preparing food in Jagannath’s kitchen. According to the estimation of a temple administrator, about 1000 families of cooks work in Lord Jagannath’s kitchen, of which 75 families are involved in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen, while the remaining 925 families produce the *mahaprasad* for the public. The economic significance of *mahaprasad* for the temple as a religious as well as economic institution thus is reflected in the fact that such a large number of people work in the kitchen for the public.

The Production of Public *Bhoga*

In this section, I wish to emphasise the economical side of *mahaprasad*. The main difference between *kotha bhoga* and public *bhoga* has already been mentioned: while all ingredients for the *kotha bhoga* kitchen are supplied by the Temple Administration, materials used in the *rosoi ghara* are purchased and provided by the cooks themselves.

The temple kitchen is constructed in the form of a rectangle. In the middle a courtyard is situated, where people prepare the food by cutting vegetables, grinding flour or spices etc. At the different sides of this courtyard the rooms with stoves are located. Only a small place in the south-eastern corner of the area serves as the place for preparing *kotha bhoga*. The whole kitchen contains 240 stoves, only 10 of which are situated in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen. The majority of other stoves originally belonged to different monasteries, yet due to the economic deterioration of the monasteries¹⁵ many stoves were sold to the cooks' families. Some cooks of the monasteries still work daily inside the kitchen, but the daily amount of divine food needed for the monasteries guests' has decreased.

Depending on day and season, the cooks calculate the required amount of food. Every day around 250 to 400 people cook in the kitchen for the public. These people have their own family business, because every man is allowed to cook as long as he belongs to the family of the *supakaras*. If time allows, cooks working in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen are also entitled to prepare food in the public kitchen. In this way, they often earn extra money and support other members of their extended family.

Mahaprasad is ordered for special occasions, life cycle rituals (Fig. 3 shows the distribution and consumption of *mahaprasad* during a death ceremony), etc. as well as for the regular donations to the poor. *Mahaprasad* is also presented to private visitors at home, or ordered to feed guests at public events.

15 For socio-structural changes mostly related to modernisation, the development of the hotel industry and new possibilities for education, monasteries mainly suffer from the loss of disciples, who in the past cared for the property and worked the land, as well as from the loss of pilgrims, who play an important role for the income of the institution. These changes make it almost impossible to maintain the monasteries. For the same reasons, there are also fewer donations to the monasteries. Therefore, their cultural importance shrinks and their economic power is reduced.



Fig. 3. Cooks distributing mahaprasada during death ceremony to community (Photo by author).

On all these occasions *mahaprasad* is used to establish community; community between humans and likewise between humans and gods or ancestors.

The number of family members who are engaged in the process of preparing *mahaprasad* for the public depends on the exact composition of the family. Sometimes up to ten men from one family are involved, including father, uncles, siblings, cousins, and sons. Usually only one person is responsible for keeping in touch with the customer, taking the orders and purchasing the food-stuffs and cooking materials such as pots and firewood. Furthermore, helpers for cutting vegetables, grinding materials, and supplying water and wood need to be organised. Two to three people are cooking, while up to three people are required for selling the divine food at the temple market.

Temple festivals and annual festivals provide the time framework for activities in the kitchen. Depending on the occasion, the cooks prepare food between one to three times daily in the kitchen. For the public *bhoga* they observe the same purity regulations as in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen. The difference is that in the kitchen for preparing the public *bhoga* (*rosoi ghara*) the cooks themselves are responsible for observing the rules of purity. Even the preparation process is not structured in the same meticulous way. The menu is reduced to fourteen dishes to be sold on the temple market. The standard menu consists of a combination of different items required for a 'perfect

meal': buttered or flavoured rice, cinnamon rice, sweetened lentils, lentils with vegetables (*dalma*), salted lentils, vegetable gravy with mustard, sweet fruit chutney, and finally a variety of cakes (*pitha*). Only for special occasions, the customer can choose a menu, which contains some extra dishes.

