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TAKING THE PLACE OF MARTYRS: AFGHANS AND ARABS UNDER THE BANNER OF ISLAM

Darryl Li

During the US invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, a new *qabristan* (graveyard) was built in the southern city of Qandahar, adjacent to an existing one, for a special category of “foreign guests”: the bodies of Arabs, allegedly al-Qa’ida fighters and their families. Soon, hundreds of locals began to visit the newcomers’ graves bearing stones, colored cloth, and salt, in search of intercession for illness, deafness, barrenness, and other afflictions of the body and soul. They also came to pay respect to foreign Muslims who had died on Afghan soil. “These boys died here alone, in a foreign country. They were our Muslim brothers and we weep for them,” sixty-five-year-old Sher Mohammed told a US newspaper in January 2002. “It is the duty of every Muslim to see they are buried with respect.” Six years later, a woman in her fifties who lived nearby and frequently tended to the graves went further, telling the BBC, “They are martyrs, and it is my duty to be at their service.”¹ Nor is the soil of Qandahar alone in welcoming the bodies of holy warriors. In Khost, locals seek intercession at graves containing the victims of a US air raid on a mosque: body parts

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of Arabs and Afghans, buried side by side with the remnants of Qur'ans.² And on the other side of the border, near the villages of Arawali and Bagzai in the Kurram Agency of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), similar visits take place at the graves of alleged foreign fighters driven from Tora Bora by US bombs, captured by Pakistani forces, and killed while trying to escape.³

The veneration of the tombs of saintly friends of God (*awliya'*, singular: *wali*)⁴, often in search of such blessings that may take the form of miracles (*karamat*, singular: *karama*), is a common practice in Afghanistan and many other parts of the Muslim world.⁵ Some shrines in Afghanistan have arisen atop the graves of deceased travelers.⁶ Veneration of alleged al-Qa'ida fighters, however, seems to have piqued the anxieties of Gul Agha Sherzai, the US-backed warlord of Qandahar whose forces reportedly once opened fire on a woman and child visiting the *qabristan*.⁷ Others were hardly deterred: as late as January 2008, hundreds of Afghans continued to visit the graves every day.⁸ Like Gul Agha, the Pakistani state has looked askance at these gatherings. Seven months after the invasion, when Chechens rumored to be al-Qa'ida fighters were killed in a shootout outside Jarma village, police mounted raids around Kohat in search of hair, nails, and other body parts so as to prevent locals from holding a funeral prayer for them. The arrests and the withholding of the corpses, however, did nothing to stem local protests or prevent the construction of a shrine at the site of the battle.⁹

State authorities in Afghanistan and Pakistan have not been alone in their discomfort with these shrines: Interspersed among the Afghans seeking blessings or cures have been Westerners in search of ominous signs of "fundamentalist" resurgence and ongoing sympathy for al-Qa'ida, who see the Pathans and their foreign guests as drawn together by their common embrace of "hardline" Islam. In September 2005, a Western journalist noted the failure of efforts by President Hamid Karzai to discourage visits to the Qandahar graves as evidence of ongoing support for the Taliban.¹⁰ While many visitors disclaimed any particular motives against the United States or its client regime, others were carefully defiant in their choice of saints. "Americans have the right to call these people their enemies," quipped an Arawali taxi driver to a reporter. "But we have the right to call them martyrs."¹¹

It is also possible, however, to see irony in the veneration of the graves of Arab fighters, for they have stereotypically been Salafis and virulent critics of the practice of grave visitation as un-Islamic forms of innovation (*bid'a*), ignorant remnants of local traditions (*jahl*), or even polytheism (*shirk*). Such practices are often associated with Sufis, who in Afghanistan mostly belong to one of two Sufi orders (*turuq*, singular: *tariqa*), the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya.¹² Among some circles, Arabs developed a reputation for unwelcome fanaticism as early as the 1979-1989 war with the Soviets, accused of attempting to impose “foreign” and rigid forms of Islam upon the authentic, pliable, and local traditions of the Afghan people. Little wonder, then, that Pir Sayyid Ahmad Gailani, leader of the Qadiriyya order in Afghanistan and a prominent politician, has gleefully pointed to the visits as evidence of the victory of Afghan Sufi religious practice over the presumed anti-visitation Salafism of the Arabs buried there. “These guys must be turning in their graves.... They came here to eradicate this practice, and now there are people praying over their graves.”¹³

So, here we have two ways of looking at the visitation of Arab graves by Afghans: as veneration of foreign fundamentalists in the service of a monolithic “radicalism,” or as a triumph of local, folk, moderate, syncretistic traditions over alien, literate, radical, puritanical ones. Between these two perspectives—the *qabristan* as site of fundamentalist persistence, the *qabristan* as site of fundamentalist defeat—I would like to suggest a third: the *qabristan* as a reminder of the debates between Muslims hailing from different lands and holding different ideas in order to realize projects that meaningfully incarnate a common faith called Islam and its prophetic message for all of mankind. These accounts of the veneration of the Arab graves gesture toward the kind of cross-cultural encounters that are integral to pan-Islamist projects such as the Afghan jihad. Through examining debates around miracles and veneration of tombs—debates with long textual genealogies and deep resonances in local practices—this article tentatively attempts to reconstruct some of these encounters. Doing so can help avoid reductively viewing these visits as a victory for either (good) “local” or (bad) “foreign” Muslims, while at the same time moving beyond the truism that Islam and Muslims are not static or monolithic. In so doing, we can also illuminate some of the religious, political, and cul-

tural relationships that have developed between Afghans and other Muslims, mostly Arabs (also known as the “Afghan Arabs”), over the last three decades of near-continuous conflict. Finally, we can reframe our understanding of this intensely scrutinized yet poorly understood group of travelers, who have played such a pivotal role in recent world-historical events.

The Afghan Arabs: Beyond Foreign and Local

There has been much confusion around the issue of Arabs in Afghanistan, in large part due to a simplistic teleological narrative reducing the September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington to Arab volunteers in Afghanistan morphing into al-Qa’ida and turning against their erstwhile American sponsors.¹⁴ Therefore, some background here may be helpful. The violent challenges to and reconfigurations of centralized state authority in Afghanistan since the collapse of the 1976 Saur revolution have involved a variety of actors from both near and far. The latter category has included the armies, diplomats, and spies of global powers such as the United States and the Soviet Union; from neighbors like Pakistan and Iran, tribes and diasporas have also played an important role alongside governments. In the shadow of these more prominent entanglements have been thousands of Muslims from further afield, especially the Arab world: aid workers, fighters, proselytizers, and less purposive wanderers as well. A major engine for this movement was the war against the Soviets (1979-1989). The United States and Saudi Arabia channeled billions of dollars in aid to the Afghan mujahidin groups, primarily through the Pakistani military’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).¹⁵ Parallel to this official state assistance were the efforts of civil society groups in the Muslim world and especially Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, which sent both aid and volunteers to perform a variety of missions.¹⁶ Arabs traveled to Pakistan and Afghanistan to work as engineers, doctors, journalists, teachers, preachers, and fighters.¹⁷

