

ANDRE GINGRICH

Paradise Lost, or Paradise Regained? Conceptions and Ideologies of *Himah* as a Ritual Site in the Highlands of South-Western Arabia

A research focus on cognitive procedures in rituals, and on their roles in the creative or destructive tensions between conflict and consensus, opens up room for a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. These may include cognitive anthropology with an emphasis on clinical psychology (see Tatiana Bužeková, this volume) and medical anthropology with its attention for transitional rites as targeted events within biographical strategies (see Eva-Maria Knoll, this volume). My own approach, on the other hand, is primarily inspired by the anthropology of ideologies and of religion and thus investigates the social and ideological production of ritual concepts, and of cognition in and about ritual.

Such an obvious diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches, however, does not necessarily imply that these different perspectives have to be taken as being mutually exclusive. On the contrary – one may argue that cognitive and psychological anthropology help us to understand how the mind is shaped by and interacts with ritual processes, while approaches inspired by medical anthropology shed light on biographical transformations of the body through ritualised strategies. A focus on ideologies, finally, helps us to grasp the socio-cultural production of standard cognitive situations and conditions, which in many ways set the stage for what is then discussed more closely by those other approaches. This is how my text is situated within the wider range of non-exclusive and mutually supportive, different approaches to cognition in ritual.

This article¹ has five sections, which basically discuss protected ritual zones of natural reserves on mountain peaks in south-western Arabia (see Fig. 1: map, p. 65). While this empirical theme is explored through a defined theoretical perspective, it will become clear as the analysis unfolds how the theme also relates to a trope that inspired not only John Milton, Joseph Haydn and Krzysztof Penderecki, but also many others. Section one gives a theoretical and ethnographic overview, and section two will then outline main tendencies of what is happening on the ground in today's globalised present. Section three focuses on the locally prevailing ideological patterns today, while section four will feature some of the historical background to that. Section five will then return to the globalised present in order to highlight some of the main contests and interests that inform the issue today and tomorrow.

1. THEORETICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

The advantage and benefit we continue to gain from anthropology's well-established focus on ideologies lies in its corrective potential against too much and too exclusive an emphasis on the individual. This allows us to maintain the necessary balance between a good focus upon personal experience on the one hand and, on the other hand, wider socio-cultural relations that always interact with personal life-worlds. This is the basic reason why some of our classical authors in this field continue to inspire us. For this task, this relates to a number of French authors and to other authors inspired by Francophone anthropology – such as Marcel Mauss (1990) and Louis Dumont (1986), Maurice Godelier (1986), Marshall Sahlins (1976), Edmund Leach (1976) and Maurice Bloch (1989). A substantial influence from these sets of works will result in a focus on the inner features of an overall ideological setting and how it orchestrates and informs a ritual. In consequence, one will often be encouraged to analyse ideology in a way similar to a movie or drama script. It follows that the

¹ I would like to thank the editors of this volume, and the contributors to the Anthropological Atelier in Budmerice that preceded it in spring 2010, for their helpful discussion about earlier versions of this text. I gratefully appreciate the valuable comments on various philological questions and references by my colleagues at the Austrian Academy of Sciences Dr. Johann Heiss (Institute for Social Anthropology) and Dr. habil. Velizar Sadovsky (Institute for Iranian Studies). I thank Prof. Horst Kopp (FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg) and his team for providing the map in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1: Map of the south-western part of the Arabian Peninsula (topography)

ritual then is the way in which the script actually is performed on stage. That stage, in turn, may then be assessed in terms of ritual sites or ritual arenas, to borrow a very useful term from Victor Turner (1969). Script, performance and arena in such a perspective on religious and other ideological rituals are of course intrinsically permeated by relations of power.

These perspectives lead to a specific emphasis on the socio-ideological reproduction of cognition in ritual across time. Inside the ritual process, personal and collective performances are seen as entailing not only artful creativity and innovative change, but also boring repetition and thoughtless submission, as Maurice Bloch (1989) pointed out long ago. As to the place of ritual processes inside society at large, it is usually seen as connecting everyday life with sets of higher values and norms, thereby representing a threshold between everyday life and the higher order. Following Edmund Leach (1976) and Mary Douglas (1970), the respective threshold times and threshold zones tend to be specific to a ritual, and they usually include participants' bodies and their physical performance. On these theoretical premises, my guiding research question reformulates a problem once raised for other contexts by Maurice Godelier (1986). I ask about the ideological part in the production of ritual reality – i.e. to what extent do local or global ideologies *a priori* impose, orchestrate, choreograph and evoke certain ritual activities, rather than merely legitimising and explaining them *a posteriori*?