In the public kitchen the helpers of the cooks transport the food from the kitchen to the entrance of the hall of offering (*bhoga mandapa*). In this hall the food will be placed on the floor. The gods are not present in this place but reside in the nearby inner sanctum. The temple priest (*puja panda*) performs the worship consisting of five offerings (*pancha upchara*) which transforms the cooked food (*amunhia bhoga*) into *mahaprasad*. Afterwards, every cook takes his pots, filled with food, outside. At the door, the accountant of the temple administration collects the tax from each cook. The tax is calculated according to the size of the pot. The carriers, who are employed by the cooks, transport the *mahaprasad* either to the temple market for sale, or to another group of carriers waiting at the southern or northern gate of the temple, who take the food to the house of the person who ordered it. Each shop owner must pay one rupee per day for using the electric bulbs at his stall on the temple market. The market is located in a place with overhanging branches of trees, in which many birds and monkeys reside. To avoid any dirt from falling onto the food, vendors place enormous blue canvases above their stalls.

When pilgrims visit the Sri Jagannath Temple they follow a certain routine. Most of the time the whole temple area is crowded with people and pilgrim guides try to do business by skilfully leading visitors to certain places where they can spend money. Beyond that, they teach the visitors about the history of the temple and tell stories and 'miracles' about *mahaprasad*. They take the pilgrims to particular shrines of gods and/or goddesses to whom they can pray for the fulfilment of their personal desires. The next important part of this trip is the inner sanctum of the temple, where they can receive the auspicious sight (*darshan*) of the deities. Most pilgrims I spoke to, described being in front of the deities as a strenuous situation. However, everybody agreed that consuming divine food bought on the temple market and purchasing religious souvenirs was the highlight of their visit to Puri.

The temple market (*ananda bazar*) shows all features of a conventional market such as price competition and calculation according to demand. There are around 65 shops offering *mahaprasad* as well as approximately 60 shops selling souvenirs. Due to fierce competition the sellers have implemented a particular sales strategy. First, they offer a sample of their assortment for attracting the customers to their shop and to convince them of the quality of their dishes. In addition they walk around and look for devotees to lure them



Fig. 4. Pilgrim holding *mahaprasada* in his hand during *Ratha Yatra* (Photo by author).

into their shop. For the consumption of *mahaprasad* some shops offer banana leaves, which are used as plates, as well as lemon salt and chilli to flavour the food. After purchasing the food and utensils, the customers can sit on the ground in special areas of the temple market to consume their food. The *mahaprasad* is bought in small earthen pots (see *fig. 4*), arranged on banana leaves and distributed to family members and friends.

What is left from the daily sale is not thrown away or wasted but bought by various members of the association of cooks (*suara nijog*) who run an independent business within the temple compound, which is called *nirmalya khala*. There, the rice is dried on the concrete floor in the sun. The Temple Administration gives out three year contracts to members of the cook's association for using the place. The person who actually runs the business pays a monthly rate to his association. The dried product is called *nirmalya* ('without impurity') and is packed in small bundles of pink cloth. A wholesaler buys these packets of *nirmalya* directly from that place and sells it to pilgrims on the temple market as well as outside the temple.

In summary, the preparation, distribution and consumption of divine food involves a great number of people who work in different places and are part of the expanding business of *mahaprasad*. A privatisation of parts of the kitchen took place, and cooks became independent entrepreneurs on a flexible market. The independent work of the cooks generates profit out of which the temple in turn receives taxes that are transferred back to the temple administration household.

Even if in the wider kitchen the food is produced under less routinized and more market-oriented conditions, the reputation of *mahaprasad* is not

negatively affected. I explain this fact out of the physical closeness of the actors, practices, and spaces to the encompassing ritual field.