The early 1990s were a turning point. The collapse of the Soviet-backed Kabul regime and subsequent infighting among the Afghan mujahidin made continued Arab volunteer efforts appear unnecessary, if not unseemly; the participation of some Afghanistan war veterans in violence in Algeria and Egypt helped seal their reputation as globetrotting trou-

blemakers.¹⁸ At the same time, a dizzying array of dissident groups from throughout the Muslim world came to Afghanistan in search of a relatively safe haven where they could make contacts and develop military expertise. It was in this period that the term “Afghan Arab” emerged in some parts of the Arabic-language media, denoting a sort of monstrous cultural hybrid, a nightmarish inversion of the relatively benign image of pan-Islamist solidarity that was nurtured during the anti-Soviet war.¹⁹ By the middle of the decade, the conflicts in Algeria and Egypt became internationalized with the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York (1993), the Paris metro (1995), Egyptian president Husni Mubarak’s motorcade in Addis Ababa (1995), and the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad (1995). With Osama bin Laden’s return in 1996, Afghanistan became the center for al-Qa’ida, although other military training camps devoted to jihad maintained their independence from it. In this context, the United States involved itself more directly in amplifying Egypt’s efforts to kidnap and forcibly repatriate dissidents around the world, including in Croatia, Albania, and Azerbaijan. Against the backdrop of these political shifts, however, various Arab aid and proselytizing efforts in Afghanistan also continued. After the September 2001 attacks, the United States and its allies dramatically expanded efforts to track, capture, and torture transnational Islamist activists on the assumption that they could be Afghan Arabs and therefore potential members of al-Qa’ida.²⁰ In practice, the campaign devolved into a dragnet of Arab travelers in non-Arab Muslim countries, as seen most egregiously in the use of cash bounties for Arab captives during the US invasion of Afghanistan, many of whom were indiscriminately shipped to indefinite detention at Guantánamo Bay or elsewhere.

Even when critiquing the often sensationalist output of journalists, government officials, and self-proclaimed “terrorism experts” on the Afghan Arabs, existing scholarship has largely treated this phenomenon as something aberrational, a sort of extraneous “radicalizing” variable. In particular, a dichotomous assumption characterizes much of the writing on the topic, including the accounts of grave worship quoted above. It goes something like this: there are foreign Muslims who are mostly Arab, Salafi/Wahhabi, radical, rootless, puritanical, and violent. And then there are local Muslims, in this case Afghans, who are Sufi or follow the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, and are potentially moderate, account-

able, and syncretistic. To take one example, David Edwards's oral history of Afghanistan reported that, "For the most part, Arabs were perceived as overbearing and insensitive to Afghan traditions."²¹ Moreover, Arabs' lack of local ties was precisely what enabled their fanaticism:

Kinship, honor, respect for elders, compassion for the plight of women and children, recognition of the needs of civilian populations—all might affect the decisions of an Afghan commander considering his options, but Arabs—[Afghan] informants believe—had no such crosscutting loyalties or scruples. They were zealots who had come to Afghanistan to prove a point and build their movement, and they had no particular affection or respect for the people living in the country where they were fighting.²²

Edwards's account undoubtedly captures the sentiments of at least some Afghans, and these criticisms have been echoed in other conflict destinations for transnational Islamists, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Iraq, and Kashmir. But as the phenomenon of the Arab graves demonstrates, the perception of Arabs as brutal interlopers is also incomplete.

The construction of a threat that is simultaneously "foreign" and "Wahhabi" has a long history in Afghan state formation and imperial strategies in the region. When Timur Shah ascended to the throne in 1772, he created a special office in the court to combat potential influences from the Wahhabi movement for fear that it would undermine the nascent regime. As various rulers tried to consolidate and expand the Afghan state throughout the nineteenth century, the epithet "Wahhabi" was often used against 'ulama from British India, seen as agents of imperialist influence, and even against local critics of the regime.²³ Meanwhile, in India itself, colonial officials employed the same label against Muslim reformist movements they deemed threatening to their rule.²⁴ In the mid-twentieth century, the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth noted that Pathans in Swat, Pakistan "have recently come increasingly under the influence of fundamentalist and puritan interpretations of Wahabi [*sic*] type."²⁵ The foreign/local dichotomy and the concomitant deployment of the term "Wahhabi" can persist easily today because it confounds one of the most common critiques of the US-led "war on terror," namely that this campaign is a war upon Islam or Muslims as such. It recognizes that Islam

and Muslims are not uniformly or inherently backward, anti-modern, intolerant, or violent.²⁶ Instead, by arguing that the United States and its allies must compete with “foreign” fighters for the hearts and minds of Muslims in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan, this dichotomy enables the war on terror to be recast as a war in defense of Muslim pluralism. The foreign/local dichotomy maps putative doctrinal differences (Salafism versus Sufism, Salafism versus the Hanafi school) onto geographical ones (Afghanistan versus the outside world) in order to reproduce a nation-state logic amenable to both local regimes and their imperial sponsors. Thus, Afghans can delegitimize Wahhabis as foreign while other foreigners (such as Americans) can delegitimize them as fanatics.

The neat conflations and alignments upon which the foreign/local dichotomy depends, however, tend to reify the misleading notion of Afghanistan as somehow historically isolated from the outside world. Nile Green has shown how a self-conscious Afghan identity emerged among the Afghan diaspora in Mughal India, through a process of narrativizing a “tribalization” of Sufi *awliya*.²⁷ Sufism—often glossed as “local” and authentic in the foreign/local dichotomy—is obviously no less transnational in nature than Salafism.²⁸ Sayyid Ahmad Gailani, the leader of the Qadiriyya order in Afghanistan quoted in the introduction as denouncing “foreign” fighters, was born to a Baghdadi father, making him an “Afghan Arab” in some sense as well. Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, head of the Naqshbandiyya order in Afghanistan and a major political figure, traces his ancestry to the Prophet through the migrant reformist scholar Ahmad Sirhindi, who was born in what is now Indian Punjab; he was also schooled at al-Azhar in Egypt along with his more “fundamentalist” counterparts. Afghan ‘ulama are no less transnational, since study abroad has historically been the norm rather than the exception, due in part to the country’s lack of any Islamic institutions of higher learning: most of the leaders of the mujahidin parties in the 1980s studied at al-Azhar in Egypt.²⁹ Much of the generation after theirs who became the Taliban was schooled in the Deobandi madrasas that sprang up in the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan after the partition of British India made access to Deoband itself more difficult.³⁰

Given the conceptual flaws and disturbing political valences of the foreign/local dichotomy, how then are we to approach the Arab *qabris-*

tans—and the Afghan Arabs more generally—without reverting to an assumption of monolithic, undifferentiated Islam? I suggest that a helpful starting point is to think of differences between Muslims not merely as a way of undermining a monolithic image of Islam, but as potentially generative of pan-Islamic solidarity as well. Critiques of Orientalist reductionism or monolithic portrayals of Islam, as salutary as they are, tend to overlook one important point: that pan-Islamist sentiments can and do coexist with other forms of Muslim identity. Pan-Islamism is no more necessarily exclusive of nor a substitute for nationalism than, say, liberal internationalism. Gathering under the banner of Islam is a decision that can be made by Muslims, be they Salafis, Sufis, Afghans, Arabs, fighting or non-fighting, traveling or non-traveling (all of which are cross-cutting categories), under certain circumstances. More important than the question of how commonality is imagined or sought—as this inevitably produces the narratives of disappointment and cynicism so ably amplified by the foreign/local dichotomy—is the question of how difference is encountered and dealt with. It is necessary to recall that *any* pan-Islamist project—or any project that seeks to spread a message with specific content to all humanity—will inevitably encounter empirical differences. The important questions are which differences are tolerable variations and which signal a deeper incompatibility, and how is this determined. Most importantly, differences and even disputes can nevertheless draw people together if they are grounded in and reinforce shared assumptions or terms of debate.

The broad and diverse history of what can be loosely thought of as Islamicate civilization provides any number of conceptual, discursive, narrative, institutional, and material resources that can help process differences when drawn upon in specific contexts, such as the Afghan jihad in the 1980s. Undetermined by—and sometimes even predating—the logic of nation-states, these discourses and practices can help shape both commonality and contestation outside the foreign/local dichotomy. They allow individuals to confront questions of difference by translating precepts of sweeping generality (“all Muslims are brothers in faith”) into practical modalities (say, how to debate the burial of a recently arrived foreign Muslim and the conversion of his grave into a site of veneration). Identifying and interrogating these ways of processing difference

can shed light on how Arab participants in the Afghan jihad and their Afghan counterparts drew from and added to a body of texts, arguments, and practices whose spatial and temporal contours cut across national and cultural boundaries as a matter of course. This approach allows us to see not only that in certain circumstances Muslims of different kinds could gather under the banner of Islam, but also *how* they (re)arrayed themselves in doing so.