The local and global ideologies under scrutiny here (or: the “scripts”, to continue the metaphor) are specific versions of Islam on the one hand and specific versions of global environmental doctrines on the other. The ritual sites, ritual arenas, or “stages” to be discussed are *Himah* and *Hawtah*,² which are two different peninsular Arabic terms for what is basically the same type of socio-cultural phenomenon in the mountain regions of south-western Arabia. In the vast mountain areas extending parallel to the Red Sea shoreline, between Jidda and Mecca in the north and Hudayda and Sanaa in the south, many of these mountain peaks at altitudes of 1800 – 2500 mt. have been continuously preserved as protected natural environments throughout the centuries up to the present day (Serjeant 1962). As concepts, *Himah* and *Hawtah* at least go back to early Islamic traditions, which require setting apart that which should not be violated. In this sense, the terms are closely related to (and partially intersecting with) the concept of *Hijra*, today commonly known as 622 C.E. and the beginning of the Islamic calendar, but originally designating the “asylum” which the Prophet Muhammad found after his emigration from Mecca during that year in Medina (Yathrib). *Hijra* (asylum), *Haram* (the sacred zone) and *Himah* and *Hawtah* are thus all versions of the same basic principle of setting apart something or somebody that requires protection and respect. Based on these basic norms and values, *Himah* and *Hawtah* zones always comprise special parts of the environment. Usually some of the most fertile elements of wild nature are among them.

2. CONTRASTS OF GLOBALISED CONTEXTS

Himah is the term more frequently used in north-western Yemen and right on the other side of the border, in Saudi Arabia’s Asir province, as well as in southern Hijaz to the north of Asir. Basic similarities aside, the term and its socio-cultural content have gone through very different phases of contemporary history throughout the past decade.

North-western Yemen has been torn apart by a bloody civil war throughout the first decade of the 21st century. That civil war unfolded between the central government and its allies on the one hand and, on the other hand, major tribal groupings of the north and north-west under Shi’ite leadership. This leadership and its following are best known as the al-Huthi movement, although they themselves consider this to be a pejorative term. The Zaydi variant of Shi’ite Islam once represented the dominant orientation during long periods of Yemen’s history, but today Zaydism has become a religious minority which is largely confined to the northern highland and mountain regions.

In many ways, that civil war represents one of those “New Wars” discussed by authors such as Mary Kaldor (1999), Carolyn Nordstrom (2004) or Tony Robben (2011). New Wars have been analysed as asymmetrical armed conflicts between small mobile units and state formations under modern technological conditions, in which both sides compete for civilian support in ways that actually result in a constant dissolution of boundaries between civilians and armed units, to the extent that the population itself is transformed into the main battleground. In addition to its technological and military dimensions, the global side to this particular version of a New War is that Yemen’s government and its allies (Saudi Arabia, other Sunni-dominated Muslim countries and some of their Nato allies) accuse the rebels of being the tools and agents in a global Shi’ite conspiracy. That conspiracy, they say, is emanating from Iran and allegedly includes militant Shi’ites in Iraq, Hizbollah in Lebanon, and so forth. Although Iran might in fact have tried tacitly to support the al-Huthi forces, the US and UK administrations have continued to warn that the civil war tends to give al-Qa’ida groups the opportunity to actually fight together with the Yemeni government against what radical Sunni Islamism denounces as Shi’ite infidels. These developments had not destroyed the al-Huthi movement by the end of 2010. Still, events have indeed contributed to the strengthening of al-Qa’ida influence in the Yemen to the extent that extremist volunteers sought to gain more legitimacy for themselves by joining the government’s military action against the al-Huthi rebels.

² Original fieldwork in the Yemen was carried out in the 1980s. The southern Hijaz and Asir regions of Saudi Arabia were revisited in 2002. The transliteration of Arabic terms follows a simplified version of Arabist standards unless Anglicised versions of the term are commonly used.