The Value of Bhoga

Two interrelated fields of action can be identified in the public kitchen of the Jagannath temple. On the one hand the production of this kind of *mahaprasad* is part of a ritual process. The food is offered to the gods, but the ritual is shorter than in the case of *kotha bhoga*. On the other hand the food is a commodity when it enters the market and is sold to the community. Exchange and provisioning of *mahaprasad* are therefore structured by ritual as well as economic principles, relationships, and values. This supports my argument that the production, circulation and consumption of public *mahaprasad* is a ritual as well as a business.

From an analytical point of view two perspectives can be distinguished: the inner perspective of the specialised producers of public *mahaprasad* and the outer perspective of consumers.

The producers of *mahaprasad* for the public designate their action as business (*bebasaya*) and distinguish it from the ritual production of *kotha bhoga*. As one cook mentioned to me:

‘This is just our business, *bebasaya*, because it is for the people, but that is *kotha bhoga*, it is for the gods!’

To understand this valuation it is helpful to analyse the modes of exchange occurring in the temple kitchen as they constitute two different types of relationships. On the one hand, the production of *mahaprasad* for the gods in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen establishes a long-term ritual exchange relationship between gods and temple servitors. First of all the ritual establishes personal relationships with god Jagannath and provides the servitors with the purity and auspiciousness inherent in *mahaprasad*. Second, it reaffirms the line of inheritance in the family of cooks and therefore continues the relationships based on knowledge and practice. Third, the *kotha bhoga* is an expression of solidarity within the community of servitors who have jointly contributed to its production.

In contrast, the production of food connected with the public kitchen designates a short-term transaction (Parry/Bloch 1989), because the producer (servitor) provides the food for the market, which is centred on market-based forces such as supply and demand, competition, and trade. Compared to the

three meanings connected with *kotha bhoga*, the public *mahaprasad* differs mainly in the terms of value and ways of production. First, the cooks consider this part of their work as 'business'. The servitor does not get a share of the food offerings and therefore does not create a personal relationship with god. Instead, he works for maximising his profits. Second, the production of *mahaprasad* only requires an inherited right of access to this part of the kitchen. The organisation of work is the responsibility of the cooks and not of the temple administration, or the community of the temple servants. Third, the public *bhoga* is basically a means of income for the family. In other words, public *bhoga* constitutes short-term exchange relationships between people.

When I asked the cooks about their work inside the temple, they directly linked the information about making *mahaprasad* to the *kotha bhoga*. It took me one month and several interviews to realise that there is a further division of the temple kitchen. Why do the cooks feel no need to mention a clear division of the temple kitchen into two different spheres of action? This can be explained by the fact that for them the *kotha bhoga* kitchen is the ritual and 'real' centre of making *mahaprasad*. For the cooks there is a hierarchy between working for the gods (high value) and working for the market (lower value). Nevertheless, they do not apply these different values to the product *mahaprasad* itself. As producers they always emphasise the unique value of *mahaprasad*. The product provided by the public kitchen is, in the presence of the gods of Sri Jagannath temple in Puri, transformed into *mahaprasad* by the ritual procedure. The difference in price of *kotha bhoga* and *bhoga* on the market can be explained with economic reasons because the former is a relatively rare commodity and therefore acquires a higher price on the market. Therefore, visitors to the Jagannath temple may realise the existence of two kinds of *mahaprasad* only on the market. But they are usually not aware of a division of the kitchen or of the different ways *mahaprasad* is produced for the public. Not even all locals with whom I had my daily conversations were aware of these key distinctions. It seems to be a specialised knowledge.

For the devotees, *prasad* is a physiological 'internalization of divine qualities' (Fuller 1992, 74). While this internalisation is happening, a devotee receives *darshan* – the auspicious sight of the deities. The identification between deities and humans, which occurs while performing worship and taking *prasad*, is only short-lived as the used materials (ash, light, water, food etc.) are transient (Fuller 1992, 75). Therefore, repetition is an important part of Hindu religious practices. A good example is the daily ritual practice of the Jagannath temple: the impermanence of food is the reason why a devotee should frequently consume *mahaprasad*.

