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Female Mystics and the Divine Feminine in the Global Sufi Experience

Edited by
Milad Milani, Zahra Taheri and Aydogan Kars

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About the Editors

Milad Milani is a Senior Lecturer in religious studies at Western Sydney University. He specialises in the study of Sufism and Islam through a comparative religious studies lens. Dr Milani's research draws on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology and more broadly on other thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche for analysis, paying special attention to how the history of religion is understood in present-day thinking about religion. A central part of his research concerns the phenomenon of "Persian Sufism" and "Sufi poiesis", with special reference to Attar of Nishapur. He is broadly interested in the ontology of Islam. Dr Milani is an internationally published academic and has authored three books on Sufism: The Nature of Sufism (Routledge 2021), Sufi Political Thought (Routledge 2018), and Sufism in the Secret History of Persia (Routledge 2014). He has one co-edited book: Islam, Civility and Political Culture (Palgrave Mcmillan 2020).

Zahra Taheri received her Master's degree in Persian studies from the Pajuheshkade-ye Farhang-e Iran, and her PH.D from the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University Of California, Berkeley. She has taught Persian literature, language, Iranian history and culture, and Gender and culture courses in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley, the Department of Persian Studies at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and Australian National University. Dr Taheri is the author of Hozur-e peyda va penhan-e zan dar mutun-e sufiyyeh (2007), The Silence of Old Mirrors: The Lost Voice of a Muslim Woman in the Constitutional Revolution Era: The Life and Works of 'Alamtaj Qaem-Maqami (2012), and The Image of Women in Persian Ethical Texts (Forthcoming). Taheri is also a published poet with two collections of poetry: Milad and Pegaah-e Nokhostin. Her third book of poetry Daaman be Khaak Mikeshad Maah is in press with "Nashr-e Sales" in Iran.

Aydogan Kars is a Senior Lecturer at Monash University in Melbourne. His first book, *Unsaying God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2019) was awarded a Special Mention of Excellence for the 2019 Alberigo Award by the European Academy of Religion. His co-edited book, *ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī* (Brill, 2022), presents studies, editions, and English translations of the shorter Arabic and Persian treatises penned by ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (1145–1234). While Aydogan has published broadly in religious studies, his publication record concentrates on medieval intellectual history, Sufism in particular.

Preface to "Female Mystics and the Divine Feminine in the Global Sufi Experience"

How are we to understand the feminine and the female in mystical experiences? This is not a simple issue to address, despite the fact that significant attention has been paid to the topics of women and gender in religion. The present corpora on the Sufi experience, as it is felt globally, concerning the female mystic and divine feminine intends to be as *cornucopia*. Thus, this book does not propose to reproduce information, adding to the pile of existing knowledge; rather, the intention is to open up the possibility of discovery of new meaning where old knowledge stands.

Our investigation, in this Special Issue, then, departs from the focus on the common questions and concerns about women and gender in history and culture. In particular, it addresses, instead, the silent language of meaning in the ontology of human existence in order to bring out into view the ontologically primordial foundation of its fundamental existentiality. In this way, the primordial femininity embedded in the mystical experience can be genuinely encountered, or so is the intentionof the leading article of this Special Issue. It is a daring enterprise, but one worthy of exploration as it is, in essence, an inquiry into that upon which we might chance, that which we can only intuit, yet the hand of that which we cannot force but for its own revealing.

Such enigma cannot be understood by fashioning female and feminine into preconceived εἶδος. We are at its mercy as φύσις because it is a thing charged with possibility, as that which is simultaneously in a process of concealed unconcealment. It is, as ἀλήθεια, an "unconcealedness" with the paradoxical import of it fully felt as "the state of not being hidden." Thus, the "truth" of its reality is never assumed as already established, but rather that which can only enter into our intelligibility as inextricably something humanly comprehensible.

Sufi receptivity to mystery in religion has for centuries provided the ground of possibility for the discovery of aspects of الغيب. The Qur'an, its principal source of inspiration, presents the greatest mystery held by سر الكلمات. To be clear, we are not referring to the interpretive power of the Qur'an in the context of verse 31:27, which is a possibility, but rather the potentiality of the unknown possibility within the words therein. The activity of Sufism, therefore, has opened up new understandings of religion by way of its contemplation on revelation and the piety of its messenger. This is by no means devoid of its considerations of the feminine and the female as key to the esoteric realization of the divine. Tradition declares Allah as without gender, yet we are confronted by the use of gendered pronouns for God in the Qur'an. Generally, pronouns, such as هُوَ and هي, in Arabic are linguistic designations for the masculine and feminine and are used concerning human beings as well as (gendered) inanimate objects that, in English translations, will be rendered as "he" and "she", or "it", depending on the context. In using such approach, linguistic ontology might call for the careful deliberation in theological reasoning about the nature of God in Islam. However, such an initiative is hardly new. It has been part of the long tradition of debating sacred etymology in theological tafsir. One encounters its Sufic expression no less in the works of Shaykh al-Akbar, Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) and that of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273). Here, we find subtlety in the nuanced literary art of the two Sufi masters. We are presented with thoughtful depth and complexity of prose, with intricate technical detail in religious knowledge, exhibiting a multilayered form and meaning, whilst acknowledging that such is the nature of their mystical writings, so as to express the irony, paradox, and tragedy that is religion. Within the preternatural world of Ibn Arabi and Rumi, the divine feminine and the female mystic are encountered in unexpected ways. God is without form

and kind (genus): "[He] neither begets nor is born, and to [Him] there is no equal" (112:3–4), but the expression "[He (is)]" is not necessarily devoid of the masculine and feminine essence. It is also written that "O people! [We] created you from a male and a female [. . .]" (49:13) and it is known that God created in pairs (51:49). The enigma alluded to at the heart of Sufi mystical theology is that the feminine and the masculine are, in essence, though not an attribute, a possibility from God. Held within the innermost secret quality of God is that which is "fertile," "pregnant," and "loving," whilst at the same time that which is a most mighty master and protector over all.

Turning our attention to the contributors, such "problematic" is directly identified and addressed by Milani and Taheri. Their inquiry into the nature of the female mystic and the divine feminine in Sufi experience wrestles with difficult questions that both arise from reading Sufi tradition in general and are embedded in classical Sufi sources. They present the thought-provoking hypothesis that opens new grounds for analysis concerning the understanding of the sacred in Sufism, by pondering if the ground of the sacred is female and the basis of mystical experience is feminine.

Smith, on the other hand, immersed within the mystical autochthonous of Southeast Asia, presents a feminist ethnographic exploration of how local notions of a "sacred feminine" shape Sufi praxis on the island of Lombok in the eastern part of Indonesia. Her long-term immersive anthropological fieldwork reveals to us how Dewi Anjani, both in her indigenous form as "Spirit Queen of Jinn" and as "Holy Saint of Allah", rules Lombok from Mount Rinjani. Together with a living female saint and spiritual guide with whom she shares sacred kinship, these feminine beings shape the kind of Sufi praxis that has formed in the largest local Islamic organization in Lombok, Nahdlatul Wathan, and its Sufi order, Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan.

Sufism is also present in South America, a place less commonly known for the presence of Islam. Though Argentina is today home to a Muslim minority comprising just 1% of the population, the first Muslim settlers were the Moorish/Morisco who arrived with the Spanish conquistadores in late medieval era. Dominguez conducts important discourse analysis combined with astute observations on the social and cultural everydayness of the Sufi Argentinian world. Her focus is on ideas of gender, as found within Abdul Rauf Felpete's book, Enseñanzas Sufíes Para Los Tiempos Actuales, a work produced in the context of the Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya in Latin America. In this work, we are privy to a tense discussion on the nature of conservative Islamic outlook, as represented by the group, and as inspired by Nazim al-Haqqani's (1922–2014) ideas, which appear incompatible with the avant-garde spirit of the Argentinian society in which the group has been active.

Jungian psychoanalysis meets textual hermeneutics in an unconventional approach by Mirjalili's Sufi sensibilities to discuss the symbolism and meaning of the Persian Goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita and Sufi cosmology. Mirjalili shares deeply reflective personal heuristic about mystical experience. She is, in effect, the center of her investigation as the dreaming subject, balanced with expert analysis using the work of Henri Corbin (1903–1978) and Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (1153–1191). Successive dreams of the goddess Anahita, whilst an acolyte on the Sufi path, raised the significant question regarding the parallel between Anahita in Zoroastrianism and Khezr in Sufism.

Adrahtas draws us into the extraordinary world of the Turkish Sufi poet, Yunus Emre (c. 1240–c. 1320). He discusses, in depth, the presence and the pragmatics of "the feminine" in the experience of the poet, examining the extent to which "the feminine" pervades Sufi hierophanics. In the poetry of Yunus Emre, Adrahtas shows that "the feminine" turns out to be the subtle, yet decisive challenge, opposition, and subversion that, on the one hand, negates symbolic Islam and, on the other, affirms imaginary Islam in the name of the Islamic real, thus evoking Jacques Lacan.

Finally, Salamah-Qudsi contextualizes the economics of female piety in the medieval Islamic world. She traces Sufi approaches to poverty and working for a living (kasb) as well the intersection with marriage and women. Focusing on Sufi biographies and historiographies, she points out that wealthy women entered into marriage with renowned Sufis to gain spiritual blessings, while others financially supported their husbands. In her rereading of sources, Salamah-Qudsi also highlights the fact that the piety of male Sufis was usually asserted through material poverty, whilst the piety of female mystics was asserted through wealth and almsgiving. She brings to view that devotion was often constraining from a financial point of view, and Sufis needed to pay attention to financial implications, while still pursuing progress on the Sufi path.

This Special Issue of Religions brings to its readership a wide-ranging and multidisciplinary approach to the question concerning the sacred feminine. Providing both historical and contemporary analyses, the reader will find innovative perspectives and insights about female mystics and the divine feminine in the global Sufi experience.

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Article

An Inquiry into the Nature of the Female Mystic and the Divine Feminine in Sufi Experience

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Abstract: This article is an inquiry into the nature of the female mystic and the divine feminine in Sufi experience. It considers this experience in the general sense with regard to the Sufi tradition, but in its analysis, the article primarily draws on examples from the classical period of Sufi history. Based on an analysis of the thought of key Sufi figures from that period, the assertion is made that the ground of the sacred is female and, as such, the basis of mystical experience is feminine.

Keywords: Sufism; female mystic; divine feminine; phenomenology; history; mysticism

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1. Introduction: Overview and Approach

Recent notable studies have successfully captured the role and significance of women in the history of Sufism. These have also addressed particular issues in relation to gender, religion, society, culture, and politics within the context of Sufi history, with some focusing on the study of Sufi women from various regions of the world, including the Near and Middle East, the Subcontinent, North Africa, Indonesia, and North America (see, Diaz 2015; Pemberton 2010; Taheri 2011; Shaikh 2012; Abbas 2002). There are also studies that provide detailed accounts of the Sufi position regarding the female and feminine in Islam (see, Elias 1988; also, Bashir 2011). Such studies have underlined the significance of the divine feminine, with special reference to Ibn Arabi, in recognition of the feminine attributes of the divine behind the veil of female corporeality. Even so, such analyses performed within the established paradigm of Islamic thought foreground the visibly traditional outlook in Sufism.[1] Works that concentrate on gender too have provided insight into the complexity of gender as both concept and lived experience within the Islamicate world.[2] Our task, in this brief study, is to give due attention to two phenomena: the phenomenon of the female mystic and the phenomenon of the divine feminine, both as they are found in the history of Sufism. What we hope to discover is whether mystical experience and, thus, the source of that experience is feminine in nature, so far as can be discerned. Our method is, however, philosophical to the extent that it consists primarily of the task of thinking about the nature and meaning of the phenomena in question. We thus proceed with a view to seeing what might be possible in terms of what the analysis yields about its understanding in spite of established views about the subject of our investigation. There are, thus, three parts to this study: (1) the female mystic (2), the divine feminine, and (3) comparative analysis of two Sufi women from the late medieval period. Parts One and Two deal with the historical and phenomenological aspect of the female mystic and the divine feminine, whilst Part Three will address the phenomenological structure of these with reference to two case studies. This work is in fact connected to an earlier publication (Milani and Krok 2020) wherein holiness was shown as traditionally marked by its antipathy toward the female and feminine in Sufism, despite the propensity of some key figures for overcoming this attitude. In the present work, the hope is to demonstrate reasonable grounds for making

the assertion that, in fact, the ground of the sacred is female and feminine—in building on the thought of certain Sufis—if we look beyond the screen of androcentrism and patriarchy.

The common understanding from tradition is that mystical experience is about the transcendence of self and, thereby, one's corporeality, in pursuit of the divine, wherein celestial unification is sought. This outlook presents the problem whereby corporeality, in being reduced to mere superficiality, is thus taken as having lesser significance in comparison to the non-corporeal aspect of the self as spirit or soul. However, this does not always and perfectly align with what is observable about the experiential nature of Sufism. We give consideration to the alternative, where mystical experience constitutes the embodiment of the sacred in human experience—without recourse to the redundancy of corporeality in mystical experience—to which numerous examples from Sufi literature testify. This is because it would appear that Sufi tradition has in fact made a consistent effort to homogenise Sufi experience in accordance with traditional Islamic metaphysics, and where anomalies are found, they have been ignored or glossed. The thought of Ibn Arabi presents one such major anomaly in Sufi historicising. Rumi's poetry, another. However, both seem to understand something more arcane than ordinarily perceived in traditional Sufi hermeneutics about the divine, and it is this that has impressed upon us to look closer at the phenomena in question.

Whilst Islamic, the argument has been made that Sufism is phenomenologically correlative to experiences of the sacred prior to Islam (Milani 2014). As such, and as a first point in our inquiry, we need to consider the mystery-cult in relation to our examination of the female mystic and the divine feminine. Before we proceed, however, a more preliminary clarification needs to be made with regards to Ibn Arabi's conceptualisation of the feminine, as this seems to have had a more direct impact on a tradition of interpretation in Sufi thought. Without recourse to the full complexity and nuance in Ibn Arabi's philosophy, we can simply say that Ibn Arabi held that Allah (*al-wahid*) is between two feminine qualities: "His own secret Essence [*al-dhat*] . . . and the world which comes from Him [*al-khalq*]" (Austin 1984, p. 7). This tells us that although Ibn Arabi took the contentious view that the essence of God is feminine, he nevertheless simultaneously retained the view—so far as it is evident—that God, *as He is*, is masculine. His triune conceptualisation of God in Islam is unique, and whilst Ibn Arabi's thought on the matter maintains the significance and centrality of the divine feminine and the pre-eminence of the female mystic, his view allows for the now predominant position that the relationality of both aspects of the masculine and feminine are functionally essential to understanding the mysteries and meanings in Islam. Ibn Arabi's is, therefore, the classical representative of the generally favourable androgynous defense, both metaphysically and ontologically.

2. The Mystery-Cult and Mysticism among the Monotheisms

The religion of the ancients was unreservedly more attuned to the sacred feminine (see, for example, Ruether 2005; also, Cusack 2009). One can provide a long list of goddesses that were revered and feared equally as the gods. However, a dramatic shift occurs with the rise to prominence of the monotheistic faiths wherein the divine feminine is brought increasingly under scrutiny until it is marginalised and, in some instances, utterly relegated to the esoteric and the occult within these traditions. The Sufi tradition, like Christian mysticism and Kabbalah, is one such space within the great monotheisms that the presence—or at least the appreciation—of the divine feminine can still be observed. This, in short, is because of the far-reaching influence of the mystery-cult. These are the Greco-Roman mystery religions such as the well-known Eleusinian mysteries, Mithraism, and Orphism, amongst others.

The mystery-cult is the historical antecedent to mysticism as found in the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Mysticism in the latter, however, reflects the Platonic appropriation of mystery-cult, that is, their treatment of mystical experience is quintessentially a Platonist one. Yet despite this, the embeddedness of prominent aspects of the mystery-cult nevertheless persists. Of the more prominent is the cult of Dionysos, from

which we obtain the continuity of the significance of altered states of consciousness through ritual and libation (even if the role of blood/wine is retained only symbolically in Persianate Sufi literature, see Milani 2014 for more on this) (for an early but important critical study of Dionysos see, McGinty 1978). This deep history of mysticism is compounded by the later and highly influential strand of Platonic philosophy: Neoplatonism. It had a considerable bearing on developments in the intellectual history of Islam, including the elaborate doctrines of most Sufi articulators of mysticism. However, along with inheriting the Greek logic for solving metaphysical problems, the Islamicate world also inherited the long-standing philosophical discords of that world. For starters, the Dionysiac cult, whilst being otherworldly, was not world-denying, whereas Plato adapted mystic doctrine with the view to reject this world (Seaford 2006, p. 83). The latter's philosophical–mystical agenda clearly prevails in the theological outlook of all three monotheisms, underpinning the religious mindset of key intellectuals such as Augustine, al-Ghazali, and Maimonides. Yet, so too does the persistence of the Dionysiac mystery of communality and deeply emotive core. Another point of contention is the patriarchal ethos in Athenian philosophy and the mythological and enigmatic role of the feminine in the ancient mystery-cult. Dionysos, for instance, was a major proponent for the collapse of boundaries and the dissolution of opposites. In this sense, for example, the incorporation of the Dionysiac frenzy by Plotinus, the prime Neoplatonist, enforced what he advanced as the totalising prevalence of the One (Seaford 2006, pp. 105–18, 151).

The point that needs to be kept in mind when observing the phenomena of the female mystic and the divine feminine in Sufism is that the tension between the Dionysiac and the (Neo-)Platonic remains pervasive in Sufi thought (see, Jeanmaire 1951; Sedgwick 2016). This has a significant bearing on how the two phenomena come to be viewed, rather differently we might add. It is indeed an extra layer of complexity that already undergirds the older tension/conflict of the monotheistic and Greek paradigms. Therefore, it is in keeping with the deeper and more ancient mode of the mystical that the assertion is made here that mysticism—within which the most hidden aspect of the divine sacred resides—is essentially feminine. What we find with the Platonic experience, broadly, is the masculinisation of what is argued here to have been an originally feminine phenomenon. This brings us to our first quandary: if mystical experience is feminine, does this mean that the essence of the monotheistic God is feminine?

It would seem that mystical experience should not be gendered, since both male and female have access to it equally. Let us consider, then, the same situation in religious experience, generally. Is it masculine or feminine? One would be correct in saying that it is neutral, but what correspondence would such a statement have to the truth of the situation? That is, the truth pertaining to the experience of religion. Were we to say that because traditional Islam is tempered by patriarchal overtones, it would not be an untruthful statement to make about the nature of that experience as masculine in nature, even if it does seem somehow to be incorrect. Therefore, it would also correspond to that same truthfulness to say that mysticism is feminine in nature, for it is the enigmatic, unseen, i.e., the mystique, of that religion. It would then be the Apollonian imperative—in the face of the Dionysian—that would want to rationalise and downplay or even neutralise any such distinction for the sake of putting forward a neater theology of unanimity. However, mystical experience is ubiquitous, and so a greater problem emerges—that is, if we agree about the pre-eminence of the feminine in both mysticism and the sacred—when we consider the experience of the female mystic as a corresponding activity of the presence of the divine, which is in essence itself feminine. Yet can such a relationality be conceivable in Sufi experience? It would appear so. In the first instance, it was proved by Ibn Arabi in his theory of monism that neither is the divine fully absent from the human experience in question nor is the sacred wholly separated from the human in spite of the strict Islamic view to uphold God's absolute non-corporeality. What remains is for us to now demonstrate by way of what can be gleaned from the available evidence that the source of the divine referred to by the mystic is indeed feminine.