Nearly a decade of successive civil war confrontations, of bombardments and of house-to-house fighting in central areas and remote mountain regions have cost a dramatic loss of human lives and fortunes, with up to 250,000 displaced persons and almost as many dead in Upper Yemen. This devastation also has destroyed much of the *Himah* areas in the fertile mountain regions of the Yemeni highlands. To some extent this is the direct result of the specific forms of military operations in New Wars. In other ways, this also occurred as a more indirect result of the civil war: local inhabitants often were forced to exhaust those reserves' resources in situations of severe emergency, such as whenever their own farmlands were destroyed. So in sum, northern Yemen has seen vast destruction and erosion of its *Himah* areas during the past decade as a consequence of the civil war.

Saudi Arabia, by contrast, has gone through a period of relative stability and increased efforts towards nation-building since September 11, 2001. Because about a dozen of the 09/11 terrorist hijackers in fact originated from the Saudi Arabian south-west, the Saudi administration has invested increased efforts at all levels to integrate its south-western provinces into the kingdom. Saudi Arabia's fairly energetic and coherent domestic efforts towards stability, security, social welfare and education have been accompanied by continuous and equally successful efforts towards gaining a better record in international relations. These efforts range from new peace initiatives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a moderating role in the international oil market, to a new support for certain transnational and global diplomatic initiatives that are compatible with the kingdom's prevailing vision of its own future. The diplomatic and transnational initiatives include the global struggle against drug abuse, the charter against human trafficking, and quite a wide range of environmental initiatives. This recent embracing of certain transnational and global initiatives is to an extent factual and serious, being combined with local supervision and international monitoring. At the same time, these efforts also contain a substantial propaganda element since they help the Kingdom to escape from its negative reputation with regard to human and women's rights, the death penalty, freedom of speech, elections and so forth.

It is in these contexts that Saudi Arabia's state authorities have also become active domestically towards integrating and permitting the activities of certain global movements in their efforts to protect ecological reserves and environmental diversity. Some of these efforts include state-sponsored and publicly subsidised activities to protect existing *Himah* zones in the south-western provinces and to actually strengthen them if possible (Abu Zinada et al. 2003). Similar efforts had already begun in the 1990s in Syria and Lebanon, where protocols for establishing national parks had been signed, some of them in the *Hawtah* zones of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains along the Syrian-Lebanese border (Gari 2006). Based on this north-Arabian precedent, the first decade of the 21st century has seen a modest re-invigoration and an upgrading of existing *Himah* zones in the high mountain areas of south-western Saudi Arabia.

These contemporary contrasts with regard to *Himah* in the south-western regions of the Arab peninsula should not, however, be misunderstood as an absolute dichotomy of tendencies that were independent of each other. After all, the civil war in Yemen unfolded under the influence of some active support by the Saudi government, while some of Saudi Arabia's affluence was due to the hard work of Yemeni migrant workers until the 1990s. In addition, Saudi Arabian efforts in strengthening *Himah* areas in the Saudi south-west attained more significance in public speech and writing than in actual changes on the ground, while the Yemeni civil war did not devastate each and every *Himah* area in equal ways. The common historical and cultural roots of the *Himah* phenomenon thus to an extent remain visible and valid on both sides of the border today. Still, the differing effects of Saudi nation building vs. Yemeni civil war have created changes in opposing directions that cannot be ignored.

3. HIMAH AND LOCAL IDEOLOGIES

This is now the point to discuss how local ideologies operate in orchestrating rituals among south-western Arabian *Himah* contexts. I can draw on fieldwork details from various cases in the whole region, including many local differences. It is nevertheless useful to focus here on some of the primary similarities.

The first answer to any question about the extent of “ideology as script” and its effectiveness upon “*Himah* as the stage”, however, has to be a negative one. *Per se*, that stage exists not because of ideological reasons but for the sake of what we may summarise as rural risk-minimisation and optimisation of investments. If those mountain peaks were left barren, this would increase the risk of floods and torrents. In turn, this would then greatly raise the likelihood that many of the vast slopes of terraced fields below the peaks would be destroyed. So first and foremost, there are serious factual and practical reasons of safety and wealth which make it very reasonable to protect forests and bush on these mountain peaks: they are catchment and flood-control areas. The fact that the “stage” *per se* exists was therefore causally conditioned by practical reason, to use Marshall Sahlins’ (1976) famous book title formulation. Yet the ways in which that stage then is set and used is orchestrated by culture, or more precisely, by local cultural versions of Islam.