In Odiya language, *mahaprasad* is called *abadha*. This term refers to food that is not distributed on plates, but needs to be eaten directly out of the pot, particularly an earthen pot called *handi*.¹⁶ This further points to the local conception that the unique pureness of *abadha* has the power to remove bad deeds (*karma*) to a degree that it can even dissolve inequality by cast. As a result, all devotees can consume out of one pot, regardless of cast affiliation.

Mahaprasad in the form of *nirmalya* is a variety of *mahaprasad* and a desirable good for the devotees. It can be preserved for a long time and therefore can be brought to the family members, friends, and neighbours who were not able to visit the Jagannath Temple. *Nirmalya* is also given to dying persons by putting rice seeds in water and spoon feeding the person drops of water. According to local narratives, the use of even a small morsel of *nirmalya* at the time of death will release the soul from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*). *Nirmalya*, like all types of *mahaprasad*, is a materialised means for salvation and therefore a central resource in Hindu eschatology.

Furthermore, *nirmalya* plays a great role in some village traditions. Like *mahaprasad*, *nirmalya* is considered to be a medium of god and for example used for solving cases of conflict. Comparable to swearing on the bible in an American courtroom, it is believed that in the presence of god represented by *nirmalya* everybody will tell the truth.

All this shows how highly valued *mahaprasad* is. Everybody I met in Puri emphasised the immense power and unique taste of this food. After being offered to the gods, the food becomes *mahaprasad*. The final physical contact with the gods during worship turns the food itself into a divine substance. God hereby becomes material and consumable. In this sense, *mahaprasad* forms a central ritual resource (working definition of SFB 1070¹⁷, see also Hardenberg, this volume) for the temple economy. As a valuable final product of a religious food chain (Rösel 1983), it constitutes the basis for the servitors' everyday duty. I further define *mahaprasad* as a central religious resource for the devotees because it is a top requirement on every important occasion and ceremony, an agent for creating ritual friendship (Skoda 2005, 137), and above all else an important means for purifying oneself and getting a glimpse of the divine power. Furthermore, when the divine food items are sold at the temple market, they turn into a highly important economic resource. For the cooks' families, the production and selling of the food is a main source of their

¹⁶ *Badha* instead, means something that is transferred from the cooking pot to elsewhere.

¹⁷ Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, 17, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 11.08.2016).

income. It increases the attraction of the temple for devotees and additionally creates fame and economical wealth for the city of Puri as a touristic site. By and large, it economically affects the temple as well as the city and also turns Puri into an important religious place for pilgrimage.

Thus, we may conclude by saying that the temple establishes the 'base' (Gudemann 2001, 7) of a community's shared commons, 'which include lasting resources (water, food items, wood, pots etc.), produced things, and ideational constructs such as knowledge, technology, laws, practices, skills, and customs' (Gudemann 2001, 8).

The providing of *mahaprasad* for the public is an economic act, placed in a market that is structured by supply and demand (Gudemann 2001, 10). Hereby the self-interest of a family is the primary motive. In this field, the actors ritualise their economic activities for their benefit and link 'pragmatic and materialist values with ritual ones' (Sabloff 2008 274). The value of *mahaprasad* itself, as it embodies Jagannath and the cosmic relationship between space, community, action, and god, is the valuable commodity. This is sold on the market to the regular customers. By being allowed to use the ritual practice, the cooks enable the public to use *mahaprasad* for their individual aims. The family relation to the *kotha bhoga sebayats* allows the producers of public *bhoga* to be part of the wider kitchen. The community of those who have inherited the duty to produce *kotha bhoga* remains the ritual centre within the whole production process; they maintain the daily practice and ritual routine as well as the care of the relationship to Jagannath. In the production process of *kotha bhoga*, worldview materialises itself by ritual practice and therefore structures the temple economy (McAnany/Wells 2008, 2).