The distinction between 'male' and 'female' in Sufi experience is, therefore, not arbitrary as conventionally thought. Nor can it be two aspects of the one force, such as, for example, yin and yang complementarity, as has been earlier suggested (see, Murata 1992). Sachiko Murata's famous hypothesis (1992) is seemingly helpful in so far as she alludes to the possibility of a more daring Islamic conceptualisation of God as inclusive of feminine and masculine qualities, but in fact, it is misleading with regards to a more fundamental understanding of the divine in Islam, in particular, in the light of the antiquity of that mystical experience. We are not interested here in what seems to be appropriate; rather, our focus is directed toward the inception of the divine in Islam. By inception, we refer to the pursuit of understanding the meaning of the divine in Islam and not merely the historical beginnings of an idea. To start, there are numerous inconsistencies that prevail in textual sources, not least the inconsistencies that are prevalent in traditional discourse on the subject. The Quran, which is the basis of the traditional account, stresses that the male and female do not exist in the eyes of God, that is, that both man and woman are equal before Him (e.g., 16:97). The problem remains, however, that the implicit masculinity of the divine remains the leading interpretation in any discourse regarding mystical experience. This is because first and foremost *Allah* ("the god") is rendered linguistically masculine due to the Arabic pronoun *Hu[wa]* ("He")—hence "His" and "Him", providing the common reference throughout the Quran. This is not to say that medieval commentators had not made the case for the 'he-ness' of God as beyond gender (consult Kars 2019, pp. 17–20; on the explication of views within Sufi tradition that push the boundaries of conventionality, see Langhi 2009; Geoffroy 2016). Regardless, it is the patriarchal strand that generally takes hold in the interpretation of religious experience in Islam, including its dominance over mystical literature as well. The claim here is not that the masculinity of 'Allah' in Islam creates patriarchal exegesis. Perhaps male-anthropomorphic theology was what the advocates for a unitive metaphysics, as Kars explains, were hoping to leave behind (on anthropomorphism in Islam, see Holtzman 2019). Rather, if anything, we might say the masculinity of patriarchal exegesis is the cause of 'God' as masculine. Indeed, the masculine perceptibility of God in Islam is so familiar and close to the patriarchal mindset that it would operate in the background of religious thinking about 'Allah', despite any technical variance to it that has been asserted by the scholars. If so, then the androgynous defense—taken up by medieval scholars advocating for 'God' as transcending the male and female binary—seems to be nothing more than a slogan. There is no denying the fact that 'Allah' is generally, but also ultimately, perceived as masculine, even where effort has been put into grammatical arguments to the contrary. The scholars may take care to use technical language to avoid the masculinisation of God, but this has very little impact on the general mood of how God in Islam, let alone Judaism and Christianity, is seen both historically and in the everyday. Given the above, there would, of course, never be the need for an exegete—albeit, a traditional one—to discuss God's masculinity and then relate this to men's superiority over women. It is already implicit.

As the outlier, we suggest that divinity is in essence female, and it is the God of tradition that betrays the patriarchal religiosity reflected in it. The abstract theological argument that Allah is beyond gender is pulled into question in connection with its archaic etymological form, *Elah*, which is feminine, a fact that Ibn Arabi also recognised (Abrahamov 2015, p. 177). The argument for God as beyond the binary, however, is a conflation of two issues reinforced by the (Neo-)Platonic schema that would influence Muslim rational theology: the prevailing view that Allah cannot be anthropomorphised and that, apart from the use of analogy, personification of Him was forbidden. However, as we have just read, it is so natural to refer to Allah as "Him" (*hu* هو), even if this were a mere linguistic flaw, and the clue is in (the error of) language. Moreover, if the view that 'Allah' should, technically speaking, be gender neutral is successfully defended, it would have to close down any thought of attribution of gender to the deity as reflected in the gender-specific association of human beings with their God. This, whilst noble in intent, is impossible to maintain on the whole. Contrary to the prevailing views (either

independently or in combination) that God is masculine, that God transcends gender, and that God can be spoken about only in analogical terms with regards to gender, the assertion is made that the experience of the divine is quintessentially feminine. Mystical experience constitutes communion with God, and as such, the correlation cannot be but confirmed: if God's essence is feminine, then the experience of that mysterious source, in the context of mystical experience, must also be feminine. This assertion is in fact not far from the conventional view that God is taken to be a creative force, a lofty and hidden deity, and so through the specialised interpretation of Ibn Arabi about this, it has become possible not only to infer that God possesses a feminine nature but also that the female body can be seen as a metaphor/metonym for God. The seeds of God as feminine are already present in the popular tales of Layla and Majnun, Khosrow and Shirin, and Vis and Ramin, well-known to both Arabic and Persian speaking Sufis. Ergo, not only is it not unfamiliar to historical Sufism that the female mystic is the embodiment of the ideal and the means for comprehending the possibility of union with God but also outlined in such cultural tropes, as the stories portray, the female mystic is the same means to achieving that unity. One can readily derive from the writings of Ibn Arabi, and to some extent, Rumi, the notion of the divine feminine as a feature of God and, in the female, the most perfect image of God reflected (see Taheri 2011, pp. 141–46). However, what is not explicitly discussed, because of the limitations of an ultimately patriarchal tradition, is that the female mystic is representative of what is celestially female in essence and that the divine feminine is the innermost source of God as possible to be attained through mystical experience.

3. Part I: The Female Mystic

Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003), the distinguished Orientalist and scholar of Sufism, was on the right track in her title "The Feminine Element in Sufism", as opposed to, for example, 'women in Sufism', or some such variation of words. The difference between 'feminine' and 'women' denotes a significant shift in focus about the phenomenon in question. "The Feminine Element in Sufism" was published as the second appendix in her seminal work on Sufism, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* in 1975. Here, she does underline the role of women in Sufism, historically, but the piece points to the feminine aspect of mystical Islam by documenting key elements of its history that concentrate on the phenomenon of the female, and not just (the gender/sex orientation of) woman. The appendix piece did lay the textual and historical groundwork for what has now become a wide topic of interest. In 1982, Schimmel (Schimmel 1982) published a distilled version of "The Feminine Element in Sufism", focusing on promoting the positive role of women in Sufi history, but nevertheless, in it, she plants the seeds of the idea of the value of the divine feminine in mystical Islam that has since been taken up by scholars from various areas of disciplinary focus. Our reference to Schimmel is partly to pay tribute to her originating efforts toward fleshing out the importance of the divine feminine in Islam via her study of Sufism and partly because of her direct engagement with primary source materials, some of which remain unavailable to the English-speaking world in full. We provide her references as well as the originals wherever possible.

Historical Sufi commentators, such as al-Sulami (937–1021) tell us that there were, to be sure, notable women Sufi whose spiritual achievements were worthy of emulation by both men and women (see, for example, Cornell 1999). Such exemplification of women in historical Sufism is also indicative of a fundamental fact: that Islamic faith and practice were anything but homogeneous. Muslim life, both now and in the past, when observed in finer detail, without fail demonstrates both variety and diversity as a lived religion. This is particularly pertinent to the point about perceptions of women in Islam and Sufism. Such consideration, therefore, always requires careful attention given to context, because the discourse on the role of women continues to be partial to numerous external factors and the way that the latter in turn render religious content. However, there is always the question of how the past is imagined and what it actually was like. We read about the past through books, such as al-Sulami's, but we cannot experience the author's world firsthand. Whilst

such texts champion respect for women as equals to men, we might ask, do they necessarily represent the reality on the ground? The question of the representation of women in Sufism is admittedly a more difficult subject to attend to than often hoped. The observation made here is that despite the good intentions of some authors and given the general freedoms that Muslim women—especially those living in major civilisational centres (such as Nishapur) as well as those of a higher social standing—enjoyed, the overwhelming presence of male prejudice is generally prevalent. As such, there is no reason to think that historical Sufism would have been innocuous in terms of the general tenor of androcentrism across the Islamicate world. That said, we move well beyond the concern with Sufi women, generally, in our asking about the female mystic.

The question of the 'female mystic' is meant to distance us from (mis)conceptions about women in Sufism. It is to reorient the focus back onto the originary function of mystical experience underpinning Sufism as opposed to seeing Sufi women as an issue pertaining to gender. The topic of 'woman' in Sufism (and Islam, generally) typically depicts that which is paradoxical in nature because what is seen is easily confused with what remains essentially true about the mystical. The question of gender is only superficially relevant as it pertains to social and cultural differences in relation to notions about sex, whereas, if we ask about the female mystic, we are dealing with that which is more fundamental as a condition of being in a mystical state. This paradox, then—which arises from the basic problem of a (mis)take in thinking about the topic— signals where our attention needs to be with regards to our investigation. However, in order to be able to discuss the female mystic, we are required to first say something about the historical context of women in Sufism with regard to its paradoxical nature as noted.

The Sufi penchant for paradox and irony, in particular, as found in the works of such Sufis as Ibn Arabi, Rumi, and Attar, is well-established. It becomes important to climatise to the paradoxical nature of their works when reading and thinking about the role of women in Sufi literature so as to be able to obtain a better sense of the phenomenon of the female mystic portrayed by these Sufi authors. Sufi literature, in general, requires of the reader an appreciation of subtlety and complexity. Sufi poetic works are specially composed with a range of literary tools in mind, including the flexibility of interpretation and the use of symbol to effect. The basic idea in Sufi poetry, for example, such as that of Attar of Nishapur, a figure to whose works we will in a moment turn, is that the author wants to capture emotional and intuitive content as well as to allow for the open-endedness of the potential for meaning conveyed in the text. However, we may encounter another kind of paradox in the literary genre of Sufi works such that even though the poet Sana'i declares that "[a] pious woman is better than a thousand bad men" (Schimmel 1975, p. 426; Sana'i 1950, p. 271), it is done, no doubt, not out of sincerity but to taunt his male audience.[3] For the "ideal of the Sufi", said Schimmel, "was always the 'man'" (Schimmel 1975, p. 426), having full well known the content of classical sources. Still, the dispensation, it will become clear, was that if a woman could in fact reach the level of a man, they would be considered as having achieved "the high ambition of Sufism" (Schimmel 1975, p. 426).[4] Indeed, Schimmel did say that "[t]he attitude of Sufism toward the fair sex was ambivalent" (1975, p. 426). However, the source of this idea of metaphorical transfiguration is found in Attar's *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*. He cites Rabi'a al-Adawiyya as the exemplar. She is not only the only woman given her own chapter in the biographical line-up of Attar (other women are mentioned, but they do not have a devoted section to them), but she is the only one in his biographical work to have received the status of manhood. Attar does mention other women in passing and in relation to notable Sufi men, as we will be observing, but they are mentioned only as supplementary figures, at best, and at worst simply as incidental to Sufi history. At any rate, these women, as important as they are, are not given the same kind of attention as Rabi'a.[5] We must not forget, Rabi'a is the only woman counted as among the greats only because she achieved the status of a man. The paradox becomes apparent: Rabi'a, therefore ironically, is revered among men when *she* becomes *he*, the problem being that not only is woman irrelevant but also the female mystic is unseen.

Cornell's assessment of the representation of Rabi'a by Ibn al-Jawzi and al-Sulami might be an important distinction, but it is ultimately one without a significant difference (cf., Cornell 1999). When we take a closer look at the issue, and using Rabi'a as representative of the attitude of both authors toward women, the former wants to portray her as the emotional recluse, whilst the latter seeks to show her as the disciplined rational, because the matter bespeaks the motivation of situating womenfolk in their proper role with respect to menfolk. For Ibn al-Jawzi, women are lesser than men, and for al-Sulami, they are equal to them. However, we are left with a bitter taste either way: if it were not an issue that both accounts are in fact merely two variant male readings of Rabi'a, then it might count for something to consider that the first is dismissive of women and the second appropriates them through a masculine reading. The point is that the real option for women seems nothing more than either to be lesser than a man as a woman or be equal to a man in becoming a man. Rabi'a is an ideal Sufi (Smith 1928) because she became a man: "When a woman walks in the way of God like a man, she cannot be called a woman" said Attar (1905, p. 59).[6] Schimmel's English translation of Reynold A. Nicholson's MS is here noted. More striking is Arthur J. Arberry's translation of the same (below offered in full for effect) (Arberry [1966] 1983, p. 40):

> If anyone says, "Why have you included Rabe'a in the rank of men?" my answer is, that the Prophet himself said, "God does not regard your outward forms." The root of the matter is not form, but intention, as the Prophet said, "Mankind will be raised up according to their intentions." Moreover, if it is proper to derive two-thirds of our religion from A'esha, surely it is permissible to take religious instruction from a handmaid of A'esha. *When a woman becomes a "man" in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman* (emphasis mine).

Notably, his defence is based on his take on *sunna*; still, the point to focus on is that the apology is turned on its head when suddenly Rabi'a is turned into a "man" and can no longer be called a "woman". The rationale employed by Attar is, however, the critical point. It has three parts to it: (1) that (according to the highest religious authority) the physicality of the human being—in a Platonic-cum-Augustinian[7] twist—is secondary, (2) (in fine deflective form) that—and put forward as a 'by the way'—Islam is for the most part learned from a woman (Aisha), and (3) that Rabi'a, in having reached the heights of Sufism, is equal among men, anyway. To seal the deal, Schimmel (1975, p. 426) reminds us that any woman having subsequently achieved the station that she had might be given the honour of being "a second Rabi'a"—that is, a woman that has become a man—but, and here we offer our own observation, this would fail to see the irony as it is both in Attar and in later masters such as Rumi and Ibn Arabi. The irony is that Attar cannot possibly be taken literally as defending such a view and that his statement about women becoming men reflects the popular slogan of the time.

Margaret Smith's now-classic study of "the woman saint" demonstrated that Rabi'a was certainly not the exception (in that she was not the only Sufi woman of her time) but that she was, nevertheless, exceptional. Sufi women contemporary to Rabi'a were no less notable for their saintly qualities, but that they were lesser in importance to the tradition on the whole is noticeable, because, we observe, they had not attained 'manhood' as she had. They are shown to occupy a woman's role in society. Even their practicing of Sufism is made to reflect that they are women. The language used places them in their womanly role as those that are enthusiastic (overwhelmed by emotion and erratic, as opposed to the rational intellectual religious knowledge of the Muslim man) and as those that weep constantly and make others weep, and are fearful—"[t]hey might even become blind from constant weeping, so that their hearts' eyes might see better", adds Schimmel (1975, p. 426). This latter is surely a compensation for the "fair sex" from the point of view of what was by then already an established androcentric tradition. The study of Smith and Schimmel reveals something easily overlooked: that which is defined (or confined) to the female is also what captures the quality of the mystical. This is to turn on its head the story of the woman saint in Islam in order to show the nature of the Sufi woman more favourably. To

use the example of Rabi'a, what we see is the masculinisation of the mystical, which some agree to be the sign of equality. What is spiritual might be properly the realm of men —by virtue of, say, conceding that in biblical terms the "Spirit of God" is analogically a masculine entity—and thus masculine, but the mystical—by virtue of what might equally be ceded as typically gendered references to the hidden, soft, fertile, and womblike—is properly the domain of the female and hence feminine. Hence, we maintain that the difference of the masculine and feminine, in this sense, is important as opposed to what is commonly perceived as the masculine and feminine as two aspects of the one God, i.e., the argument from androgyny. Rabi'a, no less, is held up by the Sufi tradition as the representative (and if we push the point, an embodiment of divine) love (*ishq*); she too is, as we have seen, masculinised, and so the quality of mystical love is appropriated by men as something achievable by (and perhaps even, once again, on Platonic terms, for and between) men.

At the western tip of the Islamicate world, Ibn Arabi recounts four relatively obscure Sufi women that he knew that support the aforementioned point. The first is Shams, "mother of the poor" (Austin [1971] 2008, p. 142), whom he first met in her eighties and visited often. She lived in Marchena. She is described as a remarkable abstinent endowed with flawless piety. Ibn Arabi is witness to her extraordinary gifts of telepathy, prophecy, and miracles. The second is Nunah Fatimah bint ibn al-Muthanna (or Fatimah of [Cordova] Seville) (Austin [1971] 2008, pp. 143–46) with whom he had a close connection on account of her singling him out as the example student. Ibn Arabi met her when she was ninety-six (Austin [1971] 2008, p. 145). Ibn Arabi speaks of her as a pious renunciate (who "only ate the scraps left by people at their doors") and most obedient servant of God (refusing even the "Kingdom" when offered to her for the sake of God) (Austin [1971] 2008, p. 143). She is described affectionately by him as "a mercy to the world" (Austin [1971] 2008, p. 144). Her spiritual influence was so strong that God would acquiesce her wrath and her mercy toward another. For example, when a muezzin struck her with his whip, a mere look by her and the next day he was destined to be executed by the Sultan but was spared on her intercession. Ibn Arabi was witness to numerous miracles performed by her as evidence of her extraordinary spiritual ability; in particular, he notes her powers of incantation through *al-fatiha* ("The Opening") (Austin [1971] 2008, p. 143). The third is the "slave girl of Qasim al-Dawlah", who remains unnamed. She is described as having the gift of what might be perceived as teleportation ("the power to cover great distances quickly") and communing with nature (Austin [1971] 2008, p. 154). Ibn Arabi describes her in terms of the masculine honours of having possessed the "virtues of chivalry" and being "most strenuous in self-discipline", fasting regularly day and night. He held her to have been "strong" and that "her exertions" suited her well. He claimed that to his knowledge she had no equal in chivalry. Finally, there is Zainab al-Qal'iyyah (of the "fortress of Banu Jamad") with whom Ibn Arabi had contact "both in Seville and at Mecca" (Austin [1971] 2008, pp. 154–55). She was the "foremost ascetic" of the time, we are told, and although she possessed both beauty and wealth, "she freely abandoned the world and went to live in the region of Mecca". Having travelled with her from Mecca to Jerusalem, Ibn Arabi describes her as having no equal in religious observance and as keenly intelligent. She is described as possessing the gift of levitation. He also notes she was the companion of distinguished men of religion (Austin [1971] 2008, p. 155). The latter, according to the paradox thesis presented here, is of particular note, since it denotes that she is given the particular honour of being permitted amongst men *as* a 'man'—because of her asceticism—and not as a woman. Her giving up the world is indicative of her having given up being a woman, as we shall see. Of course, the offering of these accounts from Ibn Arabi's *Ruh al-Quds* is not to infer his opinion as such but again to denote his documenting of the mood of the time. That is, his references all indicate that when women were praised by men, it was through their masculinisation. Indeed, asceticism and piety were male-dominant institutions, and successful participation in them would require the masculinisation of the female. At the eastern tip of the Islamicate world, there are accounts given of an obscure Sufi woman by the name of Fatimah of Nishapur.[8] In the biographical traditions, she is considered one

with great knowledge of mysteries (‘*arifa*). She lived in Khurasan, frequented Mecca, and from there, visited Jerusalem. She is said to have been the teacher of two especially notable male Sufi figures: Bayazid Bistami and Dhu’l Nun al-Misri. Bayazid said “[i]n my life I only encountered one real man and one real woman—Fatima of Nishapur”, and Dhu’l Nun said “[s]he is of the saints of God, and my teacher”.[9]

From the above accounts of lesser-known female figures, we see Fatimah of Seville and Fatimah of Nishapur, as clearly signalled in their roles as hidden spiritual guides—this, for us, is an indication of the unseen female mystic. They were surely in plain sight, yet they concealed their spiritual power, revealing it only in secret to whom they intended. To be direct, the men mentioned (Ibn Arabi, Bayazid, Dhu’l Nun) are no less considered pillars of the mystical tradition, yet they learned their religion—their mysticism—from both men *and* women. This also indicates that Sufi women were held in high regard by men who recognised them. The point remains, however, that the respect for women in historical Sufism was subtle, or at least, it was subtly communicated. For instance, in the seventy-third chapter of the *Futuhat al-Makkiyya,* Ibn Arabi reports that when a master of the Way was asked to reveal the number of living saints in the world, he answered “[t]here are only forty”; asked why he did not say “forty men”, he replied “[b]ecause there are women among them” (quoted in Nurbakhsh 2004, p. 10). The point, being elusive, is easily missed; we see the essential feminine in mysticism shine forth, but only if we can see what our authors have said about them as untainted by the conventional point of view.

