Introduction: Sharing the *Sacra*

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In his recent *War on Sacred Grounds*, political scientist Ron E. Hassner cites examples ranging from Ayodhya to Jerusalem to contend that sacred places "cannot be shared" (Hassner 2009: 3). Hassner's analysis resonates with a wide range of popular and academic identitarian discourses contending that, for various reasons, cultural identities are essential, exclusivist, and therefore inherently antagonistic to those of others. Although Hassner concentrates on intercommunal violence around holy sites, his argument is consonant with those of Bernard Lewis (1990), Samuel Huntington (1993, 1996), and others who see the world as an arena made up of cultural "blocs" contending with each other for hegemony along what Huntington, instantiating the "clash" between Islam and the West, terms "bloody borders" (Huntington 1993: 35). Whereas, for Huntington and Lewis, conflict erupts when incommensurate civilizational identifications are brought into contact, for Hassner the problem—likewise territorial—is the "indivisibility" of sacred sites:[1]

> Sacred places are integrated monolithic spaces that cannot be subdivided; they have clearly defined and inflexible boundaries.… [T]he religious prerequisites for safeguarding these sites from desecration require believers to have complete and exclusive control over them. Thus, competing groups may resort to violence in order to gain control over such a site. (Hassner 2009: 43 and 3)

Religious sites are here the repositories of core identities, and just as those identities must remain inviolate so too the sites must be protected from the presence of corrupting others by all means possible.

The following chapters seek to complicate the issue of conflict over holy places and, by extension, of the "clash of civilizations", by attentive readings of intercommunal relations around sites or practices that are deemed holy by the persons or groups involved. The authors do not seek, in so doing, simply to counter the conflict-centered perspectives of Hassner, Lewis, Huntington, et al. with bourgeois cosmopolitan pleas for pluralism. Instead they inadvertently seem to have followed the advice Fredrik Barth gave to anthropologists in a post-9/11 interview

where he suggested that we should "speak to historians and political scientists who say things about the clash of civilizations … [so as to] disturb and subvert their frames of reference by undermining one or more of the premises on which they base their arguments, showing how it does not make sense from a broader perspective" (Borofsky 2001). The chapters that follow, for the most part written by anthropologists (the two exceptions, one by a scholar of religion and the other by a linguist, are each products of empirical field research), "disturb and subvert" these identitarian frames of reference by refusing to take "identity" for granted.

Identity-based models, particularly those working with paradigms such as "indivisibility," must presume that difference necessitates conflict when parties with different identities are invested in the same "property."[2] The texts in this book treat identity as an emergent, situational, and ofttimes contingent property, and thus, rather than assuming the priority of conflict, investigate the complex processes through which social interactions, ritual performances, and historical transformations are worked out as two or more "communal" groups circulate through and around "shared" holy places. Rather than presuming the necessity of conflict, as approaches which foreground incompatible core identities necessarily do, the chapters which follow ask "why, in many cases, does conflict not arise?", "how, when conflict does occur, is it disarmed or circumvented?" and "what, when intercommunal relations become difficult or cease, has brought about that change?" The collection is able, in this manner, not only to show that intercommunal conflict is not inevitable but also that the field of interaction around groups with different sectarian identities is far richer, busier, and more intriguing than any conflict-based model could suggest or show.

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Although all the essays in this volume have very different genealogies, the collection has a history which goes back to the publication, in April 2002, of Robert Hayden's "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans" (Hayden 2002). In that article Hayden, very aware from his research in [now Former] Yugoslavia of the way intercommunal relations can collapse into extreme internecine violence when populist ethnocracy replaces state-supported ethnic diversity, extended that insight to research on sacred sites in India (which he compared with those of Yugoslavia), arguing that apparent situations of syncretism around holy places were, despite appearance, no more than temporary manifestations of a "tolerance" of the other brought about either because the other was too weak to threaten the dominant group's control of the shrine or because the balance of power between the two groups was too close to allow one to expel the other. Thus "processes of competition between groups that distinguish themselves from each other may be manifested as syncretism yet still result, ultimately, in the exclusion of the symbols of one group or another from a religious shrine" (Hayden 2002: 228; see also Hayden 2005). Hayden's argument is explicitly addressed in the contribution by Albera.