These local cultural versions and associated practices result in a specific set of cultural norms that inform and standardise aspects of local behaviour. No regular local resident should permanently live in *Himah* areas. Their lower and more accessible zones merely serve as neutral temporary meeting points to negotiate some tribal disputes. Sometimes, those neutral meeting sites may also include the more or less temporary dwelling area and asylum zone for refugees from the outside. Yet beyond these more exposed outward zones, shrub and forest cover the surface to an often impenetrable extent, with one or two narrow paths leading through it. An unusual rock in the innermost forest, but situated below the peak, is often said to be the home of a mighty demon. On rare occasions, individual local residents secretly try to establish certain magical bonds with the *Jinn* or demons. Finally, the actual top of the peak includes a small plateau. Quite often, that plateau area also features a water cistern, and sometimes a small mosque also is built there.

The plateau on the peak thus has to include a cleared area: this is the assembly site for the most important ritual of the *Himah* zones, the so-called *istisqa’* or *istighatha*, the rain sacrifice. Again, practical reason and direct analogy play an obvious role in the choice of this rain sacrifice site, since this is in fact the one area that always receives the greatest proportion of precipitation if any comes down at all. The logics of regional culture, on the other hand, inform the ways in which the ritual performance is enacted and the messages it conveys. The script for that ritual performance is thus informed by regional culture, which profoundly is shaped by folk Islam³ in its south-west Arabian variants.

Folk Islam in south-western Arabia provides a basic cognitive and emotional resource for regional forms of world view. It essentially envisions a tripartite hierarchy for this world as well as for the other world. The other world is basically invisible. Hell, the devil and his demons are positioned at the lowest level of that hierarchy. Paradise, high above on the medium level, is inhabited by a heterogeneous population that also includes virtuous human souls. Allah is ubiquitous and transcendental, ruling the other world as well as this one. Rain and water in general are God’s most visible sign and gift to humans in this world. Below Allah and his angels, this world has a middle realm that consists of humans’ visible world and the invisible world of the *Jinn*. These demons may sometimes penetrate the visible world, while the reverse rarely is possible for humans, and if so then only at great risk. The lowest tier in this world is situated beneath the world of humans and demons. It consists of wild and domesticated animals at the top, and of other living and non-living elements below them.

Himah zones are thus conceived as transitional and threshold areas at the extreme periphery of humans’ residential and agricultural realm. In this threshold area, *Himah* zones are primary recipients of rain and precipitation during normal times of the year. In times of drought, these are the last spots where any water still is available in the peak area’s cistern. By analogy, these threshold areas are closer to Allah, because rain and water are Allah’s primary gift to humans. In addition to the abundance of water, a plethora of birds and wild

³ The term of course is not unproblematic, but I use it here as a shorthand metaphor that helps to emphasise religion in its locally practised dimensions. On that level, similarities across the international border continue to prevail despite all theological differences between Sunni Islam in its Hanbali (“Wahhabi”) version and Shi’ite Islam in its Zaydi version. Prevailing similarities on the level of religious practices by mountain farmers also have to do with the fact that many tribal groups on both sides of the border consider themselves to be related to each other, and that under the Ottoman and Yemeni Imams’ administrations before 1934, Asir was considered by those governments to belong to their respective territorial domains.

bees amidst colours of green are taken by most locals as additional visible indicators in this world of the existence of a paradise in another world. In short, these particularly fertile parts of wild nature are experienced as visible indicators of a paradise that is yet invisible.

The abstract conception of “nature” has its counterpart in local language. As I have shown elsewhere, such a concept *strictu sensu* can only thrive in a monotheist legacy, which basically sets a non-sacred creation apart from a creator who monopolises most of the sanctity there is (Gingrich 2002). In this sense, *Himah* (and *Hawtah*) represent a very special and particularly abundant part of wild, non-domesticated nature, which features two threshold zones towards the invisible realms of the universe. One threshold zone is of minor significance, while being hidden and secret: this is the mighty *Jinn*’s residence in the innermost, lower part of the forest. The other threshold zone is of overwhelming importance in its public ritual meaning: this is the rain sacrifice site on the peak’s plateau, with its special affinity to Allah.