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Acts: Miracle Stories

To understand the processing of difference, let us start with miracles. The Arabs buried in these *qabristans* may not have been surprised that some sought miracles at their graves, since miracles are also part of what attracted many Arabs to Afghanistan in the first place. Stories of extraordinary, even supernatural, occurrences during the Afghan jihad circulated widely in the Arab world: bodies of martyrs exuding the smell of musk, birds flying ahead of Soviet MiG jets to warn of impending bombing raids, even sightings of angels. Of course, there is nothing unique about such occurrences and tales about them circulating in wartime, as war is itself an experience that brings out the extraordinary.³¹ But that is precisely the point: longstanding and complex Islamic traditions on the extraordinary (*khariq lil-'ada*) provided both Afghans and Arabs with a common vocabulary, a common set of tropes, and common criteria for recounting and debating such phenomena as *karamat*, saintly marvels, or miracles. The importance of miracle accounts in Arabic discourses on the Afghan jihad is all the more striking if one starts from the foreign/local dichotomy and its attendant emphasis on Salafi/Sufi disputes. The discussion of latter-day miracles, i.e., those outside the early days of Islam, has generally been associated with Sufism, whereas Salafis have often been perceived as skeptical of, if not outright hostile to, Sufism in general and contemporary claims of the miraculous in particular.

Perhaps the inaugural text in this discussion is a book by 'Abdallah 'Azzam (1941-1989), a Palestinian Islamic scholar who played a leading role in organizing Arab participation in the Afghan jihad. 'Azzam was an Azhar-trained jurist who had developed extensive pan-Islamist contacts while teaching in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and is probably best

known for his treatise arguing that participation in the Afghan jihad was obligatory for every Muslim (*fard 'ayn*).³² He was also a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, though his relationship with them was at times strained, especially over the question of Arab military participation in the Afghan jihad. One of 'Azzam's best-known books, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan (Signs of the Merciful God in the Afghan Jihad*, hereafter: *Signs of God*), catalogues dozens of accounts of extraordinary, including supernatural, occurrences during the Afghan jihad.³³ Published in 1983 on the basis of earlier dispatches for the Kuwaiti Islamist publication *al-Mujtama'*, *Signs of God* was immensely popular. It went through multiple editions, was printed in Lahore, Jidda, Amman, Beirut, Alexandria, and possibly other cities, and is now widely available on the Internet. It has been translated into English, Turkish, and Bahasa, and excerpts are also available in the language formerly known as Serbo-Croatian.³⁴ A quarter century after the book's initial appearance, I continued to encounter its readers—both dedicated and casual—in Pakistan, Yemen, Israel/Palestine, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.³⁵ Both because of its content and the extent of its circulation, *Signs of God* is a useful marker in tracing perceptions of the Afghan jihad in the broader Arab and Muslim worlds.

Signs of God reflects 'Azzam's intimate involvement with Afghan interlocutors in a multi-sited set of interactions stretching from Peshawar to Lahore to the Hijaz. The introduction was penned by 'Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf, an Afghan mujahidin leader and al-Azhar graduate who was fluent in Arabic and was for a time titular leader of the coalition of major anti-Soviet *mujahid* parties. 'Azzam writes that he was first exposed to stories of *karamat* in a lecture he attended during Hajj by one of Sayyaf's aides, Muhammad Yasir. For miracle accounts he relies extensively on the famous Deobandi-educated *mujahid* commander, Jalal al-Din Haqqani, and on his relatives and bodyguards.³⁶

Signs of God sought to demonstrate the existence of extraordinary occurrences in the Afghan jihad as evidence of divine support and sanction through an eclectic range of genres, including philosophy, history, ethnography, law, and polemic. The book's argument is essentially threefold: First, 'Azzam establishes that extraordinary events are possible, through reference to pre- and early Islamic history, including the act of Qur'anic revelation itself (signs, or *ayat*), miracles attributed to prophets

(*mu‘jizat*), and marvels (*karamat*) involving the companions of the prophet Muhammad (*al-sahaba*) and the subsequent generation of Muslims (*al-tabi‘un*). Second, turning to the present, he claims that reports of such events in Afghanistan are credible (‘Azzam searched for eyewitnesses,³⁷ had them swear oaths on the Qur’an, sought physical evidence whenever possible) and that they belong to the category of *karamat*, as opposed to magic or other morally suspect forms of the extraordinary. Third, having established that it must be God himself who is causing marvels to occur as signs of his support for the Afghan *mujahids*, ‘Azzam then provides political and legal analysis to exhort and guide action from the umma.

In his analysis of the nature of miracles, ‘Azzam openly relies on Sufi writers for several important points. The first is that engagements with the miraculous must be grounded in the fundamentals of the religion, as acknowledged by the Sufi mystic al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (830-910): “This knowledge (*ilm*) of ours is confined to the [holy] Book and the Sunna. As for he who hasn’t read the Qur’an and hasn’t studied (*yaktub*) hadith, it is not correct for him to speak on our knowledge.” Second, in order to properly classify an extraordinary occurrence, one must look beyond the event itself and instead assess the character of the person associated with it, asking if he is allied with God or derives his power from the Devil. This problem exists because *karamat* and mere magic may take the same form (“The only difference between *karama* and magic is in the friend of God’s following of the prophet and the magician’s opposition to him”). As Abu Yazid al-Bistami (804-874) put it: “If you see a man flying in the air and walking on water, do not be fooled by him until you see where he stands between good and evil (*hatta tanzuru kayfa wuqufuhu ‘inda al-awamir wa’l-nawahi*).”³⁸ Third, the *absence* of extraordinary events says nothing about a person’s piety or character. ‘Azzam notes that Shihab al-Din Abu Hafs al-Suhrawardi (1155-1191) described eager Muslims who lamented the fact that they have not been blessed with miracles and therefore even blame themselves for somehow not being pious enough. “Had they known the secret they would attach no importance to this... For the path of the upright demands uprightness from the soul, and that is itself a miracle (*fa-sabil al-sadiq mutalabat al-nafs bil-istiqama fa-hiya kull al-karama*).”³⁹ Fourth, ‘Azzam notes the necessary ambivalence toward *karamat* on the

part of those blessed with them, another pervasive theme of Sufi discourses on miracles:⁴⁰

A *karama* does not indicate that the person bestowed with it is better than others. Indeed, it may even diminish his standing with God on account of it becoming well known (*bi-sabab al-shuhra*) and some complacency may sneak into his soul. Because of this, many of the pious ask for forgiveness upon the appearance of a miracle at their hands, just as if they have sinned.⁴¹

It is important to bear in mind that although ‘Azzam’s arguments draw upon Sufi sources, his conception of the miraculous differs in several crucial ways, the most important being the downplaying of the importance of the individuals involved. ‘Azzam does not offer biographies of those blessed with miracles in order to demonstrate the pious lives they have led, something that is more commonly associated with Sufi hagiography. Instead, the accounts of miracles explicitly support a collective, political project. They do not demonstrate the righteousness of a *wali*, but the righteousness of a nation. The subjects of most of the miracle accounts are not saintly or ascetic individuals who encounter the miraculous as signposts along a personal path to spiritual enlightenment, but rather ordinary pious individuals caught up in extraordinary circumstances.