Because of work I had published on Muslim-Christian co-usage of shrines in Palestine in *Man* (Bowman 1993, see also Bowman 2012a), I was asked to comment on Hayden's *Current Anthropology* article. That, and the issues it foregrounded, pushed me into further field and analytical work on Palestinian "mixed" shrines as well as on examples in Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M.) (Bowman 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012b and Bowman forthcoming). Subsequently a group in France, including Maria Couroucli and Dionigi Albera, organized a seminar entitled *Les Lieux partages du religieux et les pelerinage interconfessionnels en Mediterranee: Approches anthropologiques* under the aegis of Ramses II which took place in late March 2006 at the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre, and drew on diverse work being done on shrine sharing around the Mediterranean Basin.[3] A month after that I convened a triple session—"Syncretism: Sharing or Tolerance? The Politics and Pragmatics of Mixed Holy Places"—at the ASA Diamond Jubilee Conference at Keele University in the U.K. that engaged a number of scholars published in the current volume (Albera, Bastin, Carpenter-Latiri, Chau, Couroucli, Kwon, and Tuladhar-Douglas), and included a late-night debate with Robert Hayden who had flown in from Pittsburg for the event. In February 2008, Elazar Barkan and Yitzhak Reiter organized a conference entitled "Sharing Sacred Space: Religion and Conflict Resolution" which took place at Columbia University and led to Anna Bigelow and Aomar Boum contributing to this volume.[4]

I chronicle this history as it indicates the degree to which the issue of "shared" or "mixed" shrines[5] remains alive and salient—perhaps because of its pertinence to the "clash of civilizations" discourse. Certainly through the past decade what I have termed the "identitarian" approach has remained strong, as indicated not only by the publication of texts such as *War on Sacred Grounds* by prestigious presses such as Cornell but also by the support given in 2007 by the National Science Foundation and the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research to Robert Hayden's *Antagonistic Tolerance: A Comparative Analysis of Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites* project. Hayden's project engages a number of researchers in gathering data in Turkey, Bulgaria, India, and Portugal to prove that, despite long histories of apparent sharing of holy places, the antagonism that underlies all mixing will inevitably, when the balance of power is disrupted by political change, lead to the violent expulsion of one of the sharing groups and, in most cases, the extirpation of all signs of its previous presence (Hayden et al. 2011).

The "non-identitarian" cadre has simultaneously been engaged in elaborating an increasingly sophisticated "choreography" of intercommunal relations around holy places, which this text makes manifest. At the core of that "choreography" is a partial shift of focus from temporal developments—the historical trajectory of holy places, often involving, as Hayden elaborates, a displacement of sharing by exclusivity—to the spatial interaction of communities in and around sites. This shift certainly does not indicate a simple synchronicity, much less, as Hayden has claimed, the presumption of "stasis in social structures, an error generally thought to have passed with structural functionalism" (Hayden et al. 2011: 15); what it

entails is attention to the minutiae of engagements, avoidances, mimickings, avowals, and disavowals through which members of interacting communities manage the presence of the others. Historical changes in those interactions are central to analysis, but such changes are seen not only to bring about shifts in communal relations around the sites but also transformations in the identities, practices, and self and other representations of those involved in such relations.

Antagonistic polarization and subsequent displacement—the tropes of identitarian representations of culture contact—are, to misquote Lévi-Strauss, "easy to think with" in that they organize narratives of clearly defined entities involved in clearly comprehensible acts of self-defense and expropriation. What is less easy to conceptualize, and far richer to think with, is the complexity of interrelations and self-conceptualizations in "border zones" where identities are local products rather than extensions of the hegemonic orthodox discourses of state and sect. Recent work by authors in this collection, most notably Bastin's *The Domain of Constant Excess: Plural Worship at the Munnesvaram Temples in Sri Lanka* (2002) and Bigelow's *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India* (2010), evidence this work of invention and reinvention, and throw back from the margins of more homogeneous practices troubling questions about the character of religion, the nature of community, and the identity of identity.