The cosmology of folk Islam and the accumulated memories of past rituals preserved as public tradition therefore ascribe a specific set of meanings to the *Himah* area as the site or stage on which the ritual performance of *istisqa’* or *istighatha* should take place. An *istisqa’* may also take place at other sites, particularly if the village in question is located far away from the highest peak, and if the location of a nearby mosque or an alternative smaller elevation would provide alternative sites for an *istisqa’*. The semantic and logical connection between *Himah* and *istisqa’* or *istighatha* is thus not binding in both directions. An *istisqa’* or *istighatha* may also take place at other sites than in a *Himah*, but a *Himah* is certainly the most privileged and preferred site to carry out an *istisqa’* or *istighatha*. In this sense, any *Himah* area on a mountain peak is imbued with meaning, emotions, and memories that refer to days of climatic emergencies when God’s help is urgently needed.

Times of drought signify the absence of rain as one of God’s most important gifts. When these droughts drag on too long, it obviously becomes necessary to sincerely ask God for that gift. This collective plea is carried out in the form of a large ceremony with a sacrifice as its core element and climax. In such times of drought, after tensions have been rising at first, people come together to put their disputes and conflicts aside in order to perform the ritual. Its main parts are a long procession, accompanied by singing and occasional dancing, in the course of which a white bull is led up to the mountain peak on a pre-selected day when the stars are right. The ritual *communitas* of equal humans in the face of God then waits until sunset while the stars begin to show in the east, when the bull is slaughtered. Each household receives one portion of the bull’s meat, but the best piece is left on the plateau when people return home. The procession, the sacrifice, and the remaining best piece of meat – they are all the ritual community’s gift to God: it is hoped that the gift will be reciprocated by God’s own unique gift, namely rain. Beyond factors of practical reason that I have outlined, and inscribed into them, the cosmology of folk Islam thus does in fact operate like a script for performing the rain sacrifice as a key ritual of vital importance to local communities.

4. NOTES ON THE CONCEPT’S PRE-ISLAMIC BACKGROUND

Neither *Hawtah* and *Himah* are explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an, nor does it refer to the *istisqa’* or *istighatha*. Similar in this sense to other widespread elements of Islamic ritual life (such as male circumcision), however, they have gained wide acceptance in Muslim south-western Arabia. This is also interesting in view of historical continuities that were passed on through the acceptance of Islam. In fact the rain sacrifice of a white bull represents a legacy from south-western Arabia’s pre-Islamic periods, which included strong non-monotheist currents and traditions.

The sacrificial role of the bull in the rain sacrifice is testified to by Sabean and Himyarite sculptures and engravings of decorated bulls’ heads (Dostal 1983). This pre-Islamic role of the sacrificial bull seems to be related to that of the ibex. In ancient South Arabia, the snake and the ibex were sacred beings, as we know from epigraphy and archaeology. The ibex stood for the mountain top and the snake stood for wells and water springs – often at a mountain’s foot – where snakes tend to reside. Both of these wild animals were associated with respective gods and goddesses in the Ancient South Arabian (i.e. Sabean and Himyarite) pan-

theon. This polytheistic pantheon did not include any de-sanctified notion of creation, which allowed that both animals were regarded as sacred beings that stood for different sources of water.

Humans had to feed the sacred snake and to hunt the sacred ibex in times of drought. We know that already in late pre-Islamic times the ibex hunt ritual often had to be substituted by a bull sacrifice wherever the wild ibex was not available for hunting or had died out. In short, today's *istisqa'* and its bull sacrifice date back to pre-Islamic times, when the ibex hunt was associated with what some call an ancient Near-Eastern mountain and wilderness cult (Ryckmans 1987, Korom 1992). At the core of those cults were sacred forests and sacred parks, at first in ancient Mesopotamia and in ancient Persia. There, the etymology of the word for these sacred parks actually stood directly at the linguistic roots of the respective Greek and Biblical loanword from ancient Iranian, *paiṛi.daēza* or "paradise", the sacred protected area (Brandenstein and Mayrhofer 1964: 137; Mayrhofer 1996: 746).