Notwithstanding these important differences, ‘Azzam’s reliance on this literature is surprising in light of his own strident critiques of Sufism.⁴² In a later work, ‘Azzam explicitly praises the Afghan jihad for having “shaken the earth underneath the feet of Sufism” in Afghanistan, accusing Sufism of “being built on the principle of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”⁴³ In the introduction one of the follow-up editions of *Signs of God*, ‘Azzam sharply reminded readers of his Salafi bona fides:

The man who writes these words on *karamat* is a person who has spent a quarter-century studying Islam carrying the Salafi creed. He does not believe in superstitions, lives to fight *bid‘a* and to establish God’s religion on earth, and is influenced most by the books of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. He doesn’t take his beliefs from the delusions of windbags, or even the visions of the pious (*ru‘a al-salihin*).

His only doctrine comes from the book of God and the sunna of the messengers and from the luminaries of Islamic thought through history, especially the line of Ahmad ibn Hanbal.⁴⁴

‘Azzam’s reference to Ibn Taymiyya is noteworthy, as he is widely considered an inspiration for radical Salafi thought but also was not entirely inclined against mysticism.⁴⁵ Indeed, the statements mentioned above from al-Junayd al-Baghdadi and Abu Yazid al-Bistami are cited in the eleventh volume of Ibn Taymiyya’s grand compilation of fatwas (*Majmu‘ al-Fatawa*). ‘Azzam also cites Ibn Taymiyya directly on several occasions, including in response to the question of whether miracles are still possible after the early years of Islam. In *The Difference Between Friends of the Merciful and Friends of Satan (al-Furqan bayna Awliya’ al-Rahman wa-Awliya’ al-Shaytan)*, Ibn Taymiyya noted that the occurrence of miracles increased among the *tabi‘un* after the generation of the *sahaba* precisely because the latter were stronger in their faith and had lesser need for miracles to shore up their belief.⁴⁶ In relying on Ibn Taymiyya, ‘Azzam was not merely trying to burnish his credentials but to draw from diverse strands of Islamic thought in a manner that eludes easy contemporary classification.

‘Azzam’s open reliance on Sufi thinkers cannot be ignored nor dismissed as mere hypocrisy in light of his criticism of Sufism in Afghanistan. Rather, I would read it as a reminder that because the continuing existence of miraculous events after the early days of Islam has primarily been seen as a Sufi concern, such traditions provide a logical conceptual and discursive resource for a kindred project such as ‘Azzam’s. In order for ‘Azzam to argue meaningfully that the Afghan jihad is a worthy analogue to the early battles of Islam it is not enough simply to propose parallels between the two. He must also provide some of the intellectual groundwork to deal with practical questions that would seem obvious to believers, such as: How do we recognize a miracle when we see one? How do we distinguish it from mere sorcery or trickery? How do we ensure that it is not someone’s attempt to usurp the mantle of prophethood? These are precisely the questions that Sufis have played a central role in elaborating for centuries, while many other strands of Islam either ignored the miraculous or insisted that it was particular to early Islamic history. For ‘Azzam to engage with this tradition is neither a sign of hypocrisy nor some

laudatory act of broad-mindedness. It is, rather, an instance of a cultural resource—in this case, the discursive traditions concerning *khariq lil-‘ada* and the place of the miraculous within it—mobilized to process difference. For readers assumed to have little familiarity with Afghanistan, texts such as *Signs of God* locate the Afghan jihad in a spiritual geography of Islam. That this modality of difference is itself deeply inflected by Sufi influences only demonstrates the limited value of the foreign/local dichotomy.

Moreover, in facilitating solidarity, this modality of difference does not demand unanimity. Instead, it provides parameters that structure the conditions of possibility for certain kinds of difference (and not others). Hence belief in accounts of miracles is less important than participating meaningfully in the broader debate about and discussion around them. The miracle accounts in *Signs of God* have by no means escaped criticism, even among ardent supporters of Arab participation in the Afghan jihad. The prominent Saudi Arabian jurist Musa al-Qarni, who was active in the Afghan jihad and worked with ‘Azzam, expressed this critique somewhat elliptically:

From a theoretical perspective, we do not deny *karamat*. *Karamat* are a matter of the extraordinary (*khariq lil-‘ada*) that God almighty bestows upon the hand of one of his friends in aid of his exalted religion. A *rational person* (*‘aqil*) cannot deny this. But there is exaggeration in this [matter], and secondly any person can make up any story about it.⁴⁷

A more forceful critique came from Egyptian journalist ‘Isam Diraz, who spent considerable time covering the Afghan war, including the exploits of Osama bin Laden.⁴⁸ Diraz claimed that none of the over one hundred Arab and Afghan mujahidin he spoke to claimed to witness *karamat* as described in ‘Azzam’s book, although a few said they had heard stories of them. Moreover, he believed such exaggerations were dangerous because they led Arab youths to Afghanistan expecting to “meet men of the level of the *sahaba*, of the ranks of angels,” but that instead they would experience shock, as “the Afghan mujahidin are human (*bashar*) in every sense of the word.” Diraz noted that some Arabs were even killed due to betrayals by Afghan organizations. Nevertheless, he also conceded that it remains within God’s power to grant *karamat* to Afghans as a means of helping them.⁴⁹

Even before the publication of Diraz's book, 'Azzam addressed the issue of romanticized portrayals of Afghans in his preface to the second edition of *Signs of God*, which is preoccupied with responding to various critiques of the *karamat* accounts. 'Azzam stands by his praise of the Afghan people but concedes that "among this people, there are righteous and those not so; there are human failings (*naqa'is al-bashar*) and weaknesses. There are makers of *bid'a* (*mubtadi'*) among them, liars, spies, thieves, smokers, and those given over to hashish and *niswar*."⁵⁰ 'Azzam then argues that Afghans are ordinary in nature but nevertheless extraordinary in piety, a point he repeats when responding to criticisms that miracle accounts lead not to trust in God (*tawakkul*) but rather complacency (*tawakul*). For 'Azzam, *karamat* are signs of piety and righteousness rather than substitutes for them. Through them, God "strengthens the hearts" of believers in times of adversity; they are not super powers inherent to any particular individual, no matter how great.⁵¹

In juxtaposing the stances of 'Azzam, al-Qarni, and Diraz toward *karamat*, we can see a modality of difference in action. Although engaged in a serious difference of opinion, they share two key assumptions: first, that latter-day *karamat* are a legitimate phenomenon (something that most unbelievers and even many self-identified Muslims would reject) and second, that Afghans are ordinary human beings. All three men assume certain standards of piety that reinforce the inclusion of Afghans in a broader spiritual geography. Their assumptions and the debate that they ground together comprised one of the ways in which Arab activists made sense of the Afghan jihad, helping to delineate a pan-Islamic yet nevertheless diverse space of thought and action in terms not defined by national categories or even the doctrinal differences between Salafis and Sufis.

Grounding Debates, Burying Disputes: Shrine Visitation

In contrast to the issue of *karamat*—where a striking degree of cross-doctrinal pollination set the stage for debates that were relatively restrained in nature—the issue of seeking intercession with God by visiting the shrines of His friends (*ziyara*)⁵² has been far more contentious. Yet, as we shall see, convergences or at least accommodations were possible once shared terms of reference for debate could be determined.