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One of the questions that emerges very strongly from this collection is "how do social fields surrounding sacred spaces relate to, and impact upon, those spaces?" Hayden is firmly cognisant of the way changes in power relations between communities encompassing holy places affect relations within what are in effect the "arenas" of those places. For him the balance of power between groups sharing a site is rarely if ever changed by what happens within its boundaries; although the contest between groups occupying a holy place is for control of the site and its resources, it is shifts of power in the wider field of politics and the state that trigger the shift from muted struggle to fierce bouts of expulsive violence. Thus, while relations in and around the holy places are substantively affected by intercommunal interactions in the surrounding political world, those relations are only allowed close scrutiny (often retrospectively) after the "stasis" of seeming sharing is transformed into open antagonism.

In contradistinction, the following chapters attend closely to the details of intercommunal interactions at holy places and events, and link these to the relations between the communities that share or mix at shrines. One consequence of this is the realization that there are multiple ways in which individuals and groups approach and relate to sacred objects and rituals. Diverse interpretations of the significance of the same objects and actions are means of enabling groups, whose religious conceptions and practices would seem incommensurate, to gather reverentially around the same site, while mimicry, imitation, disavowal, and avoidance are core strategies of mixing the nominally incommensurate in and

around the same place. Conceptions and practices of contact with the divine vary widely, encompassing everything from ecstatic communion with a saint or divinity to achieving healing through making contact with an object that one has heard, from others of other religious affiliations, has power. In Dionigi Albera's examination of Muslim usage of Marian shrines in the Mediterranean Basin we can see how variant interpretations of the same signifiers—sometimes interpretations only distinguished from the nominally "correct" meanings by the most subtle of diacritics—can enable the coming together of representatives of "civilizations" that Huntington, Lewis and others would tell us can only meet in battle.

The role of religious authorities, and those who claim to be religious authorities in various sites, differs widely and can—sometimes depending on the respect accorded them, or not, by local populations—either open sites to diversity or purge them of all but those they deem orthodox (as in Rohan Bastin's description of the role, and subsequent expulsion, of the liberation theology priests in a Sinhalese shrine). For the most part, the essays in this volume treat religious sites and practices maintained by and closely articulated with local populations, rather than those administered and "owned" by central authorities that legislate their practices for the use of pilgrims, priesthoods and others. These local sites can thus be seen to reflect and amplify images of the consociality of the communities that surround, or had surrounded, them. Relations in and around the sites are rarely simply harmonious; they reflect and replay the complex, and occasionally conflictual, choreographies that mark the everyday social lives that take place between variously affiliated communities in the adjoining territory. Strict harmony comes with disciplining—with the exclusion of difference—and emerges when sacred sites are brought under the control of monolithic authorities which purify the sites, restrict the flow of people from outside their borders into their domains, regiment their symbologies and rituals, and organize their activities to ensure the glorification of particular identities before divinities associated with those authorities. That imposed harmony is, however, the product of a violence inflicted upon those who "enjoy" it, and is frequently manifest in the violence they turn on those who are different. The harmony we see in this volume, fragile as at times it may seem, is instead grounded in the commitment of neighbors to neighbors, or of persons to an image of self and community they feel is important to maintain; as the essays of Bigelow, Couroucli, and Tuladhar-Douglas demonstrate, it may be less imposing, but it is also more flexible and more organically connected with the communities for which, and to which, it speaks.