This becomes particularly evident in the case of the association of ‘woman’ to ‘world’ in classical Sufism. There is a famous story related by Attar that Fatima would speak unreservedly with Bayazid about mystical matters and that when they sat in conversation, she would freely remove her veil (1905, p. 288ff). She would continue this habit until one day he noticed the henna on her hands. After that “free spiritual conversation was no longer possible between the two mystics, for ‘the world’ had interfered” (Schimmel 1975, p. 427). The deliberate mention of the “world” is a euphemism for woman, and so it is synonymous with womanhood in the mind of our classical authors and storytellers. However, there is more to the story. Fatima is the teacher of Bayazid in the setting. She is said to have sat down and spoken with him without a veil (that is, one can assume, both literally and figuratively). She is speaking with *a man*, a non-relative, without restriction, and this is not a problem for the biographer, but what is a problem—and here comes the paradox—is that he notices the henna. In other words, she has to stop talking to him because *he* notices *her*. To be clear, the story still advances the view—albeit, most discretely and, one might say, tastefully—that her womanhood is a problem and that her being a woman is a problem. To go further, that is, in a free-interpretation of this story beyond perhaps the intentions of the narrator, even though he (as a man) notices her (as a woman)—not as freely conversant souls, as perhaps he should—the biographer does not place the fault with Bayazid but with Fatimah. The twist in the paradox is that whilst he noticed her, because of his manhood, it is she that is at fault because of her womanhood. The insinuation—in its blunt form—is that the ‘world’, that is, ‘the woman’, has interfered and thus ruined an otherwise spiritually serene situation, whereas the message, as we read it independently, is that Bayazid is taught a lesson about paying attention to the unseen aspect of the woman as the female mystic and through her into the divine feminine.

Unsurprisingly, the *nafs* (i.e., the lower soul, a lesser form of existence, an animal-like quality, see Schimmel 1975, p. 428) is categorised as feminine. In the traditional understanding, femininity has been made synonymous with weakness of the flesh needing to be conditioned so as to aspire to spiritual life. One may wish to present Sufi aspirations to the contrary as presenting an equilibrium of male and female complementarity, as Murata would have it, but the reality is that the symbolisation of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ took on new meanings in masculinised mystical language: the ‘man’ of the way must surpass the level of the ‘woman’.

Let us consider the ‘horrid wife’ scenario. Since monasticism was frowned upon by the Prophetic tradition, marriage was seen as a way of preparing for paradise by suffering

hell on earth, and the wife played that role (of providing for the conditions of hell on earth). Jami reported that some were so opposed to, and disinterested in, women that they would not even touch food prepared by a woman (Schimmel 1975, p. 428; Jami 1957, p. 576). The well-known and humorous story recorded by Rumi in the *Mathnawi* of the wretch Kharaqani and his wife (Nicholson 1934, pp. 372–78) makes the point. Rumi's story portrays the classical Sufi ideal with regard to marriage: that enduring a dreadful wife enriched a Sufi man spiritually, so much that he became the master of beasts. All of a sudden, the lofty height of ascetic living was trumped by 'marital asceticism'. The irony is that the Muslim man becomes the "civic monk" (Milani 2018, p. 59). Common tropes visible in Sufi literature of the time depicted the 'world' as a "decrepit old woman", her figure bent "like a bow and every sense in her decayed", yet her "lust and desire" were in full effect, "snaring" a husband (Nicholson 1934, pp. 326–27, 329–30). Conjuring such imagery no doubt references the technique of Sufi teachers wanting to convey to their disciples the dangers of worldliness "that leads nowhere" (Nicholson 1934, p. 326), and it was clearly linked to, and ground in, the desire of a man for the opposite sex. The female appeared beautiful and was desirable, but she represented, spiritually speaking, the exact opposite—so that when you have something that is the opposite of another thing it is everything that that thing was not (see also, Kugle 2007; Geoffroy 2016). In other words, Sufi men were trying to compensate for the opposite in order to counter the fleshly desire that a beautiful woman would incite in a man.

The turn in Sufi literature is late, and it is seen in the reference to Potiphar's wife (also known as Zulaikha) (Q 12). Echoing the Quranic narrative, Joseph becomes a Sufi trope for the physical representative of divine beauty on earth. Zulaikha, Potiphar's wife, is uncontrollably drawn to him. The subtleties of Sufi poetics allow for more complex ways of imagining the relationship between human and divine. Thus, Zulaikha is seen as the ideal Sufi desiring proximity with the sacred as told (in the most famous version of the story) by Jami in his *Haft Awrang* (Seven Thrones). Note, the reversal, now, of standards: before, a woman wanting to become Sufi had to become a man; now it seems a Sufi who wants to be a true lover has to be like Zulaikha, a woman—that is, to be like her in love with Joseph's Face. The virtue (of love) is feminine, and femininity is the virtue here. The literary shift in Sufism is comparable to the literary shift in the Christian world where we can see in Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* a similar idea about replacing physical desire with spiritual desire in order to attain the ultimate goal of dissolution in God. The energy of Dante's love for and physical attraction to Beatrice must be redirected to God and thus transformed into something holy. Indeed, a line from Rumi's *Mathnawi*, book 1, line 111 (Rumi 1939, p. 10), reads:

عاشقی گر زین سر و گر زان سر است
عاقبت ما را بدان شه رهبر است

(Love, whether earthly or spiritual, will lead us ultimately to that king [God].)

A final example is that of Mary the mother of Jesus in the Qur'an. Rumi has a section on this in the *Mathnawi*, which expands on the Annunciation (Nicholson 1930, pp. 207–12), known to Western readership from Luke 1: 26–38. In reading the story, there is no mistaking the fact that woman (and not man) is absolutely central, beloved, and a source of mystical love and union in Sufism. To fully appreciate this, we need only to recall that Jesus is to Sufis the embodiment of pure Spirit, indeed, some have even said, a Sufi par excellence (Milani 2018, pp. 95–112), and so this example of a perfect being, a spotless soul, and so on—all references that are commonly found in Sufi literature about him. For all of that, this man, the enigmatic ideal, *is born through a woman*. He is birthed into the world through a woman and so therein lies a most subtle paradox. From the Christian point of view—and we borrow the sentiment of Umberto Eco's character, William of Baskerville—"the Lord, who is all-powerful, could have transformed himself into a man in some miraculous way, but he chose instead to become flesh in the womb of a woman, a sign that it was not so foul after all" (Eco 2004, pp. 270–71). From the Muslim point of view, it cannot be any less

than "we made the son of Mary and his mother a sign to mankind, and gave them a shelter on a peaceful hill-side watered by a fresh spring" (Q 23:50).

4. Part II: The Divine Feminine

What is the 'divine feminine'? To answer this question, we ask why Ibn Arabi considered 'Adam' in terms of *insan*? It was likely so as to emphasise the androgynous nature of the human and to convey a deeper understanding about using metaphysically nuanced language. The conventional reading of the Creation of Man in Christianity and Islam reads that God, without gender but holding potentiality for both, creates Adam and Eve (the male and female archetype), from whose intercourse then emerges humanity. Ibn Arabi's interpretation, however, allows for a possible alternate reading. God, essentially feminine, produces Adam (the male form) and from him Eve (the female substance) (Abrahamov 2015, p. 177). We are full circle: the female substance is the unseen divine feminine in woman and man.

Let us take a look at Rumi. He is of a more conservative persuasion than Ibn Arabi and takes a traditional outlook toward women, generally, but he does on occasion surprise his reader in what he writes. Now, in the *Mathnawi* Rumi says: "She (woman) is a ray of God, she is not that (earthly) beloved: she is creative, you might say she is not created" (Nicholson 1926, p. 133).[10] Nicholson's rendering of *Khaliq*, which is conventionally "Creator", represents his poetic adaptation of the term as a verb, rather than the noun, so as to indicate the activity of the holy. This is important because it signals just how subtle such a line is as it is found in the *Mathnawi*. There might be many ways to interpret this incredibly abstract verse, but one possible interpretation that is opened up by Izutsu (1984) is that based on an unusual reading of the verse: "[. . .] I have fashioned him [Adam] and breathed of My spirit into him [. . .]" (Q 15:29). Izutsu—drawing on classical sources and philology—asserted that the creative force underlying existence is feminine (Izutsu 1984, p. 203). Quoting the Persian Sufi scholar, al-Qashani (d. 1335), he says "the 'wife' (of Adam) was feminine. Moreover, the first unique 'soul' from which she was created was feminine" (Izutsu 1984, p. 203). Since the creation of Eve (Hawwa) is not overtly mentioned in the Quran—the passage 4:1 is key—and since the traditional knowledge about Eve's creation from the rib of Adam is derived from hadith (Sahih Bukhari: 3331), the question that Rumi poses is thought-provoking. If we free the subject of Rumi's verse from the linguistic form in which key words are placed, it might read something like the following: "She is a ray of God . . . creative . . . not created". The point of reference becomes irrefutable: The creative force that is the ground of being is feminine—hence, the divine feminine. This view is, of course, akin to—though not the same as—what Ibn Arabi asserted as the derivation of creation from the creative feminine, whereby, and explicitly, the feminine is the source of all beings. In Ibn Arabi's reading of tradition, the feminine gender was clearly given precedence over the masculine (Abrahamov 2015, p. 177). Therefore, in our saying that the feminine (as the creative force) is the ground of being, we do not intend to pass this off as echoing any medieval Sufi commentator, but rather it is the assertion made here in the light of the analysis provided.

There is a hadith that states: '*ina al-rahm s[h]ujna min al-rahman* (Sahih Bukhari: 5988).[11] It is literally (and traditionally) translated as "the womb is a branch of God", the word "branch" being key to denote an "extension" from the main part of something, in this case God. In the traditional sense, the hadith designates the importance of family and close relations. In this sense, therefore, it shares the value of being good to one's family or with those with whom one relates. It could be said that the hadith underlines the idea of *ihsan* (virtue) with regard to human relations. That is, it sets the highest standard of conduct for humans in relation to each other, this being underpinned by mercy, compassion, and kindness. In another sense, which is not too distant from the typical reading of the hadith given above, it can also be said that the hadith might be suggesting that perhaps the womb, which is "a locus of God's life-giving mercy" (Murata 1992, p. 182), is quite simply analogous to the act of divine creation, which is imbued with ceaseless mercy. In

this reading, *al-rahm* is clearly derived from *al-rahmah*, even though there might only be a vague linguistic connection, if at all. In both instances, what is clear is the allusion to what connects or links the divine and human. The answer: compassion. Were we to replace "branch" with "roots" (from the alternate reading of *shujna*, meaning "closely connected"), then this meaning would be doubly emphasised, if not piercing.[12] At this point, and in the context as hitherto laid out, the assertion might be made that the womb can be interpreted as figuratively as mercy/compassion. To make the point more strongly, the symbolic association of *al-rahm* to *al-rahman* has in the past been made—that is, "womb" to "God"—since both closely exhibit elements of mercy, compassion, and love.[13] If so, and in a highly unorthodox fashion, the hadith can be rendered to mean: "mercy comes from the merciful" (leaving the translation of *al-rahman* ambiguous so as to indicate both someone who is merciful, whilst also denoting God, the all-merciful), and in a most provocative and freely translated sense, playing on the word *sujna* to not only mean "derived" but in particular to mean "held/contained within", the hadith may have meant to read: "God is hidden in the womb". This latter encompasses the sum of the translations and meanings discussed.

Whilst the latter statement is contentious, the basis of its proposition relies upon an etymological argument connecting the term "womb" to *al-rahman* and thus linked to what is generally held to be the most powerful verse in the Quran: *al-fatihah*, within which (and subsequently in all but one chapter) we read the *bismillah*. Furthermore, the womb, being a place of origin, is the ground wherein a seed might be kept for a time for it to come to fruition. Thus, the analogy is of the seed planted under the surface where it is kept safe until it grows and breaks through the surface of the earth and comes up and appears as that which it is. The word *al-rahman* in any case simultaneously contains both meanings—"mercy" and "womb"—in the Arabic. Either way, it leads back to the idea and significance of the divine feminine; since *al-rahman* denotes kindness, mercy, and compassion, it is undoubtedly connected to love. If we allow ourselves to make more of the following verse in the *Mathnawi* than is perhaps reasonable (given Rumi's mostly traditionalist outlook), it might suffice to say, at the very least, on some conscious level, Rumi is aware of his deliberate allegorisation of God as "Mother" (Nicholson 1934, p. 44; see also Taheri 2011, p. 142 on the view of Rumi's son and founder of the Mevlevi Order, Baha Valad). Something might be said for invoking "Moses" in that same passage that speaks to the obvious trope of the divine as feminine in mystical thought. Moses, we will recall, was committed to water by his birth mother and pulled from water by his foster mother (Pharaoh's wife); he then emerged as prophet to face Pharaoh. That woman behind the active narrative of salvation (both of Moses and of the Hebrew slaves under Pharaoh) is worth further consideration. Pharaoh is a figure powerless in the face of 'God's plan' (that is to say, His keeping Moses alive), and Pharaoh is unable to destroy either Moses or the Hebrew; rather, Pharaoh ultimately destroys himself when the waters fall in on the Egyptians in pursuit. Rumi's conjuring of "Mother" and "nurse", including "Moses", who brings to mind the waters, presents an interesting afterthought in what could be rendered an alternative reading of the divine feminine. However, Rumi's traditional sensibilities, far from interfering with a reading of the divine feminine, in actual fact reinforce it. Not only is he aware of God as "Mother", but he, along with Ibn Arabi, is also mindful of God's primordial virginal activity (with particular reference to Mary mother of Jesus), as will become clear. His traditionalism betrays the much older entrenched Arab-Bedouin custom of the wet-nurse, which is intimately connected to the biography of the Prophet. The hadith about the woman who nursed (i.e., offered of her breast milk to) children not her own because they were without their mother is of note. Here, the Prophet asks his Companions: "Do you think that this woman can throw her son in the fire?" They replied, "No, if it is in her power". The Prophet said: "God is more merciful to His slaves than this lady to her son" (Sahih Bukhari: 5999). If we are to accept this narration, then there is something to be said about the pre-eminence of the female substance as woman being representative of the divine feminine as essence. Even if this hadith might be asserted as being used derogatorily (as in, put into the mouth of the Prophet) by tradition, as if to say

that 'if a woman can do it, so can you', it nevertheless does not fail to convey the point that God's mercy is being linked to a feminine quality.

The sense of 'softness' to these references might draw the kind of criticism that Islam has its 'soft' as well as 'hard' side, and this would be unquestionably something of a chauvinistic commentary, that is, to see the female as 'soft' (as if to suggest weakness). The hadith narrative certainly suggests strength of a different kind, the idea being to pose the question that is not typically considered by the men in Muhammad's company (that is, to those with whom he shares the parable of the nursing woman). Indeed, we could go further to assert that even in the male-centric view of seeing the female as soft and weak, the deliberate use of the hadith about the nursing woman was meant to demonstrate to readers that the perceived 'softness' and 'weakness', i.e., vulnerability, of woman is in fact no trivial thing—it is the mark of great strength, and, perhaps even ironically, the mark of a 'real man'. One might even dare say it is the most perfect mystical state. Might the hadith, then, which comes from (or is put into) the mouth of the Prophet, be an invitation to men to enter into this 'female experience' of the divine? It would appear so, since we can easily take it as support for the reversal of the so-called ideal in early Sufism that a woman must become a man to be a Sufi. As the mystical and the feminine have in common the elements of love, mercy, and compassion, the underlying irony in the Sufi message, it would seem, is, at the very least, tongue-in-cheek—that men must become like women! It should then be clear by this point that the conventional reading of traditional Sufi mystical ascension—as comprising the transcendence of worldly binaries in order to attain to union with God—remains an unsuspecting one, because, in effect, it is a position inattentive to the irony at play in Sufi language. From an observation of the works of Rumi and Ibn Arabi, what becomes increasingly evident is that the divine feminine is God's unseen quality—not as in secret, but as having been concealed from perceptibility because of the reinforced masculine reading of tradition. We do not deny that man and woman could contain within them masculine and feminine qualities, but this reflects the paradox of their material existence. However, God is non-material and Absolute-existent (واجب الوجود). Therefore, we cannot speak about God in the same way as we can about existents. As such, it is reasonable to think that a 'man' becoming a 'woman'—as the inverse to the traditional Sufi view of a 'woman' becoming a 'man'—is both necessary and essential for mystical transformation if the divine feminine is the ground of being. That is, rather than say neither are relevant because of the predominant metaphysical premise that union with the divine is to transcend binaries, we suggest that the view about the divine feminine argued here upturns the interpretation of transcendence as a unitive experience in favour of a singular and definitive source. There would be no point in dismissing or turning a blind eye to the reality of gender binaries in Sufi thought. That woman and man are differentiated by certain 'given' qualities is a given in the literature. However, that these qualities are interchangeable and, in some cases, inversed is unmistakable.

Let us return to the figure of Mary, mother of Jesus, again, as our closing example. The account of Mary is quite consistent across the New Testament and the Quran. Regardless of a Christian or Muslim reading of these texts, the central theme of the divine feminine is pronounced in both. We read that Mary was pregnant with the sacred and gives birth to a holy being. She is a vessel of God. Now, we know that the prophets of God (overwhelmingly men) are thought of as 'vessels' metaphorically by tradition—i.e., as those without self, chosen to carry the message of God. Yet with Mary, this point is of particular interest, especially in the context of Islam, since the virgin birth of Jesus is to be "a Sign to mankind" and "a blessing" from God (19:21). One could take the sign further to mean a direct interjection from God to man in defence of woman in the passage where the baby Jesus speaks from the cradle to rebuke Mary's attackers (19:28). Moreover, in the Gospel of Matthew, wherein the genealogy of Jesus is given, the chain of names of men is interrupted by the singular mention of a woman who "begot" Jesus, the Christian saviour (Mt. 1:16). Indeed, the traditional story about Mary being dedicated to the temple in preparation for her role as Theotokos is preserved in the Quran (albeit in a minimalist sense and stripped

of Christological assertions), where it is said that Mary sought solitude for a time in a place far away in the East (i.e., Jerusalem) (19:16). Undoubtedly, then, Mary is an exemplar of chastity, purity, and fullness in the divine—that is, pregnant with the divine, symbolically speaking, because of her dedication to God—in anticipation of her spiritual reward of being what Orthodox tradition refers to as "God-bearing". Furthermore, her story also resembles the seclusion of a place hidden from society, a womblike place, where she is visited by the Spirit of God (19:17–19). To explain, woman is the revelation of the secret god is famously attributed to Ibn Arabi and the manifold ways in which one can explore the divine feminine also peculiar to him. Thus, it is no surprise that he, unlike those interested in "gazing at beardless youth", was well-disposed to women instead, knowing full well the secret they embodied. He says in the *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*:

> Whoever knows the worth of women and the secret contained within them will not refrain from loving them. Indeed, love for them is part of the perfection of the knower of God. For such love is a legacy from the Prophet and a divine love. And the Prophet says: "They were made dear to me (perfume and women)". Thus he designates no one other than God Himself as the cause of love for them (Ritter [1955] 2013, p. 494; 1911: 2/190).

That Jesus was given the title Seal of Saints not only signals his own perfection—having been conceived of the mixture of "imagined and real water"—but also his mother's. The conjugation of Gabriel and Mary, as implied by Ibn Arabi's reading of the Quran, occurred "in the usual way" (i.e., in the manner of "this human species"), he tells us, but it happened in such a way that preserved the secrets of creation therein, since it was only after putting her mind at ease (that he was there from God to give to her a "pure son") that "he blew Jesus into her" (Abrahamov 2015, p. 105).

Let us bring some of the key thoughts of this section into view. Though a difficult point to make in the light of normative readings of Islamic religious experience, we have wanted to show the real strength of the correlation between mysticism and femininity in the Islamic lifeworld (as is widely understood in studies concerning other religious experiences—see, for example, Cusack and Prior 2015; Schmidt 2016; Knight 2011). We have done this by drawing on examples from Islamic sources that disclose such affinity between mysticism and femininity but which are normally drowned out by the dominant conservative narrative. Notwithstanding, what we have argued is that *the mystic* is feminised in being taken over by the sacred as feminine. Thus, regardless of sex or gender, the mystic is made to reflect the divine feminine source that it now mirrors. Indeed, to finish with the provocative example of Jesus in the Qur'an, our intention is precisely to portray just that—the power of the divine feminine as the source of the experience of the sacred in mysticism.