The practice of shrine visitation is found in many parts of the Muslim world and has been a frequent object of critique from liberals, socialists, and Islamists as a form of superstition and backwardness.⁵³ One major critique of many Muslim reformists of varying stripes has been that seeking the intercession of the dead for favors from God is sometimes indistinguishable from worshipping the intermediaries themselves, and therefore raises concerns about polytheism or the appearance of it. For some Arab mujahidin in Afghanistan, this practice—along with the associated use of amulets and charms—was deeply discouraging and even caused them to leave in disgust at what they deemed a war “between polytheists and atheists!”⁵⁴ ‘Isam Diraz claimed that he once stopped an Arab *mujahid* who abandoned the battlefield in protest of an Afghan comrade’s decision to carry a talisman, which was seen as a form of superstition that undermined faith in God.⁵⁵

One prominent Salafi critic in this vein was Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi‘i (1930-2000), a Yemeni scholar who converted from the Zaydi sect of Shi‘i Islam. Al-Wadi‘i declared that “superstition in Afghanistan is undeniable. Only a blind man could deny it: standing graves, amulets, spells, and prayers and supplication (*istighatha*) to those other than God. And the great disaster, Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, has vaulted into power.”⁵⁶ Unlike ‘Isam Diraz’s skepticism of *karamat*, al-Wadi‘i’s critique had far-reaching political consequences insofar as it implied Afghans’ religious shortcomings made them unworthy of certain kinds of support, including the duty of other Muslims to fight on their side. On the same page as his critique of *ziyara*-related practices in Afghanistan, al-Wadi‘i slammed ‘Azzam’s argument that participation in the Afghan jihad was *fard ‘ayn*. Undoubtedly referring to ‘Azzam’s famous fatwa in speaking of “words from who knows where, a fatwa from who knows where,” al-Wadi‘i questioned why jihad was justified by the presence of communists in Afghanistan when other “Muslim lands are strewn with communists, Ba‘thists, and Nasirists.” “This fatwa,” he concluded, “is a farce (*mahzala*).”⁵⁷ ‘Azzam’s response to critiques of this kind was to remind readers that the prevalence of such deviant practices (which he also opposed) in Arab countries meant that Afghans were no less deserving of solidarity than, say, Meccans and Medinans had their cities been invaded. He prioritized unity for the sake of jihad.⁵⁸

These doctrinal disputes did not take place in a vacuum, but rather were related to intense political contestation in both Afghanistan and the Arab world, which only intensified with the February 1989 Soviet withdrawal, ‘Azzam’s assassination in November of that year by unknown parties,⁵⁹ and the onset of the Gulf crisis in 1990. At the immediate level, al-Wadi‘i’s angry missive was triggered by the killing of Jamil al-Rahman, an Afghan commander who founded the Society for Da‘wa to the Qur’an and Sunna (*Jama‘at al-Da‘wa ila al-Qur’an wa’l-Sunna*). Jamil al-Rahman’s group established a statelet in Kunar province that was autonomous from the major Afghan mujahidin factions, and in which he reportedly enforced anti-visitation policies by destroying tombs. Perhaps more threatening for the Afghan mujahidin—especially for his former comrade, Hizb-i-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—Jamil al-Rahman cultivated his own ties to sponsors in the Saudi religious establishment.⁶⁰ Confrontation between Jamil al-Rahman and Hekmatyar came to a head when Saudi Arabia’s decision to host US troops triggered widespread criticism even from Saudi-supported Islamist groups, including Hizb-i-Islami in Afghanistan and Jama‘at-i Islami in Pakistan.⁶¹ In response, Saudi Arabia shifted the bulk of its largesse to smaller Ahl al-Hadith-oriented groups on both sides of the Durand line such as Jamil al-Rahman’s Society for Da‘wa and the Pakistani Jami‘at ‘Ulama’-i-Islam (JUI).⁶² Moving decisively to confront a budding rival and to present an erstwhile foreign sponsor with a fait accompli, Hekmatyar conquered Kunar in early 1991. Jamil al-Rahman fled to Bajaur in Pakistan, where he was killed in August by an Egyptian alleged to be a Muslim Brother and a former correspondent for ‘Azzam’s magazine.⁶³

Closer to home, al-Wadi‘i’s support for Jamil al-Rahman stemmed from his own long-running campaign against shrine visitation in Yemen as well as a bitter rivalry with the Muslim Brothers, whom he ridiculed as “al-Ikhwan al-Muflisun” (“the Bankrupt Brothers”) rather than al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun. Al-Wadi‘i putatively rejected Islamist attempts to capture or share in state power as “partyism” (*hizbiyya*), a position that conveniently found favor with the Yemeni regime, which used it to divide and co-opt Islamist opposition.⁶⁴ In this vein, al-Wadi‘i criticized the Muslim Brothers and by extension Hekmatyar, whom he also attacked for being on the US payroll.⁶⁵ The intensity of the rivalry with the Muslim Brothers

at home probably also helps explain why al-Wadi'i—himself a longtime critic of the Saudi regime—was willing to overlook Jamil al-Rahman's Saudi ties in distant Afghanistan. In any event, what is important here is the inappositeness of the foreign/local distinction—instead, we see alliances between different factions within and across Afghanistan and the Arab world, shifting with historical circumstances.

Given the contentiousness of shrine visitation—linked, as we saw above, to deeper and bloodier rivalries among both Afghans and Arabs—the practice presented a delicate challenge to 'Azzam and his followers. Yet nonetheless, we can see how debates around this issue were not always incompatible with pan-Islamist commitments. A first step in this direction is to interrogate the trope of Arabs “imposing” their interpretation of Islam, such as anti-visitation norms. The narratives produced by Afghan Arabs, even if self-serving, suggest that fanaticism is often in the eye of the beholder. While Arabs at times condescendingly described Afghans as backward or poorly educated in their religion, the appropriate response according to 'Azzam was not confrontation, but rather persuasion.⁶⁶ Therefore, he sought Arab volunteers who would be judicious and patient in their proselytizing (*da'wa*) by downplaying these disputes over religious practice in favor of a focus on jihad.⁶⁷ After all, if anyone was in a position to forcibly impose their views, it was the Afghans themselves, being far more numerous. Unsurprisingly, in Arab accounts it is the Afghans who are described as narrow-minded. 'Abdallah Anas, an Algerian confidant of Afghan *mujahid* commander Ahmad Shah Mas'ud (later nemesis of the Taliban), described Afghans as “fanatical (*muta'assib*)” in their devotion to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, without having been exposed to any other approach to the religion. Anas recalled that a Hizb-i Islami field commander expelled a French Algerian *mujahid* from his unit merely for urinating while standing, an act generally considered religiously undesirable but not prohibited.⁶⁸

In another incident described in the memoirs of Ayman Faraj, an Egyptian *mujahid* in Afghanistan, a dispute broke out between Arabs and Afghans over the burial of a Yemeni martyr. The Afghans wished to pray over the Yemeni's grave, which the Arabs refused to do⁶⁹: “This was the first time I had heard or seen dogmatism and doctrinal fanaticism (*al-tamadhdhub wa'l-ta'assub al-madhhabi*), and it was a saddening sight:

Muslims loathing each other and showing enmity due to chauvinism and narrow-mindedness.” After some altercations, an Afghan shaykh speaking flawless Arabic proposed that each side follow its own interpretation; the Afghans performed their prayer, while the Arabs grudgingly stood to one side. At the same time, the narrator could make out part of the Afghan shaykh’s speech to the Afghans:

The four schools [of Islamic jurisprudence] are [all] correct, respect for guests is necessary, and divisiveness and conflicts are reprehensible.... The banners atop the graves resemble the crosses that Christians put atop their graves, and the Arabs do not like that.⁷⁰

This anecdote is noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, Faraj and one of his Egyptian comrades made a point of praying alongside the Afghans, effectively conforming to local preferences. This fact belies or at least nuances the stereotype of Arab intolerance toward Afghan practices. Second, and more interestingly, this dispute concerned Afghans insisting on praying over the body of an *Arab* martyr who himself would have presumably rejected such a practice. In this case, the “secular” compromise of allowing people to practice as they see fit came at the expense of another putatively secular value, namely consent and respecting the presumed wishes of the deceased. The case thus raises a more important point, namely that the narrative of Arabs “imposing” their views on Afghans ignores the specific power relationships between Afghans and their guests while at the same time making unacknowledged judgments about what constitutes “correct” or “authentic” religious practice—judgments in which non-Muslims ostensibly have no normative stake.