5. *HIMAH*: ARENAS AND COALITIONS OF THE PRESENT

Protecting or destroying *Himah* (and *Hawtah*) is no light or marginal matter today. On the contrary, this theme and site have to do with some of humanity's most cherished cultural legacies, and they concern precious, endangered eco-zones in a highly sensitive environment which otherwise is arid or semi-arid except for those high altitudes. I have tried to show this and how local versions of moderate Islam do tend to accept, encourage and orchestrate ritual processes that, in turn, also help to maintain notions of respect and appreciation for these ritual zones *per se*. For many believers, the existence of *Himah* areas today includes subtle references to the notion of paradise and thereby to a profound element of faith. For many well-informed laypersons and intellectuals, whether they are religious or not, and whether or not Arabic is their first language, *Himah* represents a cultural legacy that in fact is connected to one of the main original notions of the ancient Middle-Eastern theme of paradise. Today, *Himah* can be seen as a contested set of values and institutions. These contests are carried out with peaceful and violent means, about either continuing to abuse and destroy or reinvigorating *Himah*, about "losing" or "regaining" cultural and ecological treasures that remind us of paradise. In the end, let us therefore also consider how several global ideologies orchestrate and inform the ways in which *Himah* areas in south-western Arabia are being dealt with in these contests. These global ideologies include several versions of militant Islam, but also visions of uncontrolled commercial capitalism, which may both combine with visions of New Wars whenever they consider it necessary, and by contrast, ideologies of environmental conservationism and of state-regulated natural protection zones.

In contexts of continuing civil war such as those of Yemen, or of Lebanon until the early 1990s, it seems that *Himah* and *Hawtah* are being pushed aside, until they approach partial or total destruction. This not only has to do with the immediate effects of war, but also with its consequences of aggravated poverty and other post-war socio-economic conditions and settings. Developments in Lebanon were always more central to international attention than those in the Yemen, and the civil war there never expanded as deeply into the Anti-Lebanon Mountain zones as is the case today in the Yemeni mountains. These are some of the reasons why I remain quite sceptical in fact about any potential in the near future for *Himah* areas in north-western Yemen. The late Ernest Gellner (1992) once demonstrated how for peaceful conditions the logic of tacit alliance linked radical Islam with radical entrepreneurial capitalism. Every new road and every new internet coffee shop seems to promote both of them under conditions of de-regulation and jungle competition. This also underlies the fact that today some versions of radical Islam in Yemen direct some of their propaganda against *Himah* areas. Because they are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, and because they are often located in Yemen's core regions of Zaydi influence, these militant forces call for their eradication as arenas of "paganism" as long as there is no huge Sunni mosque in its immediate vicinity. At the same time, commercial interests are already on their way to take hold of *Himah* areas if they are accessible enough, in order to subject them to deforestation, the planting of luxury fruit and so on and so forth. In this way, some branches of militant Sunni Islam and of casino capitalism represent a combined logic of "civilisation", which parasitically reaches out to feed itself from the disasters of warfare and its consequences.

The same social interest groups of course also exist and are active in Saudi Arabia as well. Yet there, relatively strong forces for regulating the market prevail in ways that I have already outlined, and equally importantly this happens under conditions of relative stability and peace. Encouraged by international public opinion and to an extent by the US administration and some EU countries, this has promoted the growth of a different alliance of interests, which seems to be stronger than the alliance between casino capitalism and militant Islam in these specific contexts. The new alliance of interests has forged coalitions between local farmers, regional ecological NGOs, and the Royal Saudi government, including several representatives of the more moderate versions of Islam on the levels of local and regional administration in the south-western provinces of the kingdom. So for a majority of cases in the Saudi south-west, some good prospects for maintaining and upgrading *Himah* areas in the region can indeed be identified. This, however, in one way or the other will bring about the necessity to reconcile a global ideology of “national parks” with the regional and wider Islamic notions of *Hawtah* and *Himah*.