5. Part III: Two Sufi Women of the Medieval World

This final section provides a brief comparative analysis of two Sufi women: Julian of Norwich (d. 1416) and A'ishah al-Ba'uniyyah (d. 1517). This section offers broad reflections on what has hitherto been discussed, now in relation to the aforementioned figures. Julian and A'ishah are treated as portraying comparable examples of mystical experience from two markedly distinct religions. In our undertaking, we have mainly consulted Barry Windeatt's critical translation of Julian's revelations (2015), not least because we found it accessible and believe it will be helpful to readers should they wish to pursue reading her visions in whole. (There, literature on Julian of Norwich is extensive. We offer here a short list of those studies that have been of specific interest to our particular analysis of the figure: for a study of her theology, see (Jantzen 1987; Sheldrake 2019); on her de-institutionalised value, see (Cusack 2020). Concerning Neoplatonic correlations, see (Baker 1994, esp. 118–120) and also (Cuda 2009, esp. 59)). For A'ishah, we rely solely on Th. Emil Homerin's translation (2014), which is presently the only critical edition available to the English-speaking world. Until now, we have looked at the women of the Sufi world through the prism of men. Even where we have observed the accounts of renowned

Sufi women (Rabi'a, Fatimah of Seville, Fatimah of Nishapur), access to them was almost always framed by the account of men (Attar, Ibn Arabi). What follows, therefore, is an examination of two accounts of mysticism from the first-hand experience of one Christian and another Muslim woman of the medieval period, roughly a century apart. In the writing of both, what is readily noticeable is the trace of the (Neo-)Platonic schema. For we read Julian confess "our substance is in God, and I also saw that God is in our sensory being" (Windeatt 2015, p. 121), and A'ishah composed "He turned to them and revealed to them His essence. And they lived again gazing at that living face as His eternal life appeared" (Homerin 2014a, p. 159). This is notable for the reason that the framework of both of them is dependent upon a Neoplatonic extension from and return to the One. This is conceived by Julian as beloved offspring having come forth from God that "by nature shall be brought back within him by grace" (Windeatt 2015, p. 136) and by A'ishah as the sublimation and "absorption" of the lover whose "shadowy existence passes away with promised grace" (Homerin 2014a, p. 143). Yet, in both, what is also present is the Dionysiac mood—as in the underlying current of enigmatic and uninhibited emotional content bearing the marks of the initiatic mystery-cult—in terms of how the relationship to God is experienced.

Julian of Norwich is the celebrated medieval English anchoress and author of a book known as "Revelations of Divine Love". The work is of a subtle nature that offers profound thinking behind it, which emerged from the revelations she experienced in 1373 whilst recovering from serious illness. In the book, she describes her visions during the time of her suffering, where she is shown a loving and compassionate God, merciful and forgiving despite the human proclivity for sin. Julian is regarded as having provided a strikingly independent theological view, one notable feature of which was her account of God as our mother.

Having been shown something of the mysteries of the divine, in her direct revelation of her Lord Jesus, her visions provide direct access to an experiential understanding of God as mother. What is unique about this experience of hers is that she feminises the experience of Jesus by way of simile. Now, she is not the first to draw on maternal imagery in discussing God the Creator, but she is distinctive in her feminisation of the experience of Jesus. Whilst references in the Old and New Testament offer sustainable grounds for doing so (such as Isaiah 42:14 and Mt. 23:37), these are not more than instances where metaphor is employed to convey meaning (that is, the example drawn is incidental and not detrimental to the point). Indeed, in Julian's writing, she is putting into force her meaning of Jesus "the heavenly mother". Still, her revelation on this is grounded in tradition—the Church is the mother of the faithful, and since she is the body of Christ, Jesus is "our mother" in this life and we are children to her. She says the "gracious hands of our mother are ready and enfold us diligently; for in all this he performs the role of a kindly nurse who has nothing else to do but attend to the safety of her child" (Windeatt 2015, p. 133). Incredibly poignant is the language employed by Julian in describing our connection to God through her reading of the incarnation. She takes this to be as symbolic of the womb in which we are kept until our maturity in the next life: "our Saviour is our true mother in whom we are endlessly born, and out of whom we shall never come to birth . . . we are all enclosed in him and he is enclosed in us" (Windeatt 2015, p. 126). We must also keep in mind that Julian's reference to 'mother' within the Christian context carries the double sense of both 'mother' and 'virgin', and as such, hers is a view aware of the 'virginal state' when speaking about God as mother. Indeed, 'mother' in the Christian context *is* by virtue of Mary (the mother of Jesus), who is a virgin.

A'ishah al-Ba'uniyyah of Damascus was a distinguished female scholar who was a mystic and a prolific poet and writer. In a surviving work, *Kitab al-Muntakhab fi Usul al-Ratab fi'Ilm al-Tasawwuf*, translated in short by the late Th. Emil Homerin (d. 2020) as *The Principles of Sufism*, she demonstrates love as God's greatest secret. Unlike Julian, A'ishah was not the exception in being an educated woman in her time and society. Not only was she free to produce numerous works of importance that were read and cited, but as a mystic, she was both recognised by her male contemporaries and authoritative.

In comparison to Julian's book, situated in her Christian world, A'ishah's book, in her Muslim world, is distinct not because it was written by a woman, but precisely because its language, tone, and style are not gendered. Whilst it was assumed by its translator as possibly the first Sufi guidebook written by a woman, it would be, as he admits, impossible to determine the gender of the author based solely on its content (Homerin 2014b).

Nevertheless, it would not be out of place to suggest that since love is not only central but also the key to A'ishah's Sufism, it betrays not gender but the inherent femininity of the hidden *religion of love* (*madhab-e 'ishq*) within Islam. It is, therefore, no accident that A'ishah opens the chapter on the fourth and final principle (at the apex of the book) on love with the following quote (from Quran 3:31): "Say, 'If you love God, then follow me, and God will love you!'" (Homerin 2014a, p. 97). Her commentary on the verse reveals her belief that love is both a hidden layer of religion and the most secret aspect of faith. In striking similarity to Julian, A'ishah, referring to the remainder of verse 3:31 ("God loves you and forgives your sins") says:

> The "and" here, denotes a sequence so that it is clear that love is prior to forgiveness: first, He loves them; then they love Him, and then He forgives them, as they ask His pardon. Love thus necessitates forgiveness, because to forgive necessitates love (Homerin 2014a, p. 97).

For A'ishah, "love" indicates the "purity of states" (Homerin 2014a, p. 97), and in the closing section of her book titled "Epilogue on Love", she affirms love's secret:

> The subtle meaning of God's love for the worshipper is the selection of the worshipper for this secret—which we have noted and to which we have referred—by seizing him with the Beloved's attractions and effacing annihilations until the worshipper is without a sense of self in the light of the sun of true oneness. This is the true realisation of true love. Anything less than this love is a love dependent on causes and contingencies derived from attention to the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (Homerin 2014a, p. 157)

To close, our case studies offer palpable evidence for arguing a probable deeply personal and experiential comprehension of the divine feminine. Not least, the historical example of their persons provides irrefutable substantiation of the distinguished role and presence of the female mystic in both Christianity and Islam. Moreover, detectible in both is the (Neo-)Platonic and Dionysiac tension, which defines a more profound, more historic mysticism. In fact, both Julian and A'isha provide us with an opportunity to reflect on something more: in their deeply felt mysticism, they reveal what is in fact beyond the merely religious, that is, they show their reader a way into the mysteries beyond the surface of what is the religious world of men.

6. Conclusions

The divine feminine and the female mystic are on the one level representative of a consistent and coherent symbolism of the source of creation as manifest in mystical currents within Islamic history. Yet, on another level, we have argued that these are more than symbolic: they are demonstrative of the deep-rooted experiential apprehension of the mystical understanding of God. As such, the divine feminine and the female mystic are, therefore, fundamentally not about the depiction of 'woman' (as in sex/gender representation) as we find it, but rather what it is to be in connection to the divine that can become apparent through its unconcealment. The attempt of Sufi theoreticians in the past has been to make use of the idea of God as being beyond gender so as to neutralise the masculine bias in tradition, and whilst they have provided a more sophisticated interpretation (of what still remains a misogynistic reading of tradition), we have found it wanting given the anomalies found with regard to mystical experience. Rumi's poetry and Ibn Arabi's metaphysics (as well as the hermeneutical tradition he inspired) have certainly provided support for the view that 'God', as the ground of the sacred, is, in essence, a creative force, and thus feminine. However, there is also the suggestion there, we would

like to think, that what is mystical is by nature female and mystical experience feminine. Therefore, it would appear that both Rumi and Ibn Arabi may have been inclined toward the view that the mystic—whether a man or woman—takes on the 'female' quality in entering into mysticism and is thus by nature engaged in a phenomenon that is essentially feminine. The 'female mystic', in this sense, denotes a state of being that is beyond the seemingly Sufi woman or man as gender; it is as such the quality of the mystical that is in touch with the feminine creative force (God). We might further say that it is not that Sufi women and men must transcend their gender to achieve unification with God, but rather that they each must enter truly into the 'female' quality of the feminine source of existence in order to do so. The phenomenon of the female mystic is more than the identification with gender-specificity. Indeed, it is the clearest—and in contrast to traditional means of verifying the sacred, the closest—mode of appearing of the divine feminine, the sacred ground of all existence.

All the while, we have made clear three kinds of ways in which the feminine is latent in the originary function of Sufism. In our search for understanding the phenomenon of the 'female[-]mystic', we have had to distance ourselves from the social and cultural, and thus gendered, interests in the woman Sufi. This is because the phenomenon of the female mystic, in our asking about it, is not representative of gender but rather fundamental to our seeking to know what it is as the condition of existence that presents to us the mystical in Sufism. We might ordinarily refer to the Sufi woman also as a female mystic, but this would be to merely shuffle words. What we mean by the 'female mystic' is the way of being present to the divine where God's feminine essence is manifest through the female quality of the mystic. For the woman Sufi, this way of being would set them apart from other ways that women are religiously made to appear in history. What we have meant by the 'divine feminine' is that which has always been the underlying aspect of this unfolding in history. As such, the question of gender does not pertain to a Sufi as either a man or a woman because the phenomenon itself is gendered in a much more fundamental and originary way. It should be clear, therefore, that this study has not been about the grafting of a gendered argument onto a metaphysical reading of Islam (in terms of the masculine and feminine aspects of the divine—as has already been performed by Ibn Arabi and his interpreters) nor has it been about the representation of the divine likewise (manifest or inherent) in the corporeality of male and female. Our focus has been about metaphysics so far as it is a study of ancient metaphysics, that is, what is beyond the visible formality of the woman, female, and feminine.

Implicit to our analysis has been the view about a further distinction to be made about religion and mysticism, again, not as categories, but as what they reveal upon closer investigation as distinguishable phenomena. In doing so, we want to avoid the hard distinction made between religion and mysticism; indeed, Sufism is a clear example of just how fluid this boundary can be. So, to finish, we ask whether 'religion', that is, Islam, as revealed tradition overwhelmingly shaped by men, is 'male' by quality and masculine in essence? If so, then 'mysticism', that is, Sufism, as concealed tradition, must be in turn 'female' by quality and feminine in essence. We say this so as not to delimit Islam and Sufism in absolute terms, but to show how the ratification of its activity can be signified as such, even though, in view of our inquiry, the exchange between the two has always been and will remain open. The distinction we wish to make is that each reveals in the ordinary a part of what remains concealed.

As such, *Islam as religion* is masculine in so far as it is phenomenologically underpinned by related primal instincts that are outwardly directed: desire, conflict, and domination. *Sufism as mysticism* is feminine in so far as it is phenomenologically underpinned by those basic instincts that are inwardly facing and reflect receptivity, gentleness, and empathy. Yet, to conclude, we might dare say the concealed aspect of religion and mysticism remains the primordially conceived *divine feminine* and its corresponding representative the *female mystic*.

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Notes

1 For background on the early history of Sufism, see Karamustafa (2007).

2 For this, see the work of Scott A. Kugle.

3 Indeed, Sana'i is known in the history of Persian literature as the most hostile Sufi poet toward women. The Farsi reads: من غلام زنی که از صد مرد بگزرد روز بار و بردا برد (*man gholaam-e zani ke az sad mard bogzarad rooz-e baar o va bardaa bard*). Schimmel's translation is interpretive so as to convey the meaning of the idea comminated by Sana'i in the story of a devoted woman.

4 Her apogee work on the subject of women in Sufism (Schimmel 1999) brings to bear the full extent of her Sufi apologetics.

5 In addition to al-Sulami's work cited above, one might also consider the following works: Ibn Arabi's *Ruh al-Quds*; Ibn al-Abbar's (d.1260) biographical dictionary, *Takmilat Kitab al-Sila*; and Ibn Rushayd work, *Mal al-'ayba fi ma jumi'a bi-tul al-ghayba fi al-rihla ila Makka wa* Tayba (d.1321).

6 چون زن در راه خدای مرد بود او را زن نتوان گفت (chon zan dar raah-e khodaayi mard bovad zan natavan goft).

7 Augustine, in following Plato and appropriating Platonic philosophy to inform his Christian theology, believed (to put it crudely) the body was corrupt and instead gave primacy to the abstract ideal and spiritual essence of existence the ground of its reality—i.e., the Platonic ψυχή ("psyche").

8 See Jami, *Nafahat al-uns*; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Sifat al-safwa*; and Sha'rani, *Tabaqat al-kubra* (quoted in Nurbakhsh 2004, pp. 107–8).

9 Quoted in Nurbakhsh (2004).

10 پرتو حقست آن معشوق نست، خالقست آن گوئا مخلوق نست (Mathnawi book 1, line 2437; see Rumi 1939, p. 111) (*parto haqqasst aan ma'shooq neest, khaaleqasst aan gooya makhlooq neest*).

11 This hadith can be transliterated in the following ways: *'ina ar-rahimu s[h]ijnatun min ar-rahman*, *'ina ar-rahimu s[h]ajnatun min ar-rahman*, *'ina ar-rahimu s[h]ujnatun min ar-rahman*. This is to take into account what is generally agreed upon regarding how it is to be read correctly with either a *fatha*, *shammah*, or *kasra*, where the meaning remains the same.

12 On the translation of *shujna,* see Lane (1863: 1/1509–10).

13 See Ibn Arabi's interpretation of this hadith in *futuhat al-makiyya* (1911: 3/88) (futuhat III 88.28; cited in Murata 1992, p. 182). For more references on the symbolic reading of "womb", see Murata (1992, p. 215ff). On the association of the terms in Arabic, consult *Mu'jam lisan al-Arab*, volume twelve, page 232; *Mufradat al-fadh al-Quran fi al-Raghib al-Isfahani*, page 191; and *Ataeb al-kelam fi bayan selat al-rahm*, page 25.

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Article

Sufism and the Sacred Feminine in Lombok, Indonesia: Situating Spirit Queen Dewi Anjani and Female Saints in Nahdlatul Wathan

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Abstract: This article is a feminist ethnographic exploration of how 'indigenous' notions of a 'sacred feminine' shape Sufi praxis on the island of Lombok in the eastern part of Indonesia in Southeast Asia. I demonstrate through long-term immersive anthropological fieldwork how in her indigenous form as Dewi Anjani 'Spirit Queen of Jinn' and as 'Holy Saint of Allah' who rules Lombok from Mount Rinjani, together with a living female saint and Murshida with whom she shares sacred kinship, these feminine beings shape the kind of Sufi praxis that has formed in the largest local Islamic organization in Lombok, Nahdlatul Wathan, and its Sufi order, Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan. Arguments are situated in a Sufi feminist standpoint, revealing how an active integration of indigeneity into understandings of mystical experience gives meaning to the sacred feminine in aspects of Sufi praxis in both complementary and hierarchical ways without challenging Islamic gender constructs that reproduce patriarchal expressions of Sufism and Islam.

Keywords: sacred feminine; divine feminine in Sufism; Sufi orders; female saints; female leadership in Sufism; Dewi Anjani; Nahdlatul Wathan; Lombok; Indonesia; indigenous feminine

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1. Introduction

The 'sacred (also read as divine) feminine' as cultural praxis is an under-researched area in the anthropology of Sufism in Indonesia, mostly because normative Sufism as organized through the tariqa, like Islam, is structurally and ideologically patriarchal and formally speaks to a male audience. While we can access Her (the sacred or divine feminine) intellectually and mystically, particularly in the work of medieval Sufi scholar Ibn Al-Arabi, and come to know of Her in the form of esteemed Sufi women and saints through hagiographies, poetry, and research on contemporary Sufism and gender, in general, She hides under a long tradition of male scholarship and authority in Islam.

In the culturally diverse Southeast Asian archipelagic nation-state of Indonesia—the world's most populous Muslim society—we are hard pressed to find formal discourse on the divine feminine in traditional orthodox Sufi orders. The reason for this is that the kind of Sufism that formally dominates Indonesian Islam is that of Al-Ghazali's orthodox Sufism. Al-Ghazalian gender ideology tends not to support the notion of a divine feminine or divinity in women and nor does it afford her centrality in seen and unseen realms.

Scholars of Indonesian Sufism have noted that various Sufi teachings were taught during the early Islamization of Indonesia, including Ibn Al-Arabi's doctrine of Unity of Being, which integrated into indigenous mystical fields of practice (see Riddell 2001; Wahyuni 2017; Woodward 1989, 2010). State projects of modernization and formalization of religion, however, eventually led to a preference for Al-Ghazali's orthodox Sufism together with the Syafi'i school of jurisprudence (Wahyuni 2017). Therefore, in the contemporary milieu, rarely is Ibn Al-Arabi's thought taught in the majority of formal Sufi orders, with exceptions being in a few orders only such as Akbariyah, neo-Sufi groups and in intellectual

Sufi circles in urban centers. Even so, including in academic courses in universities, Ibn Al-Arabi's discourses on the feminine remain under-studied in Indonesia.

In practice, however, we do find veneration of and orthopraxic engagement with the sacred feminine through popular belief and ritual in Muslim (especially agrarian) communities and some Sultanates across Indonesia that co-maintain and integrate Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs that engage goddesses, female ancestors, and female saints (Headley 2004; Heringa 1997; Jordaan 1984, 1997; Pigeaud 1962; Sanday 2002; Smith and Woodward 2016; Wessing 1997). These female spirits primarily derive from the indigenous Malayo-Polynesian branch of Austronesian culture and Buddhist-Hinduized religiosities of pre-Islamic Indonesia.

In Muslim farming communities, Mother Rice Spirits and Goddesses, such as Dewi Sri, were and are integral to community and family life relating to food, hearth, prosperity, and community well-being Thus, their sacred maintenance was, and in some Muslim communities, still is, not only central, but also obligatory (Heringa 1997). Spirit Queens (also read as Goddesses) play roles in the unseen 'mythical,' eternal realms in their augmentation of power in human kings or leaders through marriage or other historical dynastic partnerships in Sumatra, the Sultanates of Yogyakarta and Surakarta in Central Java, and as I show here for the first time, also in Lombok. In such communities, we find an ongoing reproduction of ritual praxis that invokes the feminine as sacred in a cosmology that has indigenized Sufism. It is this variety of 'feminine' to which I refer as an 'indigenous feminine' in her sacred form among the indigenous Sasak people of Lombok.

There is next to no feminist ethnography on the inter-relationships between female deities, saints, gender, and Islam in Lombok, and so this article aims to deepen understandings about the complexities embedded in Sufi interactions in these realms. The orthopraxic engagement with the feminine differs from the formal, orthodox Sufism in the organized Sufi orders, but importantly it contextualizes the narratives that give meaning to ideas about gender in Lombok. Departing from the gender-neutral work of Sasak Muslim scholars, and based on long-term immersive anthropological fieldwork from 2008 to the present, I present new arguments that show how the realm of the sacred feminine plays an integral role in the Sufi orthopraxis of Lombok's largest and most influential local Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Wathan.