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Perhaps more central, however, is that the following chapters bring to the fore the degree to which the social fields encompassing the holy places constitute those places and the rituals which take place within them. Throughout the chapters, which investigate sites ranging from the northern and southern Mediterranean, through India, Nepal and Sri Lanka to Vietnam and China, we see a close relation

between peoples' conceptions of the place they inhabit (and those they cohabit within it) and the sorts of interactions they engage in around the holy places within that territory. In nearly all the chapters presented in this volume, the religious sites and their rituals body forth images of imagined communities—past, present, and future—with which participants (or, in the Moroccan and Tunisian cases, organizers) feel a connection.

In some cases, most notably Anna Bigelow's chapter on Muslim shrines in post-partition Punjab and Maria Couroucli's study of the ceremonies at St. George's Monastery on Princes' Island off Istanbul, ceremonies bring together members of different confessional communities in an echo of an intensive earlier intercommunality which, while having largely disappeared from quotidian life, still resonates in practices of sharing holy space. Both chapters demonstrate how sacred sites gather members of different confessional communities who, deeply informed by what I would term a "practical nostalgia" for the cultural mixing which preceded the 1929 population transfer between Greece and Turkey (Clark 2006) and the 1948 partition of India and Pakistan, seek out holy spaces—whether deliberately or not—that evoke intercommunal encounters that have, under the pressure of demographic disparities, largely disappeared from everyday life. Here, in effect, an image of a remembered community is reconstituted and embodied in practices around the shrines.

The idea of a "practical nostalgia" implies that the impulse towards sharing sites and practices around sites is often neither conscious nor ideological, but instead is resident as a sort of *habitus* within images of efficacious activities appropriate to the sites. While the concept of an efficacy transcending confessional difference is developed later in Rohan Bastin's study of Sinhalese *haskam*, it is spectacularly displayed in Adam Chau's historical investigation of the "ritual polytropy" of elite funerals in Late Imperial China and Republican China. Chau examines the 1939 Beijing funeral of General Wu Peifu as an exemplary, and inflated, instance of gathering a multitude of religious specialists in a single space to ensure that, in effect, all bases were covered to guarantee the deceased general the most auspicious afterlife. By focusing on a gathering of the *sacra* of a multitude of religions in a single space rather than on the coming together of persons of different confessions in the place (or places) of single sects, Chau highlights the practical, as opposed to confessional, aims of the sorts of ritual events which allow mixing and sharing.

In Will Tuladhar-Douglas's study of the annual procession of the Buddhist deity Vajrayoginī through the Nepalese town of Pharping we observe the strategies by which a community with plural (largely nominal) sectarian identities is able collaboratively to celebrate a "Pharping identity" without exclusion or conflict. The only problem with this ritual assertion of a public united in its diversity is the refusal by resident Tibetan Buddhists to engage in what they term a "Hindu" procession. Tuladhar-Douglas's nuanced study of the Pharping population's "hard work" of disavowing this refusal is a fascinating testimonial to the commitment of some mixed communities to assert local, territorial identities over and against exclusive sectarian identities.

Rohan Bastin's study of Hindu-Buddhist-Catholic "sharing" in Sri Lanka investigates the Sinhalese conception of an overarching religious potentiality known as *haskam* to demonstrate the way in which, in the Sinhalese context, Śaivite Hindu, Catholic, Buddhist, and to some degree Muslim theologies could be worked to bring about syncretic practices around shared shrines such as St Anthony's Church in Kochikade, Colombo. He also shows how, in response to a local priesthood working to embrace alterity and develop wider conceptions of community and sacral efficacy, the Catholic Church under Pope John Paul II responded by imposing orthodoxy, expelling "heretical" priests, and "sanctifying" the sites by cleansing them of non-Catholic practices.