In the above story, it was an Afghan who defused tension over doctrinal differences. To understand how some Arabs sought to do so, we can turn to Faraj’s own experiences debating shrine visitation. Faraj spent some time in an Afghan village that had generally negative impressions of Arabs. For these views he blamed the Afghan tendency to extol their Hanafi school of jurisprudence above all others, as well as certain hot-headed Arabs who had played into the image of the fanatical “Wahhabi” circulating among Afghans. In contrast, Faraj decided to tell the Afghans that he also followed the Hanafi school and to pray in its style so that he could later oppose certain kinds of practice that were consid-

ered unacceptable even according to Hanafi standards. One day, Faraj found himself surrounded by villagers who had never seen an Arab before and questioned him about various religious topics: “I felt like I was in an exam.” One of the first questions was whether Faraj viewed smoking and *niswar* as haram or halal. Faraj ably redirected the question, suggesting that Afghans ask their own ‘ulama, anticipating that at least some of them would describe it as haram. Faraj did not give fatwas, in order to avoid the accusations of trying to change the Afghans’ jurisprudence. “I applied the word ‘haram’ only for things that could not be tolerated in silence.”⁷¹

As the conversation moved to the topic of “visitation,” Faraj felt his space for evasion slowly constricting, caught between a desire to be true to his stance while avoiding the label of “Wahhabism.” Faraj first tried to play dumb by asking if the question referred to visiting the sick, or to relatives. The Afghans clarified that they meant visiting graves, and that “Wahhabis” called them polytheists for doing so. Faraj incredulously asked how that could be, since the Prophet Muhammad himself also visited graves. But, Faraj hastened to add, there is etiquette (*adab*) to such visits: one should greet the dead, one should not pray or laugh. Seeing that he was avoiding the question, the Afghans pressed the point, asking about the visitation of the shrines of *awliya*. Faraj replied that *awliya* are no different from normal people, meaning that one can visit their graves in search of moral admonition (*‘iza*) or to ponder death. When asked specifically if prayer is permitted, Faraj said, “Yes, you can pray to God to have mercy on the soul of the person in the grave and to forgive his souls and admit him to heaven.” His response pointedly avoided the question of seeking something for one’s self from God through the intermediation of the dead *wali*. Nevertheless, the Afghans appeared satisfied with the answer, and Faraj felt that he had just passed “the most difficult exam I have entered in my life.” After that, he claims, the Afghans began to trust him more and to respect him as a source of knowledge.⁷²

Faraj’s dilemmas, his vacillation between dissimulation in the service of persuasion and sticking to principles,⁷³ would of course be familiar to missionaries from any religion or universalist project. What is noteworthy here, however, is his tactical adherence to one specific school of Islamic jurisprudence and his attempt, using that framework, to move his interlocutors closer to positions he believes are part of a shared faith. In so

doing—and without necessarily achieving any kind of stable consensus—he turned a dispute over an issue divisive for both Afghans and Arabs into an opportunity for rapprochement by conjuring shared terms in which to ground debate.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of visitation to shrines of Arab fighters in Afghanistan allows us to expand our understanding of intercultural encounters under the banner of Islam beyond the simplistic tropes engendered by the foreign/local dichotomy. The related phenomena of *karamat* and *ziyara* provide contrasting examples of how Arab activists processed cultural and doctrinal differences in the context of a shared project. The unacknowledged intellectual debt that Afghan Arab arguments on *karamat* owe to Sufi thought signal how some transnational and interdoctrinal differences can be effaced in the service of broader goals. At the same time, arguments around *ziyara* show how the search for shared terms of debate can help forge relationships even against the backdrop of contentious and divisive disputes. In both cases, the foreign/local dichotomy—with its attendant assumptions about Afghans versus Arabs, Salafis versus Sufis and Hanafis, radicals versus moderates—serves to obscure more than to illuminate.

The Arab graves, however, do more than provide a conceptual starting point for rethinking questions of difference within pan-Islamist projects. They also demonstrate the serendipity inherent in encounters between people from such different contexts: solidarity sometimes comes about in the most unexpected ways. The humble acts of veneration at these graves suggest that insofar as Arabs were drawn to Afghanistan by stories of miracles, it would seem only fitting that they would then be treated as sources of them as well. But to see the law of unintended consequences at work here in another way, let us take a statement by Afghan mujahidin leader ‘Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf published in ‘Azzam’s magazine:

You should know that there have already been many tutors and scholars martyred in the fields of Jihad in Afghanistan. That is why we are in great need of men who are capable of teaching, tutoring, and directing in Mujahideen [*sic*] schools, training camps, refugee camps, and battle fronts until Allah the Exalted helps us to bring about our

expected aims. We need scholars and tutors more than any other professionals or specialists. May Allah assist us and you in serving Islam and the Muslims.⁷⁴

Although some Arabs came to Afghanistan to take the place of martyred 'ulama, the Arab graves demonstrate how some found martyrdom themselves, and in doing so became *awliya'*. As we saw Gailani suggest above, it would perhaps be ironic if men who opposed the idea of seeking intercession with God would in death be visited for that very purpose. But by becoming *awliya'* in death, it would also seem these Arabs were providing one final—and quite literal—act of grounding differences in a shared community of faith and obligation.

ENDNOTES

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- 1 Pamela Constable, "Some in Kandahar Mourn the End of Taliban Rule," *Washington Post*, 16 January 2002; Dawud 'Azami, "Maqburat 'al-Mu'jizat' fi Qandahar," *BBC Online Arabic*, 18 January 2008.
- 2 Kim Barker, "Afghans Seek Cures at Shrine for Al Qaeda," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 June 2005. See also Kifayat Allah Nabi Khel, "Al-Afghan Yatabarrakun bi-Qubur Qutla Turah Burah," *BBC Online Arabic*, 21 February 2008.
- 3 Ghafar Ali, "Al Qaeda Fighters Saints in Afterlife," *Daily Times*, 6 February 2006; John Otis, "On the Afghan-Pakistani Border, Sympathetic Tribes May Give al-Qaida Chief Aid," *Houston Chronicle*, 3 October 2004; "7 Al-Qaida Men, 8 Pak Troops Die in Clash," *Tribune*, 20 December 2001. According to one report, 13,000 people participated in a funeral in Arawali for three Arab fighter-refugees from Afghanistan killed in December 2001 while trying to escape Pakistani custody. Husban Allah 'Abd al-Baqi and Rashid 'Umar, "Irhabiyyun 'inda al-Amrikan, Awliya' 'inda al-Afghan wal-Bakistan: Harb al-Adriha ma'a al-Amrikan," *Islamonline.net*, 28 January 2002.
- 4 Most of the Arabic terms (or variants thereof) used in this paper for aspects of Islamic practice have roughly equivalent meanings in Dari and/or Pashto, though they may not always be the most commonly-employed words for those concepts.
- 5 *Karamat* were not an analytical focus for early anthropological texts on Muslim societies: Fredrik Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (London: Athlone, 1959); Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). A major advance in this area was Michael Gilsenan's work in Egypt and Lebanon: Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 75-115. See also Edward Reeves, "Power, Resistance, and the Cult of Muslim Saints in a Northern Egyptian Town," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (1995), 306-323, and Pnina Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult* (London: Hurst, 2003), 66-81. For work on Afghanistan, see Louis Dupree, "Saint Cults in Afghanistan," in *Fieldstaff Reports* (Hanover, NH: American Universities Field Staff, 1976), M. H. Sidky, "'Malang,' Sufi, and Mystics: An Ethnographic and Historical Study of Shamanism in Afghanistan," *Asian Folklore Studies* 49, no. 2 (1990), and David Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
- 6 In 1955, American anthropologist Robert Pehrson died while conducting fieldwork in Baluchistan. Over the next two decades, the pile of stones around his grave left by various visitors had grown to the extent that the tomb was well on its way to becoming a shrine, although likely with a Muslim name and more appropriate origin story. Dupree, "Saint Cults in Afghanistan," 5.
- 7 "Maqbura lil-Afghan al-'Arab Janub Qandahar," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 12 January 2002.