In Nahdlatul Wathan and its Sufi order, Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan,[1] there is a history of female leadership held by the founding father's daughter, Ummi Siti Raehanun (b. 1953), who is also considered to be a saint and Murshida (a female Murshid; Sufi teacher), and an emphasis placed on deceased female saints such as Rabia Al-Adawiyah together with Lombok's indigenous Dewi Anjani, Spirit Queen of Jinn, who rules Lombok from the majestic Mount Rinjani. Dewi Anjani has been integral to the Islamization of Lombok and is said to hold a revered position in Nahdlatul Wathan that enjoins her in a sacred relationship with the historical Selaparang kingdom of East Lombok, as I examine later. Mythically, this relationship is rooted in the Sasak origin myth, Doyan Neda, which tells of how Dewi Anjani as Creatrix gave life to the first humans on Lombok from twenty royal jinn couples. The Islamization of the myth has not altered the power Dewi Anjani is understood to wield in her current identity as a holy female Muslim saint and ruler of Lombok, which in turn serves to legitimize Nahdlatul Wathan's dominant position in Lombok socially and politically.

I explore how Dewi Anjani as a representation of an 'indigenous feminine' spirit has undergone change in historicized, politicized and religio-gendered contexts, particularly through interactions with Muslim praxis and the notion of sainthood. I therefore aim to represent her plurality and shifting identities across such contexts. I refer to her Sasak indigeneity to mark a contrast from ideas about gender in formal, orthodox Sufism where the feminine is located in a hierarchical relationship to men within the confines of shar'iah that formally designates men as leaders. An exception to this, as I show, is when a human female saint is revered, as in the case of Murshida Ummi Raehanun, as the daughter of Nahdlatul Wathan's founding father and Sufi saint, Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul

Madjid (known as Maulana Syeikh), and who is also believed to share sacred kinship with Dewi Anjani. As I explore, Ummi Raehanun inherited both Dewi Anjani's loyalty and her leadership from her father, the latter of which taps into issues of patriarchal dependency women Sufis of high rank experience throughout the Muslim world more broadly (see Ali Khan 2018; Hill 2018; Neubauer 2016; Pemberton 2004; Smith 2014b).

More generally, I aim to contribute to knowledge about the lesser understood and rarely researched (ortho)praxes and heterogeneity of the feminine in Islam cross-culturally by looking at the ways in which Sufis understand, commune and form orthopraxic relationships with aspects of the feminine in their daily and devotional lives. I situate my ethnography in a Sufi feminist standpoint related to Shaikh's (2012) call for a new Islamic feminist inquiry that she draws from Ibn Al-Arabi's recognition of a divine feminine. Here, my ethnography reveals the ways in which the sacred feminine is grounded by indigenous ways of knowing and accessing the mystical realms that move beyond the gender constraints of Islam more generally. By working with the decolonial analytic I call an 'indigenous feminine', my feminist ethnography of 'Sufism' situates indigenous understandings about gender and the sacred feminine in the form of goddesses, deified ancestors and other Islamized female spirits as central to a Sufi orthopraxis.

I would like to build on this Sufi turn in Islamic feminism anthropologically by showing how Sufi heterogeneity expressed in indigenous Sasak ways of knowing the feminine aspects of Creation that are cast as sacred points to an active embrace of both masculine and feminine in seen and unseen realms in ways that are complementary and hierarchical at the same time. The article suggests that indigenous ways of interacting with the feminine dimensions of Creation retain a sacred, powerful place in the kind of Sufism that has formed in East Lombok, and yet, do not necessarily suggest that there is anything sacred about the feminine in ordinary women. Furthermore, I demonstrate how Sufi interactions with the sacred feminine are non-challenging to the dominant Islamic patriarchal shari'ah-based and Al-Ghazalian Sufi gender constructs that formally shape orthodox gender relations in Lombok.

I begin by looking at what I call 'Muslim ethnoscapes' into which Islamic heterogeneity is inscribed through praxis in overlapping, shifting, and complex ways in Indonesia and Lombok, and then turn to locate Dewi Anjani in wider Indonesian patterns of sacred relations between Spirit Queens and rulers, in order to provide a depth of understanding for the ethnography that I present thereafter in relation to Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi order.

2. Muslim Ethnoscapes in Indonesia and Lombok

2.1. Islam and Sufism in Indonesia

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim nation. There are more than 300 ethnic groups in Indonesia and a population of approximately 270 million. An estimated 85% of Indonesians profess Islam. Indonesian Islam is heterogeneous in practice and reflects the diversity of ethnic groups throughout the archipelago (Beatty 1999; Woodward 1989). Islam is traditionally taught through schools attached to national Islamic organizations. Sufism is taught through Sufi orders either affiliated with or attached to these organizations or by teachers in urban groups. Prior to the arrival of foreign religions to the archipelago, the diverse peoples practiced varieties of indigenous Austronesian/Malayo-Polynesian religiosity, which can be described as shamanic and animist. The arrival of Hindu-Buddhism in Indonesia in the 4th century changed the religious landscape into a Hinduized (-Buddhist) indigenous one.

Sufi Islam is estimated to have arrived in the 13th century (or possibly earlier) and over a period of time, it was absorbed into the pre-existing indigenous Hindu-Buddhist landscape (see Ricklefs 2001). The kind of Sufism and Islam that developed initially was that of unorganized expressions of Sufism (Ricklefs 2001). The Sufism that has formed in cultural practice in Indonesia can therefore be described as fluid and plural in that it has been indigenized in culturally specific ways. I situate this fluidity and plurality of indigenized Sufi practice within the notion that I refer to as 'Muslim ethnoscapes'. Muslim ethnoscapes represent the heterogeneity of Islam in cultural praxis and engage a

decolonial frame for interpreting Sufism and Islam more broadly. The 'indigenous feminine' is embedded within these Muslim ethnoscapes, as I demonstrate later.

Sufism as cultural praxis differs from orthodox Sufism that is formally organized through the tariqa and taught in traditional Islamic schools known as *pesantren*. Orthodox Islam is organized through national and local organizations, the largest two being Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. Nahdlatul Ulama embraces cultural practices with a Sufi emphasis and Muhammadiyah is modernist and reformist. There are at present forty-three authorized tariqa in Indonesia that are considered authentic by the national body that oversees the correctness of Sufi orders, called *Jam'iyah Ahli al-Thariqah al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdliyah*.[2] Some of the more popular tariqa in Indonesia include Qâdirîyah wa Naqshabandiyah, Syathariyah, and Rifâ'îyah. In Lombok, Qadariyah wa Naqshabandiyah, Khalwatiyah and Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan are the more dominant tariqa. The majority of these tariqa work deeply with Al-Ghazali's theology and that of his predecessors. There are also Sufi orders that exist alongside these 'formally' recognized ones, and some of these embrace the teachings of, and those derived from, Ibn Al-Arabi.

2.2. Varieties of Sasak Islam and Sufism: Reframing 'Orthodoxy' in Lombok

Lombok is a multi-ethnic island to the east of Bali in the West Nusa Tenggara province. The majority of inhabitants consist of the indigenous Sasak Muslims, followed by neighboring ethnic groups Sumbawanese, Bimanese, and Balinese Hindus, as well as Javanese, Bugis, and Arabs, amongst others. Approximately 95% of the island's 3.7 million inhabitants practice a variant of Islam. Balinese Hindus are a minority along with Chinese Christians and Buddhists and the marginalized non-Muslim Sasak who practice an indigenous religiosity known as Sasak Boda.[3]

Sasak Islam dominates the religious landscape and is typically classified by scholars into two major streams: Wetu Telu and Waktu Lima (Budiwanti 2000; Cederroth 1981; Freeman 1989; Muliadi 2019). The former, Wetu Telu ('Three Times'), is represented as syncretic, Sufi Islam rooted in the Boda's Hinduized animism. Waktu Lima ('Five Times') is referred to as orthodox Islam. Indonesian scholars often describe 'Wetu Telu' as Sufi oriented and 'Waktu Lima' as fiqh oriented (Quddus and Ariadi 2015). Such classification, while helpful in giving a broad picture, however, does not capture the complexities, heterogeneity and dialectics within the 'Waktu Lima' category, which Western-trained scholars tend to homogenize as 'reformist' (Budiwanti 2000; Harnish 2003, 2019; MacDougall 2005).

I draw on Sasak Muslim scholars' recent re-framings of early 20th-century Dutch colonial and contemporary scholarship that reproduce binary constructions of Sasak Islam as 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox/syncretic', to provide new insights into indigeneity[4] and gender in Sasak Sufism. I argue that homogenizing the notion of 'orthodox' fails to capture the plurality within this category of practice together with the indigenous complexity and depth of Sufi wisdom enmeshed in 'orthodox' life-worlds. In particular, I show how the Sasak Islam two-tier model overlaps and is capable of shifting in and out of indigeneity in politicized contexts.

With this in mind, I refer to Nahdlatul Wathan (established in 1953) as the largest local and most powerful Islamic organization in Lombok. Scholars (Budiwanti 2000; Harnish 2019; MacDougall 2005) represent Nahdlatul Wathan as a reformist organization intolerant of indigenous practices like those of the Wetu Telu. While this may partially be the case, and it certainly was in the 1930s, when its founder, Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, was proselytizing after his return from lengthy study in Mecca, such accounts have overlooked the specific variety of Sasak Sufism in Nahdlatul Wathan that is anchored in indigeneity and acknowledges the sacred feminine in the form of the Spirit Queen of Jinn on Mount Rinjani—Dewi Anjani—as integral to its projects of Islamization, and which Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid is understood to have guided mystically through his sacred kinship with the Spirit Queen.

More recent Sasak Muslim scholarship reframes the 'Waktu Lima' 'Wetu Telu' debate by locating understandings broadly in the notion of Nusantara Islam or indigenized Islam/s in Indonesia (Fitriani 2015). In the case of Lombok, I draw on the notion of Muslim ethnoscapes to refer to sites of shifting Islamic practice embedded within the concept of Nusantara Islam, to elucidate the heterogeneity of Sasak Islam and to unearth a more gendered understanding of the kinds of Islam in practice. Particularly, this concerns a reinterpretation of the reification of 'orthodox Islam' to elucidate how it, too, has been shaped by Sufi cosmology and indigeneity.

Sasak religio-sociological history can only partially be interpreted and reconstructed due to limited written sources and varied oral sources (Mahyuni 2007).[5] Prior to Islam's arrival on Lombok, the powerful Javanese Hindu kingdom of Majapahit had penetrated sometime in the 14th century and greatly influenced the language, practices and religiosity of the indigenous Sasak Boda (Boda is also referred to as 'Majapahit religion' because it was Hinduized by the Javanese Majapahit kingdom) (Asnawi 2006; Kieven 2013). There is also speculation that prior to the Majapahit expansion, indigenous Javanese, Balinese and/or other ancestors had already settled in Lombok (Fauzan 2013).

It is generally agreed upon that Islam in its Sufi form first entered in North Lombok in the late 16th century from Java (Budiwanti 2000) and then later in East Lombok from Makassar (Harnish 2003). There are varieties of Sasak Islamic practice that have been identified ethnographically. The Sasak Boda indigenized Sufi Islam and henceforth it became known as 'Wetu Telu' (for a detailed description see Budiwanti 2000; Cederroth 1981). The work of Indonesian scholars (see Budiwanti 2000; Fitriani 2015; Muliadi 2019; and Saharudin 2019) demonstrates how Sasak indigeneity agentively absorbed Sufism into all aspects of life including agrarian rites, life-rites and worldview including the integral role of lontar (palm leaf) manuscripts in providing references for teaching. To this, I add understandings about gender, which I explore in the following section.

Balinese Hinduism from neighboring Bali entered Lombok after Islam, and overpowered the indigenous Sasak during the late 1600s and 1700s until Sasak Muslims regained power during the colonial era with Dutch assistance in the late 1800s (Harnish 2019; MacDougall 2005; Mahyuni 2007). The reformist Islamic agendas of the late 1800s and early 1900s rejected the indigenization of Islam and thus the 'Waktu Lima versus Wetu Telu' binary was formed upon Muslim leaders returning home from the pilgrimage in Mecca where they learned a shar'iah-strict orthodox Islam. MacDougall (2005) notes that in Mecca, not only did they embrace orthodoxy, but they also studied Sufism. The Qadiriyya wa Naqshbandiyya tariqa, in particular, played a defining role in Lombok's modern history. Many Muslim leaders known as 'Tuan Guru' and Sufi masters were instrumental in overthrowing the Balinese, and then later, the Dutch in the revolts of the late 1800s (MacDougall 2005). It is at this intersection between Dutch colonialism and the rise of Sasak Islam that the politicization of the sacred indigenous feminine began in an explicitly Islamic context.

The Islamization process eventually transformed the indigenous Sasak emphasis on the 'male and female couple' into the dominant 'Sufi masculine', and in doing so, significantly marginalized and diminished the value of the feminine. The 'sacred couple' was, and in some cases still is, honored at Sasak sacred deity sites called *pedewaq* that consist of one or more erect stones that usually represent ancestral or deity male and female couples (Telle 2014). These sacred deity sites relate to the indigenous Upper World realm known across Indonesia as the Kahyangan, where ancestors and deities dwell.[6]

Some of these sacred sites have been re-Hinduized and Islamized and others were destroyed by Muslim reformists. In their Islamic form, they transform from a place for interaction with ancestors and deities into the Sufi 'maqam' or station—a place where a male saint (*wali*) disappeared (*moksa*) or was last seen. These 'maqam' are now popular pilgrimage sites for Sufi Muslims from different parts of Indonesia. Islamization has further seen the formal replacement of the indigenous ancestral couple with Adam and Eve during rituals that remember and honor the ancestors and in the wayang kulit shadow puppet plays (Budiwanti 2011; Harnish 2003). The ritual focus on Eve as the first human mother

has not, however, overshadowed Dewi Anjani, who in myth is not only Queen of the Jinn, but is also a saint and 'mother' of Lombok and the Sasak people. I now turn to a discussion of Dewi Anjani before profiling Nahdlatul Wathan and how she shapes the organization's Sufi orthopraxis later in the article.

3. The Indigenous Sacred Feminine in Lombok: Creatrix and Saint

Here, I draw on feminist anthropological considerations of links between gender and the maintenance of a revered ancient female deity or ancestor who wields great power in the unseen mythical realms, by looking at what understandings they shed about female deities, saints and gender in the Sufi context in Lombok. Later, I illustrate this through field data that suggest an 'interspersing' of Dewi Anjani with that of Ummi Raehanun through their shared sacred relationship inherited from Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid. Ethnography on Sasak Sufism pays no attention to what feminist anthropologist Sanday (2002) calls 'female-oriented webs of significance' or gendered aspects from a feminist standpoint. This is quite surprising given the prominent feminine symbology found on the island in the form of myths about Dewi Anjani, legends about princesses with supernatural powers,[7] the esteemed position attributed to mothers and feminine associations with rice cultivation and sacred rituals that draw on the Goddess of Fertility, Dewi Sri, in her various forms (Saharudin 2019).

Sasak culture, dialect and lexicons are heterogeneous across the island (Mahyuni 2007) and yet there is consistency in reference to and maintenance of the centrality of a notion of the feminine. The island of Lombok in the Sasak language is known by several names, including *Gumi Sasak* (Land of the Sasak) and *Gumi Nina* (Land of Women) (Muliadi 2019, p. 32; Saharudin 2019). Local narratives relate that the reference to Lombok as 'feminine' reflects the island's fertility, abundance in water, and prosperity. Other clues are available in several 'myths' that suggest the possibility of a past (Austronesian) Malayo-Polynesian, pre-Hindu notion of a mother-centered cosmology for the indigenous Sasak people of Lombok, as I discuss with reference to the origin myth, Doyan Neda (also known as Temelak Mangan).

Together with female-centered origin myths and the importance of Dewi Anjani in Lombok's affairs, these feminine and maternal symbols demonstrate the integral role of the feminine in Sasak life-worlds, both seen and unseen. They further underscore and speak to a broader cosmological complementarity that generally places forms of indigenous feminine power in the eternal unseen realm (*ghaib*) and masculine power in societies expressed through patriarchy. Drawing on this, I argue that notions of complementarity and hierarchy co-exist by shifting across and in-between the plurality available in Sasak gendered life-worlds.

The anthropology of Indonesian cultures has unearthed aspects of 'complementarity' and 'pairing' in terms of gender within different societies and how they play out through ritual, customary law and kinship systems (Davis 1995; Errington 1990; Sanday 2002). Gender complementarity is sourced from indigenous Austronesian and Malayo-Polynesian animism that acknowledged a series of binaries such as 'male/female'; 'outer/inner'; 'mountain/ocean', and so on (Becker 1993; Weiss 2006). Scholars have suggested that these binary oppositions were neither in competition with each other nor in a hierarchical relationship; they were "mutually activating, both necessary in order for prosperity and community harmony to be maintained" (Weiss 2006, p. 70).

In contemporary Muslim society, the emphasis on complementarity shapes gender relations through matrifocality and bilateral kinship systems in negotiation with Islam, patrilineality and patriarchal hierarchical practices (Davis 1995; Errington 1990; Sanday 2002; Smith 2008; Sullivan 1994; Wardatun 2019). Such gender complementarity may have its roots within its historical Malayo-Polynesian indigeneity, yet it must be read and understood ethnographically in its relationship to patriarchy and Islam in the contemporary context and against the 'sacred feminine's' shifting identities, roles and function throughout her mythical, religious and political history.

Later, I show how these feminine symbols have been incorporated into Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi order through gender complementarity that is framed by an Islamic gender hierarchy, and the ways in which maintaining Dewi Anjani as a revered saint with power over Lombok, serves to reproduce the legitimacy of Nahdlatul Wathan as Lombok's most powerful Islamic organization.

3.1. Sacred Spirit Queens in Islamic Kingdoms

I locate Dewi Anjani in the wider Indonesian context by placing her alongside other Spirit Queens and Goddesses who continue to play important roles in contemporary Islamic societies. In pre-Islamic Indonesia, the world of spirits was filled with nature and tutelary spirits, ancestors (some of whom were deified), together with indigenous gods and goddesses as well as those from the Hindu-Buddhist pantheon. Once Islam had been embraced, saints were added to this multi-ethnic pantheon (see Quinn 2012).

Indonesian mythology and folklore are replete with tales about princesses who become goddesses or powerful spirits and goddesses who form relationships with humans, especially kings and rulers. Wessing (1997) has listed examples from India, China and Mainland Southeast Asia that share similarities with Indonesia.

In contemporary Muslim Indonesia, we find the maintenance of female deities, more so than male ones, or powerful female ancestral spiritual beings, referred to by indigenous or Hinduized names bearing the royal title of 'Queen'. These Spirit Queens rule from the unseen worlds and augment political power in human kingdoms through partnership or marriage to a human king or ruler (Florida 1992; Jordaan 1997; Wessing 1997). Such Spirit Queens are usually understood to be 'whole' and are without a male spirit partner and can be either good or destructive in their use of power. They possess power over the fate of the kingdoms (people), including their human male partners/lovers.

We find such examples in the Sultanates of Yogyakarta and Surakarta with Nyai Loro Kidul's (Spirit Queen of the South Sea) sacred marriage to the current Sultan and his predecessors, the Spirit Queen Mother Bunda Kanduang as matriarch and her relationship with the patriarchal royal family in Minangkabau culture (Abdullah 1970; Sanday 2002) and the Bugis myth about a ruler whose wife will emerge from the waves of the ocean, as Wessing (1997) has noted. To this, I add Spirit Queen Dewi Anjani, the Selaparang Kingdom and Nahdlatul Wathan's male and female leaders.

Scholars tend to represent these Spirit Queens as Goddesses (Nyai Loro Kidul in particular, see Headley 2004; Jordaan 1997). Some myths about Nyai Loro Kidul and Dewi Anjani also place them as human women whose asceticism was so strong that they disappeared into spirit form. Their stories are multiple in number, each different, yet they share an original human form and possess eternal power with influence over human life and society.