Aomar Boum and Dora Carpenter-Latiri, working in Morocco and Tunisia respectively, look at another level of institutional interference whereby state officials, developing tourism agendas, "reinstate" sharing around sites where mixing may have previously occurred by redefining the sites and the sorts of activities that take place around them. In the Morrocan instance examined by Boum, the "revitalization" of Essaouira, historically a city dense with Jewish and Muslim shrines, into the site of the annual Gnawa and World Music Festival is intended to subsume potentially exclusivist sectarian identities within the framework of a multiculturalism, and is motivated both by a will to celebrate tolerance and a drive to profit from international tourism. Its eventual impact on local identities and relations remains to be seen. In Jerba the programme by the Tunisian government to promote the ancient Ghriba synagogue as a celebrated example of Jewish-Muslim shrine sharing has, in effect, halted whatever sharing may have previously existed due to the constraints of the rigorous security required to protect European and Israeli Jewish visitors, especially in the wake of a 2002 al-Qaeda attack on the shrine. In these cases, as with the Catholic Church's purging of shrine sharing and its advocates in Sri Lanka, we witness the imposition of identity practices onto local communities rather than the growth of such practices out of local solidarities. These impositions are clearly future-oriented and intended to transform existing conceptions of community into new configurations of imagined community—configurations which may or may not be accepted and embraced by the populations affected.

Finally, Heonik Kwon investigates the way the "inhabiting" of family ancestral altars in postwar Vietnam is changing in the wake of ideological liberalization that now allows ideological "enemies", who are nonetheless kin, to reconvene after death on the commemorative altars. In contemporary Vietnam, families that had been divided by the ideological polarization effected by the "American War" are now installing images on ancestral altars of those who died "bad deaths" (i.e., were killed fighting on the side of the South Vietnamese and American armies) alongside those with "good deaths." This retrospective reconstitution of kin and community ties by modifying shrine practices affirms a motif that runs through all of the chapters. Throughout, intercommunal interactions around shared shrines are variously revealed not simply as the effects of spatial choreographies but also as moments in temporal sequences linking the realities of everyday life

with images of community drawn from past, present, and future *desiderata*. At times, as with the cases of "antagonistic tolerance" presented by Hayden, these moments of sharing may be shadowed by an active anticipation of a future time when mixing can be expunged, but in the cases set out in the following pages mixing and sharing express various degrees of commitment—conscious and at times unconscious—to imagined communities which bring together persons, groups and localities that history and sectarianism seek to divide.

Notes

1. The Latin word *sacra* refers to all transactions related to worshipping the gods, in particular prayers and sacrifices. In the context of this volume it relates to a range of sites and activities, including ancestral altars, holy places (shrines, synagogues, churches, and mosques), funerals, religious processions, and festivals (even those which "secularize" the sacred). "Sharing" is a more problematically multivalent term (see note 5 below) ranging in significance from syncretism to simple temporal and spatial coexistence (see Stewart and Shaw 1994); it is the task of this volume to explore the contexts in which it may, or may not prove apposite.
2. "[I]ndivisible disputes are indivisible in two distinct ways. First, parties in these disputes view the issue as indivisible in and of itself, meaning that it cannot be taken apart, and second, they consider the issue indivisible from themselves, signifying that they will not tolerate parting with it" (Hassner 2009, see Bowman 2011). By "issue," Hassner refers to that of the control of holy places.
3. This seminar generated a recent publication—*Religions traversées; Lieux saints partagés entre chrétiens, musulmans et juifs en Mediterranée* (Albera and Couroucli 2009)—which has since been translated into Spanish (Albera and Couroucli 2010) and English (Albera and Couroucli 2011).
4. A follow-up to the Columbia conference took place in Istanbul in May 2010; it was co-organised by Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey under the title "Choreography of Sacred Spaces: State, Religion, and Conflict Resolution."
5. I have tended, in my own usage, to term these shrines "mixed" rather than "shared," as "shared" connotes an amity I feel one cannot presuppose. Categorizing Muslim-Christian co-usage of an Orthodox church which may, in the past, have been the *turbe* (tomb room) of a Sufi *tekke* (monastery) as "mixing," for instance, neither presupposes antagonism nor syncretism but simply indicates a simultaneous usage of the same site (Bowman 2010: 200–206).

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