There can be no doubt that the global conception of national parks, with all its legal and political implications, includes an ideological script and corresponding scenarios of implementation. In many ways, these global environmental scripts and their implementation scenarios can be identified as ideologies and rituals in a manner that is parallel to what this paper has argued for *Himah* and *istisqa*. National parks include specific areas and times of taboo and of non-usage. They represent threshold zones for humans and transitional zones towards biological life at large. Transnational and global programmes for the institutional establishment and protection of national parks originate in North America and Western Europe, and today represent a quasi-secularised set of values and beliefs. In several ways, the transformation of *Hawtah* and *Himah* into national parks in the Arab peninsula by necessity will include the juxtaposition and combination of local and regional ideologies and rituals with their different but hopefully compatible global counterparts.

Just as in Lebanon and Syria a few years earlier, this will take some lengthy legal negotiation and, subsequently, detailed fine-tuning and accommodation between global norms, state administration and local practices. Still, the example has been set in neighbouring countries, and the local conditions for implementation are good. This indicates not only that in practice there are some good opportunities out there in real life for accommodating global and local aspirations toward environmental protection with religious and social traditions. Beyond that, this trend may also serve as a good case example that addresses this paper’s initial research question. Sincerely ethical – religious and global – standards and rules, values and norms, ideologies and visions may indeed help to prepare and inform, to orchestrate and to evoke a better way of life, in ritual as much as in everyday practice.

REFERENCES

- ABU ZINADA, Abdallah et al. 2003. *First Saudi Arabian National Report on the Convention on Biological Diversity*. Riyadh: The National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development.
- BLOCH, Maurice. 1989 [orig. 1974]. Symbols, songs, dance, and features of articulation: Is religion an extreme form of traditional authority? In: Bloch, Maurice, *History, Ritual and Power*. London: The Athlone Press, 19–45.
- BRANDENSTEIN, Wilhelm and Manfred MAYRHOFER. 1964. *Handbuch des Altpersischen*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- DOSTAL, Walter. 1983. Some remarks on the ritual significance of the bull in pre-Islamic South Arabia. In: Bidwell, Robin L. and Rex G. Smith (eds) *Arabian and Islamic Studies: Articles presented to R.B. Serjeant*. London-New York: Longman, 196–213.
- DOUGLAS, Mary. 1970. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London: Barrie & Rockliff.
- DUMONT, Louis. 1986 [orig. 1983]. *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- GARI, Lutfallah. 2006. A history of the Himā conservation system. In: *Environment and History*, 12, 213–28.
- GELLNER, Ernest. 1992. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- GINGRICH, Andre. 2002. Regen Gottes, Land der Ehre: Konzeptualisierungen von ‚Natur‘ bei den Munebbih des Nordwestjemen. In: Gingrich, Andre and Elke Mader (eds) *Metamorphosen der Natur. Sozialanthropologische Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Weltbild und natürlicher Umwelt*. Vienna-Cologne-Weimar: Böhlau, 143–59.

- GODELIER, Maurice. 1986 [orig. 1984]. *The Mental and the Material. Thought, Economy and Society*. London: Verso.
- KALDOR, Mary. 1999. *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- KOROM, Frank. 1992. Of navels and mountains: A further inquiry into the history of an idea. In: *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51(1), 103–25.
- LEACH, Edmund. 1976. *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols are Connected*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MAUSS, Marcel. 1990 [orig. 1922/23]. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge.
- MAYRHOFER, Manfred. 1996. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindiarischen*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- NORDSTROM, Carolyn. 2004. *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ROBBEN, Antonius. 2011. Neue Kriege. In: Kreff, Fernand, Eva-Maria Knoll and Andre Gingrich (eds) *Lexikon der Globalisierung*. Bielefeld: transcript, 296–99.
- RYCKMANS, Jacques. 1987. Die Altsüdarabische Religion. In: Daum, Werner (ed.) *Jemen: 3000 Jahre Kunst und Kultur des glücklichen Arabien*. Innsbruck-Frankfurt: Pinguin-Umschau, 111–15.
- SAHLINS, Marshall. 1976. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- SERJEANT, Robert B. 1962. Haram and hawtah, the sacred enclave in Arabia. In: Badawi, Abd al-Rahman (ed.) *Mélanges Taha Husain*. Cairo: Dar al-Maarif, 41–58.
- TURNER, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.