Some of these Goddess–mortal king relationships have sexual elements, like in the case of Nyai Loro Kidul and the Sultans of Central Java, and others do not, such as Dewi Anjani and the kings of Selaparang. Nyai Loro Kidul is said to rule the south coast of Central Java, where her palace is located on the bottom of the ocean and houses communities of spirits and jinn. Jordaan (1997) argues that she was once an indigenous goddess who was Hinduized and subsequently was ascribed the role of '*sakti*' of the deified Javanese kings. The Queen's serial marriages to the lineage of Sultans is said to ensure the protection of the kingdom, and this practice has been maintained until the present time.

The sexual elements of these rulers' relationships with the Goddess in part derives from Javanese Hindu notions of cosmological complementarity and the need for cosmic balance between the realms, which is enacted through the royal couple in sexual union (Wessing 1997). The king's virility can only exist through copulation with his queen consort who is the '*sakti*' activating principle. The sexual act in turn brings fertility, prosperity, well-being, and social order to the kingdom (Wessing 1997).

Nahdlatul Wathan's orthopraxic engagement with Dewi Anjani does not possess sexual elements, most likely because the Muslim Dewi Anjani embodies the qualities

of 'Queen Mother' and 'Holy Saint.' As a Holy Muslim Saint who is said to reside in the highest Sufi stations, she is chaste, and like the first known Sufi female saint, Rabia Al-Adawiyah (d. 801), who in the cosmology of the Nahdlatul Wathan Sufi order, sits beside her, she at times embodies a 'virginal' purity. Yet, like the Queen of the South Sea, Dewi Anjani can also be destructive. Many Sasak understand that Dewi Anjani caused the devastating earthquakes in 2018 as a reminder to the Sasak people to stay true to Islamic moral values (Muslim 2019).

Here, I present new arguments that situate Dewi Anjani's relationship to Nahdlatul Wathan in terms of allegiance and loyalty to the organization's founding father, Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, and his daughter, Ummi Raehanun, both of whom are considered to be saints and royal descendants of the former Selaparang Kingdom in East Lombok, and show ethnographically for the first time, how this fits into the wider pattern of sacred relations between rulers and goddesses in Indonesia. While much can be said about the ambiguous and multiple relationships between Dewi Anjani and the Sasak people, my focus here concerns her 'mythical transformation' from an indigenous goddess or ancestral spirit into a Muslim saint who is revered not only in communities on Mount Rinjani, but also within Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi order.

3.2. Dewi Anjani in Myth and Life

Ahmad Fauzan (2013) explains that the Sasak origin myth, known as Doyan Neda, lays out Sasak *adat* (customary law and practices) and the rules of life across the spheres of politics, society, family, economy, the ecosystem, and religion. At the center of this system is Dewi Anjani, the Queen of Jinn on Mount Rinjani and Creatrix who transformed twenty royal jinn couples into the first forty Sasak humans on Lombok. For indigenous Sasak, Mount Rinjani was/is considered to be the center of the cosmos where the 'Creator' (read Dewi Anjani) and ancestors dwell. Indigenous Indonesian animism was grounded in an understanding that ancestors, gods and spirits dwelled on mountaintops in the Kahyangan realm. Dewi Anjani, from an animist perspective, then, can be described as a deified female spirit of the Sasak lineage. Clearly, this origin myth is at odds with the Abrahamic creation story about Adam and Eve and Islamic monotheism, and yet, the Sasak have reproduced, maintained and reconstructed versions of Doyan Neda in response to Islamization (and Hinduism).

Myths about Dewi Anjani, who is also known as Dewi Rinjani in some parts of Lombok, vary widely from place to place. In these myths, as indigenous Queen of Jinn, she lives and rules from the Kahyangan over the island's iconic and sacred active volcanic Mount Rinjani that stands 3726 feet high in the northern part of the island. Mount Rinjani is Indonesia's second largest active volcano. Muslim and Hindu pilgrims alike from Lombok and beyond trek Mount Rinjani in search of supernatural power, to appease and to honor Dewi Anjani. Before embarking on a trek, a ritual asking for permission from Dewi Anjani must be performed. She is both an indigenous native spirit and a pan-Goddess in the sense that she is shared across cultures, religion and geography. Her manifestations are found in Mother Nature such as waterfalls named after her crown and at sacred sites.

The broader historical identity known as 'Dewi Anjani', however, is a character from the Javanese wayang kulit shadow puppet play adapted from Hindu mythology and the Ramayana. In Hindu mythology and the Ramayana, she is mother of Hanoman the monkey. Anjani is represented as a mother and is often depicted holding her baby Hanoman in her arms. The Javanese possibly indigenized her Indian form by giving her the title 'dewi' (goddess), as she is a descendant of the God of Love (Batara Asmara). In the wayang kulit stories, Dewi Anjani dwells in the Kahyangan palace of the female jinn (*bidadari*) and is known for her powerful meditation (*tapas*).

Scholars (see Harnish 2003) assume the wayang entered Lombok sometime in the 1800s or 1900s and worked to Islamize the Sasak with a version of Sufi Islam, and like the Javanese, the Sasak incorporated indigenous ancestors and deities into the wayang pantheon. There are some similarities between the Javanese wayang Dewi Anjani and the

Sasak Dewi Anjani, but as to how and when the Sasak Dewi Anjani acquired this particular Hindu name is unclear, and if she was formerly understood to be 'officially Hindu' is ambiguous and divergent across communities. The Islamic version of the Sasak Dewi Anjani myth claims that she was never Hindu and came into existence after Islam entered Lombok, as I explore later.

There are four main myths (and many versions thereof) concerning Dewi Anjani/Rinjani and how she came to be Queen of Jinn in her celestial palace above Mount Rinjani. It appears that these myths originated with the origin myth, Doyan Neda, but have changed over time. Two of these imply that Dewi Anjani was originally a human before transforming into the Queen of Mount Rinjani. One of these two myths tells of how Dewi Rinjani was a human twin born to a King and his exiled Queen. Upon the twins' reunion with their father, Dewi Rinjani's twin brother became king and Dewi Rinjani was appointed the role of Queen of Jinn because her meditation on Mount Rinjani was so powerful. Some versions of this myth tell the same story but from within the Kahyangan. This myth taps into former Javanese and Balinese Hindu-Buddhist divine kingship practices of posthumous deification of queens and kings (Pringle 2004). Once Islam arrived and overpowered Majapahit, the practice of divine kingship came to an end and was replaced by the practice of sainthood and its veneration.

The other one of these two myths claims that Dewi Anjani was once a human who due to her father's refusal to allow her to marry the man of her choice, retreated to the top of Mount Rinjani in *tapas* (mediation) and eventually disappeared in *moksa* into the unseen realm where she became the Queen of Jinn. This version is very similar to one of the narratives about the Queen of the South Sea, Nyai Loro Kidul, in Central Java (Smith and Woodward 2016).

The main Doyan Neda myth, however, tells the story about Dewi Anjani as Creatrix and the first kings in Lombok. Nowadays Doyan Neda is generally perceived as a children's bedtime story, but beyond that, Doyan Neda is an origin story about how Queen Dewi Anjani created the first forty humans on Lombok from 20 royal jinn male–female couples in her Upper World realm on Mount Rinjani when the island was only covered in forest (Fauzan 2013). It narrates how these first humans became the kings of Selaparang, Pejanggik, Langko and Bayan, and tells of their plights, challenges, and so on, while illustrating Dewi Anjani's ongoing loyalty to the main character who eventually becomes king of Selaparang. Queen Dewi Anjani has a magical chicken male–female couple (or birds in some versions) that assists her in earthly matters, together with a male governor. Here, we see 'complementarity' at play in the feminine-dominant realms.

Dewi Anjani is positioned as Queen of Jinn in the Upper World and as 'mother' of the Sasak people who rules from the majestic Mount Rinjani. She is the one with power to bring the king back to life with her 'Water of Life' from the sacred lake on Mount Rinjani with the help of her loyal chickens/birds. In her 'Water' form, she is integral to rice farming rituals and life in general, situating her in a very powerful realm with human fate in her hands (Herman et al. 1990). There are many oral versions of Doyan Neda in Lombok. As with any myth, reconstruction and anachronistic aspects shape and re-shape how we interpret it. In some versions of Doyan Neda, the Islamization of the myth has reconstructed how we read the roles of gender and indigeneity, especially so by referencing Adam as Dewi Anjani's grandfather and his request for her to fill Lombok with humans. This, in effect, diminishes Dewi Anjani's authority as 'Creatrix'.

Being a myth, Doyan Neda's origins are unclear. However, the myth is not to be overlooked in an analysis of Sufism in Nahdlatul Wathan for its important references to Dewi Anjani and the Selaparang kingdom. Beyond this, the myth parallels other myths about Spirit Queens and rulers, as well as that of indigenous Indonesian creation myths that begin with a figure from the Upper World who creates the first humans of a particular tribe or ethnic group.[8] Austronesian creation myths typically explain the creation story of a particular people (tribe) or island rather than the creation of the Earth or the Universe (Green 2006). Creation or origin myths are considered to be sacred and true by those

who belong to them, as was the case of Doyan Neda amongst the Sasak in former times (Herman et al. 1990).

These contemporary versions of Doyan Neda appear to be a blend of myths and legends from differing cultural and historical eras (Malayo-Polynesian/Austronesian, Javanese Hindu and Javanese Islamic and Makassarese Islamic) at the same time in one story with one time-line and thus demonstrate the changing nature and adaptability of myth to integrate competing and contradictory religious beliefs and political contexts. Given that the Sasak have maintained this myth/s suggests that they are able to reconcile these contradictory elements and fuse them into Sasak prescriptions for living in a plural society framed by the Muslim ethnoscapes with which they interact.

3.3. Saint Dewi Anjani as Qomariah in Nahdlatul Wathan

In summary, field data reveal two major contradictory versions of the Dewi Anjani myths. First, Doyan Neda positions Dewi Anjani as Creatrix of the Sasak people and her unseen kingdom above Mount Rinjani as home of the original Sasak ancestral lineage. Second, the Islamic version of Dewi Anjani positions her as a former human who transformed into a holy saint in the realms above Mount Rinjani. As myths are living texts in motion and adapt to new environments on their travels (Van 1993), my analysis thus speaks to these two major myths and the variants within them. Either way, the reading in the contemporary context in Lombok is the same: Dewi Anjani is Queen of Jinn, Muslim saint, holy woman, and mother, all at once.

In her palace above Mount Rinjani, the Queen of Jinn in her indigenous ancestral form, at some point assumed a Hindu name (Dewi Anjani) and an Islamic Sufi identity as a Saint of Allah. I suggest that these three primary identities continue to co-exist in this Spirit Queen, as is demonstrated through the origin myth Doyan Neda and the Islamic myth supported by Nahdlatul Wathan that transforms her from a Goddess into a saint. The variety of Sasak Sufism prevalent in Nahdlatul Wathan relates a compelling version of the Dewi Anjani myths because it maintains her powerful ancestral legacy together with Mount Rinjani as integral to Sufi life-worlds. She has experienced a transformation—a Sufi one—that relocates her from the realm of the deities and ancestors into that of a Sufi 'station,' a holy mosque, where she has become a saint.

The Islamic myths identify her as a human woman, Qomariah, who lived in the 1500s and later transformed into a spirit in the world of jinn where she became a holy saint. A generally accepted version of the Islamic version of the Selaparang kingdom and Dewi Anjani myth is as follows. One of the first Sufi Muslim preachers in Lombok, claimed to be Gaos Abdul Razak from Saudi Arabia, is said to have travelled across Lombok leaving a series of 'maqam' (a place where a saint rested or performed dhikr). One of these 'maqam' sites is at the Selaparang graveyard which is said to be the location of former kings' graves. Gaos Abdul Razak is said to have married a local woman and had two children: a son called Zulkarnain who went on to become Sultan Rinjani, and a daughter, Dewi Anjani, who became Queen of Jinn on Mount Rinjani.

This understanding of the origins of Saint Dewi Anjani is purely Islamic without a Hindu or pre-Hindu history, and nor does it not problematize her Hindu name. The Kahyangan above Mount Rinjani, which is the center of the cosmos, in the Islamic story transforms into a holy mosque where saints gather in the Sufi station of Divine Truth known in Indonesian as 'hakekat' (haqiqah, Ar.). The holy mosque is said to be located in the station in which Saint Dewi Anjani dwells and from where she rules Lombok as Queen of Jinn.

Dewi Anjani has thus undergone several transformations throughout religious history. If we consider the Islamic version to be a reconstruction of Doyan Neda, then we cannot rule out the possibility that Dewi Anjani is an historical Muslim woman who was ascribed 'sainthood' either during her life or posthumously as a way to reproduce royal dynastic power. It is this point particularly that connects Dewi Anjani most strongly in the person of Ummi Raehanun and which speaks directly to the centrality of the indigenous feminine. In

doing so, the indigenous feminine gives us mystical insight that moves beyond dominant readings of Sufism and Islam that generally reject anything indigenous and thus sheds a decolonial angle. I would argue that Dewi Anjani as the mythical ancestral 'Creatrix' is so embedded in Sasak indigeneity that she cannot be released and therefore has been actively integrated into Islam and inscribed into the manifest world through Ummi Raehanun's female body as a container for not only sainthood, but leadership and lineage-derived power. I look at this more deeply shortly, in the context of Dewi Anjani's ascribed position as a female Qutb.

For Nahdlatul Wathan, the historical Selaparang kingdom and Dewi Anjani have retained a central role in Islamization in Lombok and play a further role in legitimizing the powerful position of the Nahdlatul Wathan lineage in the Selaparang kingdom. In her role as Muslim Queen of Jinn she has the task of Islamizing indigenous spirits and ancestors and obtaining their loyalty to Nahdlatul Wathan. Therefore, there is a politicization of the '*ghaib*' at play in the maintenance of Dewi Anjani's Muslimness and the sacredness of the Selaparang kingdom. Clearly, for Sufis who engage their Sasak ancestral lineage in the mystical realms, Saint Dewi Anjani possesses a superior rank among Allah's saints.

Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid's daughter, Ummi Raehanun, who in the aftermath of the saint's death in 1997 assumed the leadership of Nahdlatul Wathan and its Sufi order (from 1998 to 2019), is also understood to be a saint with a special inherited relationship with Dewi Anjani and therefore reproduces the 'royal' sacred lineage in a Sufi container framed by Selaparang's connection to Mount Rinjani. Here, I develop my earlier work on this theme (see Smith 2012; Smith and Hamdi 2014) to suggest that Ummi Raehanun may very well be amongst a minority of female Sufi leaders and saints in Indonesia who is perceived to have the backing of a Spirit Queen with whom she shares an ancestral lineage. Some Sufi teachers claim that Ummi Raehanun 'embodies' Dewi Anjani, but I note that this view is controversial and somewhat marginalized because it touches on Hindu notions of 'deification' and 'reincarnation,' which are non-normative and transgressive in orthodox Islam.

4. Gender, Female Saints and Indigeneity in Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi Order

The orthopraxic recognition of the sacred feminine does not mean that Sufi women in Lombok experience gender in a more equal, equitable or 'sacred' manner than elsewhere. In fact, gender issues in Lombok are sites of contestation especially in the contexts of marriage (underage, serial, divorce and polygamy), low literacy rates for girls, domestic violence, and so on (see Bennett 2005; Platt 2017; Smith 2014a). The ethnographic examples I explore provide insights into a Sufi cultural orthopraxis that engages the sacred feminine, and yet, do not necessarily suggest that there is anything sacred about the feminine in ordinary human women indicative of a Ghazalian gender order. This last point differs from Sufi thought such as that from Ibn Al-Arabi, who presents the possibility of witnessing the divine feminine in women, which we do see aspects of in Ummi Raehanun's 'royalty,' 'deification' and sainthood.

Below, my field data show how Sufis are able to strategically shift between hegemonic Islamic and non-hegemonic ideas about gender in indigenous ways of knowing located within their ancestral lineage linked to Dewi Anjani. Dewi Anjani's mythology presents a doorway into indigenous feminine forms of power and opens a point of entry for a decolonial analysis of the ways in which Sufism is practiced in relation to ancient feminine cosmic figures and how they are maintained through understandings about gender and the heterogeneous aspects of orthodoxy.

4.1. Nahdlatul Wathan

Nahdlatul Wathan is the largest local Islamic organization in Lombok and wields considerable political and social power across the island. Sufi saint and scholar Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, popularly known by his beloved students as Maulana Syeikh, founded the organization in 1953. Upon his death in 1997, the younger of his

two daughters—Ummi Raehanun—replaced him as leader of the organization and Sufi order until 2019, when her son, Tuan Guru Hajji Muhammad Zainuddin Atsani, succeeded her. The rise of Ummi Raehanun to the leadership set off violent conflicts in Nahdlatul Wathan communities in East Lombok from 1998 to 2002 due to Islamic debates about female leadership (see Hamdi 2019; Hamdi and Smith 2012; Smith and Hamdi 2014; Smith 2012). Conflict led to a dual leadership of the organization consisting of Ummi Raehanun in Anjani and her nephew, 'Tuan Guru Bajang' Muhammad Zainul Majdi, in Pancor. In March 2021, the organization legally resolved the conflict but a new organization (called NWDI) was created in the process under the leadership of Tuan Guru Bajang in Pancor.

Tuan Guru Hajji Zainuddin Abdul Madjid (from now on: Maulana Syeikh) was born in East Lombok in 1898 (d. 1997). Following in the footsteps of other young Indonesian Muslim men in the early 1900s, he embarked on lengthy study in Mecca where he acquired distinguished academic standing. When he returned to Lombok, he started proselytizing in communities. In the early days, he was feared and rejected for his reformist teachings. Eventually, the community came to accept him and he established a boys' madrasah in 1937 and one for girls' in 1943. The Syeikh's spiritual charisma strengthened over time and he eventually came to be known as a Ulama and Waliyullah, a Saint of Allah. He authored many books, was a master healer, and could accurately predict the future.

The Syeikh married a total of seven women throughout his life. He had only two daughters, from different wives, and no sons. Before he died, his loyal disciples claimed that he issued a fatwa stating that his youngest daughter, Ummi Raehanun, was to succeed the leadership of Nahdlatul Wathan upon his passing. This fatwa was at the center of the conflict that ensued in the aftermath of the Syeikh's passing in 1997 and continues to haunt the Nahdlatul Wathan organization until the present day.

Maulana Syeikh is said to be a royal descendant of the Selaparang kingdom in East Lombok and some of his beloved students even suggest that he is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Because the history of Lombok is unclear due to a lack of documentation, we know little about the Selaparang kingdom. We know that the Majapahit kingdom entered and heavily influenced the Selaparang kingdom in the 14th century and that the Regent Gajah Mada visited in 1334 (Clegg 2004).[9] It has been suggested that the Javanese Majapahit kingdom heavily influenced Sasak culture during this time (Pelras 1996). Selaparang converted to Islam in the 1500s and the Islamic kingdom of Makassar had strong relations with Selaparang from 1638 to 1678, at which point it was forced out when the Balinese were colonizing Lombok (Andaya 1981).

Maulana Syeikh's glorified status as a royal descendant of Selaparang during its Makassar era and as a Saint of Allah is reproduced generationally and maintained by a fatwa that each leader of Nahdlatul Wathan must be a saint. This fatwa came after Ummi Raehanun had assumed the position of leader. Prior to assuming the leadership of the organization and its Sufi order, Ummi Raehanun was a housewife and mother without a special status, other than being the daughter of a very famous Sufi saint. Her life changed dramatically with the passing of her father and then stepping into his former role as leader. At that time, she did not know of her own future sainthood or of the deep ways in which Dewi Anjani would feature in her inherited position as Murshida of her late father's Sufi order. It was from her father, Maulana Syeikh, whom she not only inherited leadership, but also Dewi Anjani's loyalty, as a leader of Nahdlatul Wathan. Again, the 'indigenous feminine' analytic gives us entry into the mystical realm/s of feminine authority that co-exist/s with gendered Islamic hierarchy manifested through Muslim ethnoscapes in the world of form.