- 8 'Azami, "Maqburat 'al-Mu'jizat' fi Qandahar."
- 9 William Dalrymple, "Inside Islam's 'Terror Schools,'" *New Statesman*, 28 March 2005; Zahid Hussain, "Villagers Honour al-Qaeda 'Martyrs,'" *Times*, 10 July 2002; Abdul Sami Paracha, "4 Al Qaeda Men among 6 Killed," *Dawn*, 4 July 2002; "Three More Held for Maligning Army," *Dawn*, 8 July 2002; "Remains of Al Qaeda Men Recovered," *Dawn*, 5 July 2002.
- 10 Paul McGeough, "Old Ways Linger beneath a Veil of Votes," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 2005.
- 11 Otis, "On the Afghan-Pakistani Border, Sympathetic Tribes May Give al-Qaida Chief Aid."
- 12 There are also smaller Sufi orders, such as the Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya, while numerous Sufis are unaffiliated with any particular *tariqa*.
- 13 Ilene Prusher, Scott Baldauf, and Edward Girardet, "Afghan Power Brokers," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 June 2002. In April 1989, a shari'a court run by Afghan mujahidin factions in Qandahar reportedly put on trial a group of Arab and Afghan "Wahhabis" for allegedly tearing up banners raised over the graves of martyred mujahidin. Afghanistan Information Center, "Recent Developments in Kandahar: Problems with Wahabis," *AIC Monthly Bulletin*, April 1989.
- 14 Darryl Li, "'Afghan Arabs,' Real and Imagined," *Middle East Report* 260 (Fall 2011), 2-7.
- 15 Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan: 1979 to the Present*, trans. John King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 208-09. One of the more widely cited sources on Pakistan's management of US and Saudi aid to the Afghan mujahidin is the memoir of ex-ISI officer, Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992).
- 16 Of course, the delineation between state and non-state activity, especially regarding aid from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, is not always clear. On Saudi Islamic organizations and support for the Afghan mujahidin, see Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16-37.
- 17 On Arab aid organizations in Pakistan assisting Afghans, see 'Isam Diraz, *al-'A'idun min Afghanistan: Ma Lahum wa Ma 'Alayhim* (Nicosia: al-Dar al-Misriyya lil-Nashr wal-Tawzi', 1993), 34-36; Muhammad Amir Rana and Mubasher Bukhari, *Arabs in Afghan Jihad* (Lahore: Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2007), 79-108. Misbah Allah 'Abd al-Baqi, *Haqiqat al-Ghazw al-Amriki li-Afghanistan* (Cairo: Dar al-Tawzi' wal-Nashr al-Islamiyya, 2005), 79-84. Ahmad Muwaffaq Zaydan, *The Afghan Arabs Media at Jihad* (Islamabad: The Pakistan Futuristics Foundation and Institute, 1999), 9-14.
- 18 For more on the relationship between armed Islamist groups in the Arab world and the Afghan war experience, see Kamil Tawil, *Al-Qa'ida wa Akhawatuha: Qissat al-Jihadiyyin al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2007), and Muhammad Salah, *Waqat' i' Sanawat al-Jihad: Rihlat al-Afghan al-'Arab* (Cairo: Khulud lil-Nashr, 2001).
- 19 Early uses of the term were more localized. According to the Egyptian journalist 'Isam Diraz, the term "Afghan Algerians" emerged in 1990 in the context of the Algerian civil war. Diraz, *al-'A'idun min Afghanistan: Ma Lahum wa Ma 'Alayhim*, 9-10.
- 20 Darryl Li, "A Universal Enemy?: 'Foreign Fighters' and Legal Regimes of Exclusion and Exemption under the 'Global War on Terror'" *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 42, no. 2 (2010), 356-426.
- 21 David Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 290.

- 22 Ibid., 291.
- 23 Christine Noelle, "The Anti-Wahhabi Reaction in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan," *The Muslim World* 85, no. 1-2 (1995), 23-48; Ashraf Ghani, "Islam and State-Building in a Tribal Society Afghanistan: 1880-1901," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, nos. no. 2 (1978), 274, 82-83.
- 24 For a recent overview, see Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 58-175. One of the effects of misusing the term "Wahhabi" for these early nineteenth-century movements was to obscure their shared lineage with Sufi orders. See Sana Haroon, "Reformism and Orthodox Practice in Early Nineteenth-Century Muslim North India: Sayyid Ahmed Shaheed Reconsidered," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 2 2 (2011), 177-198. The most comprehensive account of this period probably remains Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad* (Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House, 1982).
- 25 Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, 57.
- 26 Sayres Rudy, "Pros and Cons: Americanism against Islamism in the 'War on Terror,'" *The Muslim World* 97 (2007).
- 27 Nile Green, "Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 1 (2008).
- 28 For one detailed transnational ethnography of a Sufi order, see Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult*.
- 29 In 1951, while both Afghanistan and Egypt were ruled by Western-oriented monarchies, the Kabul University Theology faculty established an official link with al-Azhar. Among the politically active Afghan clerics who studied at al-Azhar were Ghulam Muhammad Niyazi (1950s), Burhan al-Din Rabbani (1966-1968), 'Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf (1969-1972), and Sigbhatullah Mujaddidi (1951?-1953). All of these men, excluding Mujaddidi, were founding members of the Muslim Youth (Sazman-i Jawanan-i Musulman) in 1969, the parent organization of the largest Islamist political parties in Afghanistan. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad*, 204,38,53,66; Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan: 1979 to the Present*. For more on al-Azhar's role as an institution of "enlightened" non-Salafi learning in the Egyptian-Saudi rivalry for influence in the Muslim world, see Mona Abaza, *Indonesian Students in Cairo: Islamic Education, Perceptions, and Exchanges* (Paris: Association Archipel, 1994), 44-45.
- 30 Sana Haroon, "The Rise of Deobandi Islam in the North-West Frontier Province and Its Implications in Colonial India and Pakistan, 1914-1996," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18, no. 1 (2008).
- 31 In his famous ethnography of saintly authority in North Africa, Ernest Gellner left the miraculous as something of an afterthought, being unable to integrate it into his structural-functionalist account. His brief discussion of miracles, which comes at the end of a passage on miscellaneous "further services" provided by saints, concludes with an especially pertinent anecdote: "During the fighting in the course of the French conquest, top igurramen (hereditary saints) were held to be magically invulnerable. Crack shots took aim at them, and found their bullets miraculously deflected." Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, 33, 137-39. 'Azzam recorded similar stories from the Afghan *mujahids* and testified himself: "I saw with my own eyes a bullet hole on the bandolier that Jalal al-Din Haqqani wears over his chest, though his chest was not injured." 'Abd Allah 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan* (Amman: Maktabat al-Risala al-Haditha,