In a similar manner, the pilgrims become part of the community by sharing the base through market channels, which are an extension of the community and subject to very different rules and dynamics (e.g. supply and demand, self-organisation, small units competing with one another etc.).

Analysis – Connections and Divisions of a Socio-Cosmic Field

The temple kitchen of Jagannath is divided into two parts, *kotha bhoga ghara* and *rosoi ghara*. On one level, the two parts are identical because in both places *mahaprasad* is produced in a routinized way and under strict purity requirements in order to be offered to the gods. On another level, they are different because the servitors identify them as different spheres of action

related to certain social or cosmic relationships. The smaller kitchen, *kotha bhoga ghara*, is valued as the ritual centre of the kitchen and encompasses the bigger kitchen, which is used for the preparation of food for the public. The spiritual power and value of the first level is transferred to the latter and therefore enables the servitors to produce the holy food for the public. In other words, the techniques and practices of the actors in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen serve as a model for the production of public food in *rosoi ghara*. On one hand, the value of *mahaprasad* as extremely pure and auspicious is produced in the *kotha bhoga* kitchen. On the other hand, the fame of being the biggest kitchen in the world derives from the high production of *mahaprasad* for the public.

From my previous depiction it is possible to understand the process of production, distribution and consumption of *mahaprasad* forms two distinct but interrelated circles of transactions.

The differentiation between work or business and service in the production process of *mahaprasad* reflects the valuation of two different spheres of action. The sphere of work is related to productive actions,¹⁸ i.e. profit in the form of money has to be accumulated. The income maintains the household of a person as well as the 'temple household'. The housewives or the temple community 'who remain uncontaminated by contact with the amoral domain of market transactions' (Parry/Bloch 1989, 23) then can 'de-contaminate' the money by transforming it into a reproductive (Rössler 2005, 175) value of the household as now being something morally acceptable (Rössler 2005, 175). Fulfilling a service or *pali* within a defined community of temple servants may be regarded as a household; the 'temple household' is a residential unit that defines itself as a family consisting of humans and gods and goddesses. Household members are obliged to care for each other as well as for their community; moreover their service is reproductive (Rössler 2005, 175) in the sense, that they get back their share in exchange with the deity. The share is not only the medium for the relationship between human and god but also a medium for the community itself, as it sustains the communities' work and common motivation.

This points to the aspect of distribution, which additionally is linked to transactions.

18 Household activities encompass reproductive actions. Actions that take place inside the temple and are done for the purpose of business are defined as productive actions (Rössler 2005, 175).

I elaborated two circles of transactional orders that are mutually dependent. These circles are part of two different fields, based on varied motivations and values. The former is the ritual, the latter the market. On the one hand, I locate them in the ritual community of the temple, on the other hand in the market community. I equate the temple community with a household, in which the products (*kotha bhoga*) are produced for the gods and subsequently redistributed among the household members, the servitors of the temple. In regard to Parry/Bloch (1989) I use the concept of long-term transactions to emphasise the character of the actions that reproduce the household. The transactional structure in the market community is characterised by impersonal relationships between people as ‘vice-versa movements taking place as between ‘hands’ (Polanyi 1957, 250). A similar product (*mahaprasad*) is sold on the temple market to pilgrims and tourists as well as to locals, who order for special occasions. This way of distributing the product is practiced in a vast number of short-term transactions (Parry/Bloch 1989).

While Parry and Bloch in their example portray fishermen as being part of two transactional systems, I deal with divine foods which in fact are products that can be ascribed to two different spheres of action. As I demonstrated, the actions as well as the products in the two spheres differ. On one hand people aim to create contacts on the market, whilst on the other hand they try to maintain a valued relationship with god and the temple community. From this situation the difference in valuation of the practice as well as the product results.