The Sasak Sufism I interpret here is the Sufism that Maulana Syeikh taught and is currently reproduced in Ummi Raehanun's communities amongst advanced Sufi teachers called *ahli wirid* (an expert in the practice of '*wirid*' or 'dhikr'; one who is expert in traversing the *ghaib*; one who is able to call on and commune with the saints). By contrast, the original Nahdlatul Wathan community in Pancor, under the leadership of Ummi Raehanun's nephew, Tuan Guru Bajang, represents a more 'orthodox' and 'reformist' Islam

(Smith and Hamdi 2014). From 2008 to the present, I have at different times conducted long-term anthropological fieldwork in both Ummi Raehanun's communities and those loyal to Tuan Guru Bajang. My data and interpretations therefore are formed through a range of informants' understandings including from Ummi Raehanun, Muslim leaders, Sufi teachers, male and female Sufi practitioners, and women mystics who specialize in *wirid*.

4.2. A History of Female Leadership, a Murshida, and a Female Saint

Like in other Islamic cultures, the patriarchal aspects of Sasak culture place men's authority over women in an Islamic gender hierarchy that affords men the role of leader. In normative Sufi practice, this is also the case, whereby there is a doxic orthodoxy that states women cannot become authorized leaders of Sufi orders. Despite this, history and ethnography alike reveal that Sufi women across the Muslim world have reached high stations and continue to do so as Sufi figures and leaders in their communities (Ali Khan 2018; Hill 2018; Neubauer 2016; Pemberton 2004; Schimmel 2003).

The Indonesian national body that oversees the authenticity of Sufi orders has a fatwa stating that women are banned from head leadership positions in mixed-gender Sufi orders, including the position of Murshid(a) (except for cases where a woman leads or guides only women). Scholars have shown, however, that Indonesian women can and do rise to positions of informal and formal authority in Sufi orders (Husin 2014; Muzayyin 2020; Smith and Woodward 2014; Smith 2012, 2014b; Srimulyani 2012; Widiyanto 2014), particularly through kinship systems that recognize the bilateral descent of spiritual power (Smith 2012, 2014b).

Many men and women loyal to Ummi Raehanun as the former leader of Nahdlatul Wathan and its tariqa, and in her perceived sainthood, continue to associate her with the role of a Murshida (see Muzayyin 2020). In the ways royalty, status and power descend within family lineages in a kingdom, the notion of sainthood is also understood to descend generationally and bilaterally in Nahdlatul Wathan. Maulana Syeikh, together with Ummi Raehanun, and her son, Tuan Guru Muhammad Zainuddin Atsani are considered to be saints of Allah and therefore the true leaders of the organization by sacred decree. This 'sacred decree' of sainthood is embedded in kinship with Saint Dewi Anjani and the station of 'hakekat' above Mount Rinjani.

It is by no coincidence for Nahdlatul Wathan supporters of Ummi Raehanun that the conflicts from 1997 to 2002 forced Ummi Raehanun and her community out of the Nahdlatul Wathan heart of the town of Pancor and into the village of Anjani where they purchased land and built a new Islamic educational complex (a *pesantren*). Informants explained that this educational complex in Anjani is located within one of the 'mystical doors' that leads to Dewi Anjani's palace above Mount Rinjani (Smith and Hamdi 2014). Ummi Raehanun is thought to 'embody' or at least 'represent' Dewi Anjani and there are some Sufi teachers who describe this phenomenon in language that suggests Raehanun is Dewi Anjani and that Dewi Anjani is Maulana Syeikh's daughter. By inscribing Ummi Raehanun with 'Dewi Anjani,' Sufi leaders reinforce Nahdlatul Wathan's hegemony and a direct claim to Saint Dewi Anjani's power over Lombok. It was thus at this point with the establishment of a new *pesantren* complex in the village of Anjani, that the discourse about the 'embodiment' of Dewi Anjani in Ummi Raehanun, which some also read as 'reincarnation,' started to manifest outwardly in a public way.

According to *ahli wirid*, Ummi Raehanun ascended to sainthood in 2010. Through his ongoing role in the *ghaib*, Maulana Syeikh informed his disciples that his daughter had ascended to sainthood and that she should be honored accordingly. In her role as head of the Sufi order, Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, this living female saint, also perceived to be a Murshida, acted as a spiritual head, rather than a 'traditional' Murshid or a Syeikh, by overseeing the network of male *ahli wirid* located across Lombok and other islands in Indonesia. In this role, she initiated new members (male and female) into the Sufi order and offered guidance. Her son is the current head Murshid and leader.

The sacred connection Ummi Raehanun is understood to share with Dewi Anjani underscores my earlier argument about complementarity and hierarchy co-existing in a cosmic interaction that shifts between shari'ah's patriarchy and indigenous notions of feminine power in the unseen realms. The 'indigenous feminine' found in Ummi Raehanun bridges complementarity and patriarchy in a way that works to legitimize her spiritual authority. Maulana Syeikh did not problematize the issue of female leadership in Islam. Rather, we can see elements of gender complementarity and the 'sacred couple' at play in Nahdlatul Wathan. Maulana Syeikh's Sufism incorporated the 'indigenous feminine' into a mystical praxis through a Sasak understanding of gender complementarity in Islam.

4.3. Gender Complementarity and the 'Couple' Theme in Nahdlatul Wathan

Reflective of Austronesian complementarity between male and female, Dewi Anjani's pairing of forty royal jinn, together with her male–female chicken couple, we also find a maintenance of gender complementarity in the form of the Sasak Muslim couple in Nahdlatul Wathan praxis. There is, however, an Islamic gender hierarchy at play within this complementarity. Within this hierarchy, esteemed women may assume sainthood (as discussed earlier) and deceased female Sufi saints and Qur'anic figures are revered, especially the deceased female saint Rabia Al-Adawiyah, to whom I turn shortly.

The 'couple' theme is core to Nahdlatul Wathan's education system. Maulana Syeikh expressed this in Sasak language as *Dwi Tunggal Punggal Satu*: Two Together in Unity Forever As One. This notion of the feminine and masculine in unity remains the motto of the first twin madrasah the Syeikh built (one for boys in 1937 and one for girls in 1943 which was the first Islamic girls' school in East Lombok). Maulana Syeikh's discourse regarding gender was revolutionary at the time he established the first Islamic girls' school in East Lombok. He also appointed a woman as a village head and taught his two daughters how to deliver public speeches in their childhood. Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi order, Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, also has this couple theme with separate orders for men and women reflective of the twin madrasah.

4.4. Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan and Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Banat

Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi order is known as Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan. Maulana Syeikh created this tariqa in 1964 after receiving divine instruction via the saint and prophet Khidir when he was on pilgrimage at Prophet Muhammad's grave (Hadi 2010). Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan is referred to as the last tariqa in the world (*tarekat akhir zaman*) due to its claims to fit better with modern lifestyles in contrast to the heavy prayer and recitation practices of the traditional Sufi orders (Baharuddin and Rasmianto 2004; Hadi 2010). In particular, it has a flexible recruitment procedure and simple chanting practices that build on and combine teachings of preceding Sufi orders (Hadi 2010). The name of the tariqa is taken from the central text in the order, the *Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan*, a small book of prayers that Maulana Syeikh compiled from the Qur'an and Hadith, and the sayings and practices of 70 great Sufi masters (Hadi 2010; Hamdi 2019). There is a preference for Al-Ghazali's Sufi teachings (Habib 2010).

Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan differs from traditional Sufi orders in many ways (see Habib 2010). First, the name of the order is not that of a male Murshid/Syeikh like those of the traditional orders; under certain circumstances, women are permitted to lead the order and facilitate the sacred act of swearing in new members with permission from the head Murshid (as did Ummi Raehanun for 21 years); the core book of prayers used in the order is gendered, in that there are two books within one (the first section of the book is for men and represents the boys' madrasah, and the second section is for women and represents the girls' madrasah. The contents of the actual *Hizib* are the same, but men are not allowed to read the prayer at the beginning of the women's section because it addresses the girls' madrasah specifically. The men's *Hizib* may be read by anybody, including women); the order is communal in that it is fully socialized into village life in Nahdlatul Wathan schools, madrasahs and *pesantren* and associated women's wings of the organization; and it

functions within strict Islamic shari'ah as well as having a wider cultural relevance specific to Lombok. The tariqa, then, can be described as a form of communal Sufism situated in a Sasak cultural context, which is the focus of this article.

Sufi masters and well-travelled Sufis in Nahdlatul Wathan are usually referred to as *ahli wirid*. Maulana Syeikh authorized a small number of *ahli wirid* without a hierarchy among them and it was/is their duty to develop the tariqa in their respective villages and hometowns (Hamdi and Smith 2012). Ummi Raehanun as a Saint of Allah is also considered to be an *ahli wirid* who has supreme knowledge. There are a number of women in Ummi Raehanun's community with *ahli wirid* status who work within the confines of their husbands' direction (see Smith 2014b). A woman who is skilled in *wirid* may serve the community by offering healing or retrieving information from saints in the *ghaib*.

Male *ahli wirid* may be placed in the category of Tuan Guru. A Tuan Guru is a title bestowed upon a learned Muslim male preacher and/or scholar who either inherits or acquires his title after completing lengthy study of Islam, usually at a university in Egypt or Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, and has made the hajj pilgrimage (Fahrurrozi 2018). The core text of the order, the *Hizib*, is recited communally at the homes of Tuan Guru, in the pesantren, and at religious sermons on special occasions and fixed nights of the week. There is an understanding that by reciting *Hizib*, devotees will enter heaven and meet with Maulana Syeikh, and this destination is thus prioritized among Nahdlatul Wathan practitioners.

Ahli wirid who worked closely with Maulana Syeikh while he was alive were those who the saint selected personally for the transmission of advanced Sufi techniques such as breathing, high-level mystical experiential training and special *wirid*. It is these *ahli wirid* and their students who continue to work with Maulana Syeikh in the *ghaib*. In Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, there is an understanding that Maulana Syeikh is the head of all Sufi saints in the *ghaib* in his position as a Qutb.

In Sufism, a Qutb is a Sufi Syeikh who has integrated the qualities of a perfected human and who holds the highest rank among Allah's saints. Maulana Syeikh as a Qutb also bears the title of Sultan of the Saints. For some Sufi teachers in Lombok, Saint Dewi Anjani is also considered to be a Qutb. Men are generally ascribed the position of Qutb, and women are not. Because of Saint Dewi Anjani's greatness and high rank, reflective of her ancient Creatrix position in the ancestral realm, she, too has kept her original authority over Lombok in her role as Qutb in the realm of Muslim jinn. Discourse on Dewi Anjani's position as Qutb, however, does not merge with discourse on her 'embodiment' in Ummi Raehanun (in the Nahdlatul Wathan public, at least). Instead, the ways in which *ahli wirid* describe Ummi Raehanun as an embodiment of Dewi Anjani taps into a kind of 'deification' process that is tied in with notions of royalty and sainthood and former Hindu practices of deifying kings and queens, as I mentioned earlier, and points to the notion of 'reincarnation.' These transgressive notions place Ummi Raehanun in a 'dangerous' position because they interrupt orthodox Islam in their 'power' sourced from Dewi Anjani, as I touch on again shortly.

Ummi Raehanun's spiritual authority is in part dependent on Dewi Anjani's loyalty, and partly on her father's name and sainthood from whom she derived her own sainthood. This sacred partnership, while patterning those of others in the Muslim ethnoscapes of the Indonesian archipelago, points to a different kind of indigenous feminine power, particularly because of its Islamic emphasis on sainthood and the containment of sexuality. These qualities are what connect Dewi Anjani to Rabia Al-Adawiyah, and thus these two feminine figures are the most important in Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi cosmology. This differs quite markedly from other examples, such as Nyai Loro Kidul Queen of the South Sea in Central Java, whose serial sexual relationships with the Sultans of Central Java are a defining feature in the augmentation of male leaders' power. While Saint Dewi Anjani does not exhibit her sexuality in relationships with humans, her power which women have access to through Maulana Syeikh's *wirid*, does at certain times interact with forms of destructive power associated with the womb and female sexuality and reveals

characteristics of the Hindu Goddess Durga, as I explore below in relation to the role of the Selaparang kings' graveyard in Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufism more generally.

4.5. Sasak Sufism at the Selaparang Graveyard: Female Saints and Womb Power

I have demonstrated throughout this article that Sufi practitioners agentively interact with their cultural heritage in specific ways. I have argued that Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufi order is embedded in Sasak indigeneity and ancestry, particularly that of the former Selaparang kingdom and Saint Dewi Anjani. Despite being known as a reformist Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Wathan's reformism is not completely incompatible with Sasakness and is representative of the plurality of Muslim ethnoscapes that I have noted. I have argued that the organization reproduces its legitimacy by claiming its lineage to Dewi Anjani through Ummi Raehanun and thus the sacred mosque above Mount Rinjani.

The role of the Selaparang kings' graveyard and the unseen Selaparang kingdom is important for Sufis who wish to gain wisdom and knowledge from Allah's saints in the *ghaib*. The unseen realms at Selaparang thus play an integral role in the maintenance of Sasak Sufism. Maulana Syeikh's Sufism concerned a council of saints (often also referred to as a 'government') consisting of the former Selaparang kings, and other Muslim figures in the *ghaib* who were considered to be loyal to the Nahdlatul Wathan mission and feature in Maulana Syeikh's Wasiat (a book of poetry and predictions he authored in 1981). These saints include the main figures Dewi Anjani, Gaos Abdul Razaq, Rabia Al-Adawiyah, and Abdul Qadir Jaelani amongst other deceased Sufi saints and masters from around the world. Maulana Syeikh is considered to be the Qutb of this council or government and continues to guide Nahdlatul Wathan in earthly matters including politics and Ummi Raehanun's role as Murshida.

Because there is a belief that Gaos Abdul Razak left behind a 'maqam' at Selaparang, Sufis like to practice *wirid* at this particular site that leads them to the holy mosque and station of 'hakekat' above Mount Rinjani. In this celestial mosque, Sufis believe that Allah's saints gather and can be contacted by advanced Sufis who know the secrets embedded in the *wirid*. Upon graduating from study in Nahdlatul Wathan education institutions, students are required to make a pilgrimage to the sacred graves of the Selaparang kings and saints around Lombok as a gesture of ongoing loyalty to the sacred lineage.

Sufism in Nahdlatul Wathan, therefore, is anchored by Sasak indigeneity, which I have argued has a strong indigenous feminine dimension that complements and co-exists with Islamic gender hierarchy. Nahdlatul Wathan Sufis visit the Selaparang graveyard to commune with deceased Sufi saints for different reasons. Female mystics also use specific *wirid* or dhikr to empower themselves through the assistance of the saints. Some of these female mystics acquire identities as *ahli wirid* because of their skill in communicating with saints, including Dewi Anjani and Islam's revered deceased female saint, Rabia Al-Adawiyah. Together with Dewi Anjani, Rabia Al-Adawiyah is believed to sit on the council of saints in the holy mosque on Mount Rinjani. My male and female informants explained that Dewi Anjani and Rabia Al-Adawiyah, like their male saint counterparts, are understood to assist Sufis in deepening their *wirid* practice in order to traverse the Sufi stations.

In Nahdlatul Wathan, Rabia Al-Adawiyah plays an important role alongside other deceased Sufi saints in a range of earthly matters, including healing and acquiring wealth.[10] A leading Sufi teacher explained, "Rabia does not need to enter heaven because she is helping the Nahdlatul Wathan community". This particular teacher suffered from illness as a child and he claims that the central tariqa figures Syeikh Abdul Qadir Jaelani, Rabia Al-Adawiyah and other deceased saints taught him how to heal himself with a special *wirid*. The *wirid* works specifically to 'heal hearts.' After receiving a deep healing from these Sufi saints in the spiritual realms he has strengthened his ability to heal others through intercession with these beings. Women mystics, in particular, turn to this Sufi healer to seek out Rabia for healing relationships or a broken heart.

Rabia Al-Adawiyah occupies a special place in Nahdlatul Wathan for her desexualized, virginal power, much like Dewi Anjani's 'wholeness' and lack of need for a male partner. Other prominent figures such as Mary and Fatima are for the most part absent in Nahdlatul Wathan's Sufism, possibly because of their respective dominant associations with Christianity and the Shia, which are contested topics in public Islamic discourses in Lombok and Indonesia. I must note, however, that in cultural practice across Indonesia more broadly, Mary is invoked during the 7th month of pregnancy ritual known in Java as *Mitoni* or *Tingkeban*, and in Lombok as *Bretes* (among other names).

There is further a local understanding that special kinds of *wirid* performed at the Selaparang graveyard have the potential to produce forms of power in women that relate to understandings about *sakti* (read as 'spiritual power' in the Indonesian Muslim context) located in a woman's womb. This kind of 'womb' power has the potential for activation in women during times of conflict (see Smith 2012) or when a woman feels she has been wronged. In Lombok, the power associated with the female body can be located in female reproductive power derived from the Islamic and Sasak understanding that mothers deserve the utmost respect because they possess the power to give birth. The womb is what designates this special status to women.[11]

Despite cosmological associations of the womb with Mary in Sufism and Ibn Al-Arabi's metaphysics of the womb, for example, the reference to *sakti* and women's use of it are more reflective of Lombok's Javanese Hindu past, particularly the Goddess Durga and her destructive powers. The 'flaming womb' or 'glowing genitals' is a theme found in chronicles from Java in relation to historical Hindu female figures considered to embody 'magical' power (Andaya-Watson 2006; Smith and Woodward 2016; Weiss 2006). References to power embedded in the womb are therefore both Hindu and Islamic.

Ummi Raehanun in her saintly 'embodiment' of the powerful Dewi Anjani, dangerously intersects with understandings about indigenous, Islamic and former Hindu notions of feminine power that concern 'womb' interactions with *wirid* and Dewi Anjani at the Selaparang graveyard. My earlier ethnographic work on Sasak female spiritual warriors (known as *pepadu nina*) during the Nahdlatul Wathan conflicts from 1997 to 2002 was rooted in the local understanding that women mystics are more *sakti* (spiritually powerful) than men because of the power in their wombs. Such women are also referred to as *nina sakti* (a spiritually powerful or magical woman) because of their perceived strong and skillful *wirid* practice at the Selaparang graveyard. During the conflicts, Ummi Raehanun employed these women to guard her from attacks associated with the dangerous realm of 'black magic' (Smith 2012). Her glorified rank placed/s her in danger from those who oppose her power, such as her estranged family who have since established a new organization to counter her authority. Here, we see the notion of 'royal power' come through Ummi Raehanun in 'her kingdom's' (Selaparang) graveyard and its doorways for intercession with Dewi Anjani. Her 'royalty' demanded protection during that turbulent and violent time in the aftermath of her rising to the position of leader, and so she relied on for protection, and continues to rely on, forms of feminine power from the 'unseen' realms (the *ghaib*) exercised through Maulana Syeikh's *wirid* at the Selaparang kings' graveyard.

Further to these magical attributes associated with the womb and indigenous forms of feminine power, there is a wider cultural practice that involves a woman exposing her vulva or breasts to ward off a thief face-to-face, or, to prevent him (thieves are usually male) entering her home, she may hang underwear in her front windows if sleeping alone at night. These practices are rooted in an understanding that if a woman exposes her underwear, vulva or bare breasts to a thief, his magic will be suspended causing him to flee (there are cultures of thieving in Lombok associated with the use of magic, see Telle 2002). It is also the case that in situations where a woman feels she has been wronged and cannot contain her anger, she may choose to display her frustration in public by parading the village streets for a brief moment during day time while exposing her underwear or breasts.