- 1986[1983]), 124.
- 32 'Abd Allah 'Azzam, *Al-Difa' 'an Aradi al-Muslimin: Ahamm Furud al-A'yan*, second ed. (Amman: Maktabat al-Risala al-Haditha, 1987[1984?]). In *Signs of God*, however, he argued that this individualized duty did not yet extend to Muslims outside of Afghanistan and neighboring areas. 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan*, 174-75. On Saudi scholars' reactions to 'Azzam's arguments about the obligation of jihad, see Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011[2010]), 111-12, Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*, 28-29.
- 33 I employ the term "extraordinary" rather than "supernatural" here because many events classified under this category do not defy the laws of nature per se, but would in rationalist understandings be dismissed as "mere" coincidence.
- 34 'Abd Allah 'Azzam, *The Signs of Ar-Rahman in the Jihad of Afghanistan*, trans. A. B. al-Mehri (Birmingham: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, n.d.); "Allahovi Znakovi u Afganistanskom Džihadu." (n.p., n.d.[1984]); Abdullah Azzam, *Afgan Cihadında Rahman'ın Ayetleri*, trans. Ahmet Pakalın (Istanbul: İslamoğlu, 1988[1983]); *Dan Malaikat Pun Turun Di Afghanistan*, trans. Wahyudin (Klaten: Kafayah Cipta media, 2010[1983]).
- 35 The book is rarely mentioned in the English-language literature on 'Azzam. It has been dealt with at length only in a series of short monographs by the Combating Terrorism Center at the US Military Academy at West Point, which treats the stories merely as a "fantasy ideology that deludes the less educated into following [Azzam's] jihad against the Soviets." Youssef Aboul-Enein, "The Late Sheikh Abdullah Azzam's Books, Part 1: Strategic Leverage of the Soviet-Afghan War to Undertake Perpetual Jihad," (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy, 2007), 5.
- 36 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan*, 20. Sayyaf later aligned himself with the US and Hamid Karzai and is a prominent member of the lower house of Parliament. Meanwhile, Haqqani and his sons continue to lead one of the major centers of armed resistance to the US military presence in Afghanistan.
- 37 Working in Peshawar at roughly the same time as 'Azzam, the American anthropologist David Edwards recorded many such stories from his Afghan informants. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad*, 232, 37.
- 38 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan*, 57-58.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 70-71. This appears to be from the introduction to the third edition of the book, which is not included with many of the copies in Arabic and English circulating on the Internet.
- 40 Abu Nasr al-Sarraj, al-Kalabadhi, and al-Hujwiri all argue that miracles may be either a source of self-deception or temptation. John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 267-72.
- 41 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan*, 56.
- 42 In *Signs of God*, 'Azzam criticizes Mujaddidi and Gailani as pro-American royalists, but does not mention their Sufism. *Ibid.*, 44, 160.
- 43 'Abd Allah 'Azzam, *Jihad Sha'b Muslim* (Sanaa: Maktabat al-Jil al-Jadid, 1990[1988]), 24.
- 44 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan*, 61-62.
- 45 Perhaps the best-known Western scholarly attempt to debunk Ibn Taymiyya's anti-

- Sufi reputation is George Makdisi, "Ibn Taymiya: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order," *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1973). For a more recent appraisal of the issue based on a close reading of Ibn Taymiyya's epistle *al-Sufiyya wal-Fuqara'*, see Qais Assef, "Le Soufisme Et Les Soufis Selon Ibn Taymiyya," (Damascus: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2011).
- 46 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan*, 65.
- 47 Jamil Dhiyabi, "al-Munazir al-Shar'i lil-Qa'ida Yatadhakkar Mahattat Su'ud Hilmi al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi Afghanistan wa Inhiyarihi (Part 3)," *al-Hayat*, 10 March 2006. Emphasis added.
- 48 'Isam Diraz, *Usama Bin Ladin Yarwi Ma'arik Ma'sadat al-Ansar al-'Arab bi-Afghanistan* (Cairo: al-Manar al-Jadid, 1991).
- 49 Diraz, *al-'A'idun min Afghanistan: Ma Lahum wa Ma 'Alayhim*, 103-05.
- 50 'Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan*, 33. *Niswar* is a type of smokeless tobacco dip widely used in Afghanistan.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 35-36.
- 52 In Dari and Pashto, the term *ziyara* refers either to the physical shrine itself or the act of visiting it.
- 53 Such practices are, of course, not at all confined to Muslims. Indeed, the similarity between Muslim visitation practices and those of Christians, Jews, and Hindus is one of the grounds of critique in the eyes of various religious reformers.
- 54 'Abd al-Baqi, *Haqiqat al-Ghazw al-Amriki li-Afghanistan*, 91.
- 55 Diraz, *al-'A'idun min Afghanistan: Ma Lahum wa Ma 'Alayhim*, 107.
- 56 Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muqbil Bin Hadi al-Wadi'i, *Maqal al-Shaykh Jamil al-Rahman* (Sana'a: Dar al-Hilal lil-Tiba'a wal-Nashr wal-Tawzi', 1991), 29.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 'Azzam, *Al-Difa' an Aradi al-Muslimin: Ahamm Furud al-A'yan*, 63-65.
- 59 Reports of *karamat* also emerged around 'Azzam's death, such as the smell of musk from his body. Husni Adham Jarrar, *Al-Shahid 'Abd Allah 'Azzam: Rajul Da'wa wa Madrasat Jihad* (Amman: Dar al-Diya' lil-Nashr wal-Tawzi', 1990), 281-83.
- 60 Jamil al-Rahman's Arabic-language newspaper, *al-Mujahid*, received strong financial support from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, enabling it to pay even better salaries than 'Azzam's magazine, *al-Jihad*. Zaydan, *The Afghan Arabs Media at Jihad*, 83-84.
- 61 Barnett Rubin, "Arab Islamists in Afghanistan," in *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?*, ed. John Esposito (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 198-99; Abdul Rashid Moten, *Revolution to Revolution: Jama'at-e-Islami in the Politics of Pakistan* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 106.
- 62 Although "Ahl al-Hadith" (or, in South Asian contexts, Ahl-e Hadith) as a modern doctrinal label has very different genealogies in the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia, both have emphasized the rejection of grave visitation. On Ahl-e Hadith in South Asia, see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 265-81. In the Saudi context, see Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 81-89.
- 63 al-Wadi'i, *Maqal al-Shaykh Jamil al-Rahman*, 58. For more on the political rivalries around Kunar and the killing of Jamil al-Rahman, see Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan: 1979 to the Present*, 230-31, and Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, 118-19.
- 64 François Burgat, *Islamism in the Shadow of al-Qaeda*, trans. Patrick Hutchinson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008[2005]), 22-28.

- 65 Al-Wadi'i, *Maqtal al-Shaykh Jamil al-Rahman*, 32.
- 66 Here, questions of authority become key. For example, 'Azzam opposed the creation of standing graves, but argued that their destruction was a matter to be left to the competent authorities (*wula' al-umur*), rather than individual initiative. 'Azzam, 'Abd Allah. *Fil-Jihad Adab wa-Ahkam*. first ed. (Matbu'at al-Jihad, 1987), 95.
- 67 'Abd Allah Anas, *Wiladat al-Afghan al-'Arab: Sirat 'Abd Allah Anas bayna Mas'ud wa 'Abd Allah 'Azzam* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2002), 37.
- 68 Ibid., 33, 63. Anas later became 'Azzam's son-in-law.
- 69 'Azzam claimed that of the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence, only the Hanafis supported praying over the burial of martyrs. 'Azzam, *Fil-Jihad Adab wa-Ahkam*, 73-77.
- 70 Ayman Sabri Faraj, *Dhikrayat 'Arabi Afghani: Abu Ja'far al-Misri al-Qandahari* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2002), 27.
- 71 Ibid., 83-87.
- 72 Ibid., 87-88.
- 73 Ibid., 88-89.
- 74 'Abd Allah 'Azzam, *Defence of the Muslim Lands*, second English ed. (London: Azzam Publications, 2002[1984?]), 20-21. 'Azzam's widow Samira also recalled that the need for Arab preachers was occasioned by the death of so many Afghan 'ulama in the war against the Soviets. Muhammad al-Shafi'i, "Zawjat al-Za'im al-Ruhi lil-'Afghan al-'Arab': Qatl Mas'ud Wasma Kubra fi Tarikh Bin Ladin," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 28 April 2006.