The last step in the process of provisioning is the consumption of *mahaprasad*. This end of the ritual production process intends divinity, which by consumption can be physically internalised. The *kotha bhoga* producer experiences this step by getting his share. This *khei* is the material expression for Jagannaths’ acceptance of the communities’ work and therefore implies his strong cosmic relationship. While for the consumer, the relationship to Jagannath is experienced by his devotional way of taking *mahaprasad* and receiving *darshan* individually and hoping for a soteriological uplift. The practice of consuming *mahaprasad* is also strongly connected to community. People share, distribute or serve *mahaprasad* within the community of a ritual or a special occasion and hereby construct a situatively existing community that is connected with god. To summarise, *mahaprasad* constitutes a ‘tangible means’ by which temple servitors as well as devotees and pilgrims ‘create, sustain, or alter social [and cosmic] relations, units and identities’.¹⁹

19 Conceptual Introduction SFB 1070, 13, last updated 2015, <<http://www.sfb1070.uni-tuebingen.de/>> (last access 23.09.2015).

In this regard, *mahaprasad* represents the central value domain that connects community and market in the Sri Jagannath Temple.

Nevertheless, we have to take into account that both circles exist in a relational order. Giving examples I focused on practices taking place in both fields, the cosmic as well as the social, and illustrated that none of these fields exist separately. The case of selling the share of *kotha bhoga* to market vendors is one example. The other appears in the whole practice of cooking and offering the public *bhoga* to the gods, which depends on the ritual practice performed in the temple kitchen. By drawing on Steven Gudemans' (2001) approach of community and market I state that the economic field is an integral part of the temple economy because the market realm is based on community, 'on socially constituted units and relationships' (Gudeman 2001, 9). The economical field in return affects and even maintains the wider temple economy as being a religious institution, while taxes are paid to the temple administration that become part of the financial household. Thus, the accumulation of wealth includes accumulated values like relationships and financial capital. Value is held (relationship, social position), invested (more business i.e. trading with other goods, pots, pilgrim business etc.), consumed, and displayed.

Summary

By presenting my material on the kitchen of Lord Jagannath, differences as well as similarities between ritual and economy on the basis of the three aspects 'actions', 'types of relations', and 'values' (Hardenberg, this volume) have been carved out. The reason for the existing of two different spheres within the temple kitchen is analysed, as well as how and why these spaces are valued and used. As I illustrated above, the valuation of *mahaprasad* changes according to the varying social or cosmic relationships of the agents. The valuation made by the cooks depends on their particular actions. The resource *mahaprasad* itself always implies Jagannaths' auspiciousness and divinity and therefore represents a stable value.

My case illustrates a constellation of a socio-cosmic field in which the 'social and cosmic relationships are intimately linked by actions' (Hardenberg, this volume) but are separated in terms of values. By using Parry and Bloch's concept of circles of transaction (Parry/Bloch 1989) I was able to demonstrate how valued relationships derive from purposeful actions (production, distribution and consumption).

In conclusion, the analysis applying the approach of socio-cosmic fields has helped to understand the interrelatedness of both kitchens and how they are dependent on each other even if they follow different motivations and values, use varying practices, and construct different kinds of relationships.

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This book introduces the concept of socio-cosmic fields for the study of dynamics arising from the confrontation of local and global values. The contributions to this volume include case studies from Georgia, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Each paper is based on intensive ethnographic fieldwork and focuses on particular forms of exchange and provisioning: preparation of sacred food (*mahaprasad*) in Puri (India), local forms of healing child diseases (*kirene*) in Kyrgyzstan, religious endowments (*vaqf*) in Mashhad (Iran), building new religious schools (*madrassa*) in northern Kyrgyzstan, the distribution of God's blessing (*baraka*) in Tajikistan, trading and debt relations (*karis*) in Tajikistan, renewal of deities (*nabakalebara*) in Odisha (India), feasting after making a pilgrimage (*Hajj*) in southern Kyrgyzstan and forms of consumption and morality (*zneoba*) in orthodox Georgian families. Every contributor to this volume raises the question how these forms of exchange and provisioning establish valued relations between the social and the cosmic fields.

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