These momentary transgressions of normative Islamic gender expectations that regulate the female body have a 'danger' element that inscribes the body with ambiguity

between reproductive power, sexuality, and a dangerous possession of 'spiritual power' from Dewi Anjani accessed through the *wirid*. In Sufi metaphysics, we can identify Rabia Al-Adawiyah with a gender transgression rooted in her asceticism and apparent celibacy, yet the kind of subversion to which I refer here, can be located within the sexual power in a flaming womb such as those of Hindu figures or goddesses.

Such gender imagery takes us back to the formerly 'sacred' status of mothers in Sasak culture due to their power to birth humans (Saharudin 2019) as well as the destructive powers of Dewi Anjani and the ancestors, and again, links in with former Javanese Hindu culture in Lombok through associations with Goddess Durga. Female mystics who embody the 'heat' of the *wirid*'s power are able to symbolically embrace the powers of Dewi Anjani for either good or bad purposes. In these moments, they shift out of the formal shari'ah and Al-Ghazalian gender constructs that frame their orthodox Sufism in the mosques and study groups, and into their indigeneity in the unseen realms of praxis where feminine power can be accessed mystically without constraint. The kind of Sufism they bring to the field of indigeneity cannot be separated from the ancestors who dwell above Mount Rinjani and shows us that Dewi Anjani's power is also available to women mystics more broadly, especially those loyal to Ummi Raehanun and Maulana Syeikh.

5. Conclusions: A Variety of Sufi Feminism

Through carving a feminist notion of what I call an 'indigenous feminine', I have engaged a decolonial ethnographic reading of Sufism and the sacred (divine) feminine. I have done so by suggesting that indigeneity absorbs Sufism in a gendered praxis in ways that are both hierarchical and complementary. My proposed notion of Muslim ethnoscapes holds space for the co-relating of gendered Islamic hierarchy and the gender complementarity found in indigeneity, and the mystical possibilities for the indigenous feminine's prominent position in a Sasak Sufi cosmology. In Nahdlatul Wathan, Sufis are able to fuse male-centric shari'ah with sacred feminine and indigenous elements into an understanding that does not compromise the patriarchy of their order or dominant Islamic gender constructs.

I have shown how 'She', in her indigenous form as Spirit Queen Dewi Anjani—ancestral Creatrix, goddess, saint and Qutb—has been kept alive throughout the Islamization process, especially through her kinship with the Sufi saints and leaders Maulana Syeikh and his daughter Ummi Raehanun, and has retained a centrality in a mystical practice with deep, ancient roots in mythology, similar to other dynastic relationships between female deities and (male) royal leaders in Indonesia. The Sasak myth, Doyan Neda, is a rare example of a female-centered origin myth in Indonesia that demonstrates feminine agentive power through the role of Creatrix. By drawing on the gendered symbolic meanings in a number of (reconstructed) myths about Dewi Anjani, I have explored through a feminist ethnographic journey, the sacred realms of her indigeneity and sainthood in the Nahdlatul Wathan Sufi order, Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan.

Co-situated in a complementarity and hierarchy in shifting contexts in between the formal shari'ah, the ancestral spirit realm and the holy mosque above Mount Rinjani, in their indigenous and Muslim forms as the saints Dewi Anjani and revered Murshida Ummi Raehanun, the 'sacred feminine' reproduces, is ascribed and inscribes power across mystical, political and indigenous realms. My arguments indicate that the perceived power associated with the leadership and sainthood ascribed to Ummi Raehanun and the reconstruction of the idea of Dewi Anjani inscribed on her human person, support and legitimize Nahdlatul Wathan's claims to political dominance as Lombok's largest most influential Islamic organization.

My arguments about Dewi Anjani as Queen of Jinn and Saint of Allah and her relationship with Nahdlatul Wathan further suggest that an anthropology of female deities in contemporary Sufi patriarchal complexes sheds light on ideas about the sacred feminine in female-oriented aspects of life. I posit that feminist anthropological work on the maintenance of female deities and saints thus offers feminists of Sufism innovative ways

to theorize the sacred feminine in Islam from the fields of indigeneity and praxis rather than solely from texts or dominant Sufi ways of knowing derived from male mystical experience. My arguments therefore present decolonial ways to read gender and power in a Sufi context through direct mystical immersion firmly located within indigenous ways of knowing that are etic to the textual authorities of Islamic and Sufi scholarship.

The Islamic construction of hierarchy shifts gender into a patriarchal container that is shaped by the laws laid out in religious texts, but the Sufi focus on fields (unseen realms/*ghaib*) outside of the texts and their gender hierarchies—in the stations within the *ghaib*—however, opens up a realm of possibility for women and men that challenges male claims to authority by transcending it and retrieving knowledge from saints in high Sufi realms it cannot control. I demonstrated this point further through those moments where female mystics had access to 'indigenous feminine power' outside normative gender constructs in the magical fields of the *wirid* and at the intersecting sites of sexuality, womb power and Dewi Anjani. The orthopraxic interactions with the sacred indigenous feminine discussed in this article are doxic in the sense that they are practiced and experienced experientially through dhikr or *wirid*, without necessarily being studied or taught. It is within this mystical container and the Muslim ethnoscapes that hold it, that I suggest a variety of Sufi feminism can be formulated ethnographically through the fields of indigeneity, the feminine and the *ghaib*, primarily because those realms cannot be easily contained, controlled or dismissed emically, and it is for those reasons that they continue to be reproduced, re-experienced and re-lived by those who know how to skillfully immerse in such realms.

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Notes

1 The tarekat consists of twin male–female sections. Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan is for men and the general population and Hizib Nahdlatul Banat is specifically for women. There is no difference in teachings or practices between the two tarekat other than the opening prayers, which refer to male and female schools, respectively, but only women are allowed to read the prayer intended for the girls' school. I discuss this further later in the article.

2 *Jam'iyah Ahli al-Thariqah al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdliyah* (JATMAN) is an executive committee of Muslim experts and Sufi leaders that is responsible for monitoring and authorizing the correctness of tarekat in Indonesia.

3 Some Boda communities officially converted to Buddhism to conform to the former Suharto regime's requirements for religious affiliation in line with state-defined religion (see MacDougall 2005).

4 For more on Sufism and indigeneity in the Muslim world, see (Milani 2016).

5 Sasak language and culture belong to a wider Austronesian indigeneity. Sasak cultural lineages can be traced to Javanese, and later Balinese, and Bugis and Malay (Mahyuni 2007).

6 Kahyangan is the abode of the gods, goddesses and ancestors, in Java and Bali known as Hyang, who may be accessed through sacred sites such as human-made shrines and natural forming places in nature like trees groves, old trees, stones and rocks, water springs, wells, and waterfalls, amongst others.

7 These include legends about Cilinaya, Mandalika, Dewi Anjani, and Dewi Singkarwati, amongst others.

8 Examples include: the Sasak of Bayan in North Lombok have a creation myth that relates how the God Batara Indra from Mount Rinjani had two children (representing the Earth and the Sky) who are considered to be the first ancestors from the Bayan lineage and in their spirit form they function to protect and fertilize the earth (Adonis 1989; Cederroth 1975). In Javanese creation mythology, Batara Guru (Siva) is the ruler of the Kahyangan and he ordered Brahma and Vishnu to fill the island of Java with humans.

9 There is a 'maqam' representing Gajah Mada's visit in the Selaparang graveyard.

10 During Maulana Syeikh's era there was a strong sub-culture within Nahdlatul Wathan concerned with the accumulation of wealth with assistance from jinn and saints in the *ghaib*. This sub-culture still exists but is not as strong as it previously was.

11 In Arabic, *rahm* means womb, and one of Allah's divine names is *Ar-rahim*, the Merciful.

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Article

Gender Reconfigurations and Family Ideology in Abdul Rauf Felpete's Latin American Haqqaniyya

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Abstract: This article discusses the ideas about gender contained in the *Enseñanzas Sufíes Para Los Tiempos Actuales*, a text by Abdul Rauf Felpete, the leader of the Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya in Latin America, probably the largest Sufi group in the continent. I analyse these ideas against the backdrop context in which they were produced: on the one hand, a conservative Sufi Islamic frame inspired by Nazim al-Haqqani's ideas, and on the other, an Argentinian society that was incurring profound gender-related societal changes at the time when the shaykh delivered the sermons contained in the book. This historical moment was characterised by a growing feminist and LGTBQ+ activism and the arrival of a progressive government in Argentina, which over time, positioned this Latin American country in the vanguard of gender and sexual equality rights in the Spanish speaking world. In this context, Rauf Felpete proposes a gender model inspired in a Haqqani form of Islamic conservatism as a remedy to address what he perceives as the threat of civilizational decadence brought about by these changes. I discuss Rauf Felpete's family ideology, a set of moral norms based on gender determinism and pronatalism, articulated through two key concepts, first, *domesticity*, understood as a way to regulate female behaviour and, second, *motherhood*, viewed as a Godly ordained natural instinct. In order to put into practice these gender norms, the devout Haqqani is called to move to the countryside; rural communes are presented as the only possible way of living a pious and authentically Islamic life, a mode of living that implies profound reconfigurations of gender (and of lifestyle, more generally) for his Latin American followers.

Keywords: Sufism in Latin America; Islam in Latin America; gender and Sufism; Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya

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1. Introduction

Scarce attention has been paid to those forms of religious life that appear beyond the more well-established religious institutions in Latin America, and further attention to alternative forms of religiosity is needed: groups that, occupy a central, yet often unrecognised space in the religious field of the subcontinent (e.g., Semán and Viotti 2019, p. 196). However, this area of research has rapidly grown over the last decade, and there are a few recent and valuable contributions.[1] In Argentina, for example, studies have shown, that there has been a well-established Sufi scene since at least the 1980s (Pilgrim 2018, p. 54), with a presence of a *third-wave Sufism* dating back to the 1960s in various parts of the continent, Argentina included (Sedgwick 2018, p. 8). The case here studied is that of the Sufi order Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya,[2] an organisation that experienced an international expansion in the early 2000s, thanks mainly to the vision of his then leader Nazim al-Haqqani (d. 2014), who helped to establish groups of followers in most Western European countries as well as in North America.[3] The Haqqaniyya's influence reached Latin America, possibly through Mexico, where there were communities with closer connections to some North American groups, notably those in New York. During the 1990s, Abdul Rauf Felpete, a raised Catholic from Buenos Aires whose interest in oriental religions had previously

taken him to India, would travel to Lefke, in Cyprus, where the central lodge of the Haqqaniyya is located, and met Nazim al-Haqqani. He became his disciple and would then receive the authorisation (*idhn*) by the Sufi master to begin initiating people to Islam in Argentina and into the life in this Sufi order. Since then, the number of Latin American groups has been steadily rising, becoming the Haqqaniyya, the perhaps largest Sufi order in the subcontinent, and the best exponent of Sufism's *fifth wave* in South America. The trend is characterized by the partial Islamisation of Sufism's western trends, mainly thanks to the influence of so-called "travelling shaykhs", Sufis from the Muslim world that regularly visited Europe and North America, and thus, brought about a tradition that resembled the religiosities more common in Muslim majority contexts (Sedgwick 2018, p. 9).

In this case, however, the person who travelled was the follower, Rauf Felpete, and not the shaykh, Nazim al-Haqqani, who never visited Latin America. Upon Rauf Felpete's return to Argentina, he formed the first groups of Haqqani followers. Interest in Sufism had already started in Mar del Plata, where a Gurdjeffian psychologist had in the 1990s a group of followers of The Fourth Way (Montenegro 2020, p. 476); people from this group of Gurdjeffians would later become the first Haqqani disciples in the country. Since the 1990s, a number of Haqqani groups emerged across Latin America, and from then onwards, the region was somehow understood to be within the area of influence of the North American Haqqaniyya. This relationship may have triggered the visit of the head of the order in the US, Muhammad Hisham Kabbani (b. 1945) in 2011 to Argentina, visit in which he was welcomed by the National Secretary of Religion (Montenegro 2020, p. 476, n. 44). The current leader of the order Mehmet 'Adil (b. 1957) visited South America in 2016, granting Rauf Felpete the highest position in the leadership of the order in the subcontinent. This trip officially sealed differences that had been building over the previous years; a more liberal tendency[4] with a laxer approach to shari'a represented by Hisham Kabbani, and the one preached by Rauf Felpete, that follows the line of claimed-to-be successor of Nazim al-Haqqani, Mehmet 'Adil, whose Sufism is characterised by a shari'a-observing type of Islamic conservatism.[5] However, it is worth considering that these differences are evident at the level of official discourses, but are oftentimes less noticeable in daily practices and in most groups.[6]

In Argentina, today, there is approximately a dozen of stable communities of the Haqqaniyya that regularly meet on a weekly basis for sessions of Sufi ritual and prayer. Most of them do so in private homes; some of the groups, larger, have small meeting facilities (*derghas*). These derghas normally have a mosque and a community centre, and are characterised, unlike smaller groups, by having a permanently based shaykh on site. Although most of the groups exist in cities, the most important of these *derghas* is based in Mallín Ahogado, a quiet and remote area in the outskirts of Bariloche, Patagonia, the southernmost region of the country. The community is led by Rauf Felpete, who prides himself of being the head of the Islamic centre located the furthest from Mecca and the southernmost on Earth. The group that was first established in the 1990s (Pilgrim 2018, p. 5) has, since then, grown slowly but continually; today, this religious centre is the home to approximately thirty families (Pilgrim 2018, p. 9), and has become one of the largest Haqqani communes that exist in the world, and the largest Sufi centre in the subcontinent.

The order has been commonly identified as part of the New Age scene in Latin America, and, although the relationship between the Haqqaniyya and the wider New Age movement is more complex than it first appears,[7] the majority of people, including Rauf Felpete, that have ended up in the order had a prior interest in alternative spiritualities. Moreover, the Haqqaniyya seems to be of little attraction to the Arab community; there are approximately 3.5 million people of Arab origin in the country,[8] including Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims as well as Christians and Druze, as elsewhere in the subcontinent, whereas the followers are entirely composed of converts. The Islamic conservatism of Rauf Felpete's discourse, together with the complex relationship it establishes with the New Age field, tells us that these two signifiers, *Islamic* and *New Age*, rather than in opposition, often coexist in complex ways, sometimes in a continuum, others intermingling. This is evident in that, as

noted by Dickson and Xavier (2021, p. 2), the Haqqaniyya itself has been defined by some as *traditionally Islamic* (e.g., Sedgwick 2012, p. 209; Hermansen 2006) whereas by others as *New Age* (Knysh 2017, pp. 109–20), thus demonstrating that differentiating between the two is often difficult (see Dickson and Xavier 2021, for an interesting discussion on the complications of situating religiosities between the poles *Islamic* and *New Age*). In following the line of Mehmet 'Adil, Rauf Felpete has established a community that promotes a simple and rural lifestyle based on the precepts of shari'a. Like Haqqanis living in communes elsewhere, members of the group often dress in their own version of traditional Ottoman dress. Like elsewhere, the Patagonian commune enacts, mostly in an exemplary manner, the Haqqani lifestyle, and yet the majority of followers of the organisation live in cities, do not form communes and have, by contrast, lifestyles that in the Argentinian context would not necessarily be seen as unusual as those of the Patagonian group. This is also the case in the rest of the subcontinent, where the order is made up mostly of urban groups (i.e., known followers exist in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Panama and Peru).[9] Rauf Felpete is a relatively prolific author, and his books are sold in most virtual and real libraries across the Spanish-speaking world.

In this article, I argue that under the leadership of Rauf Felpete, the Haqqaniyya tries to bring potential devotees with an initial interest in alternative spiritualities towards an Islamic way of life, as interpreted and understood by the socially conservative approach to Islam of the order former's leader, Nazim al-Haqqani. Those disciples formerly interested in the New Age cover, ideologically speaking, a wide spectrum of positions, from the more liberal (perhaps numerically better represented) to the quite conservative[10], and for all of them, adapting to the lifestyle advocated by the Haqqani shaykh implies major life changes. Although these changes are evident in the case of liberal-minded followers, one should not assume that forms of moral conservatism are similar across cultures and religions. In fact, this case demonstrates that for conservative Argentinians, adopting an Islamic lifestyle also brings about significant changes to their way of living. An analysis of the approach to gender norms that appears in the writings of Rauf Felpete is used here to support the thesis that the Haqqaniya in Latin America, and specially its leader, is trying to Islamise the New Age field, by attempting to attract New Agers to a traditional Islamic Sufi lifestyle.

With that purpose, I will analyse the ideas about gender contained in one of Rauf Felpete's works, the *Enseñanzas Sufíes Para Los Tiempos Actuales* (Sufi teachings for modern times, hereafter the *Enseñanzas*), published in 2014 in paperback and in 2016 electronically, which contains some of the most relevant religious sermons (*sohbats*)[11] he delivered to different Latin American groups between the years 2010 and 2013 (Rauf Felpete 2014). The reason for selecting the text is twofold: first, because it consists of *sohbats*, texts that are useful to understand the ways in which he transmits his message to his disciples, but also, second, due to the fact that it contains a section with a sermon exclusively addressed to women, making it a valuable document for the study of gender norms in this form of Sufism. Although the overall text is not supposed to be an exposition of Rauf Felpete's views on gender, but rather a manual for daily living, "ancestral teachings totally applicable to the 21st century" (p. 11), one soon realises that the relationship between men and women is one of its most recurrent topics, making of this book a detailed explanation of how this Sufi shaykh envisions gender relations to be regulated by a Godly sanctioned order.

I analyse these ideas against the backdrop of, on the one hand, a conservative Sufi Islamic message inspired by Nazim al-Haqqani's position on gender, and, on the other, an Argentinian society that was incurring profound gender-related societal changes at that time. In doing so, I understand that Rauf Felpete's appeal to embrace a Sufi form of Islamic conservatism has as much to do with the message of his master, as with the context in which the message is preached. Thus, first, the influence exerted by the ideas of his spiritual mentor, Nazim al-Haqqani, who was well known for his restrictive views on gender, is clear. However, second, the content and sense of urgency of Rauf Felpete's discourse (i.e., gender egalitarianism is viewed as a problem that needs rapid and resolute fixing) occurs in a historical moment in which feminist and LGTBQ+ forms of activism

gained force and a number of progressive laws with regard to gender and sexuality were approved in Argentina. These changes have positioned this Latin American country at the vanguard of gender and sexual equality rights in the Spanish speaking world. In this article, I discuss Rauf Felpete's family ideology, in particular, critically assessing (1) his marriage and family ideology; (2) domesticity understood as a form to regulate female behaviour; and (3) motherhood viewed as a Godly ordained natural instinct. Moreover, I content that his promotion of an ideal, simple, rural life is intendedly proposed as the only possible way to put into practice these conservative Islamic social norms that imply profound lifestyle reconfigurations for his Latin American followers.

2. Androcentrism and Gender Segregation

Before we address what type of attitude towards gender characterises Rauf Felpete's understanding of Islam, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the androcentric use of language in the work here analysed, the *Enseñanzas*. Various are the features indicating that in the book male identity is taken as normative of humanness. The *Enseñanzas* do not use any form of gender-inclusive language, a way of expression most noticeable in the use of alternatives to the normative default plural form which in the Spanish language is masculine.[12] This would probably be not especially remarkable would the author not had been Argentinian, a country where the debate over inclusive language is particularly prominent. In the past, the use of gendered language did not necessary indicate (conscious adherence to) misogyny; even those advocating for gender equality normally used non-inclusive language. However, that changed during the decade of the 2010s; this was a time when inclusive language rapidly gained ground, and the use of a plural masculine gradually became mostly identified with conservative positions on gender. (In some cases, the issue of language inclusiveness denotes a generational gap, younger people being more aware of the political loading of language). Considering that Rauf Felpete's book was published in the decade of the 2010s, time in which the use of inclusive language was already firmly established, it makes sense to suggest that his use of the androcentric norm may have been intended. Consider how age plays out in here, the shaykh is not young; however, his average readership may presumably be much younger.

The androcentric character of the *Enseñanzas* is evident in that the text is written with a male reader in mind. This is because the text is a collection of sermons (in the text referred by the Turkish term, *sohbat)* given by the author to his disciples; note, here, that the Haqqaniyya does not hold gender mixed congregations. The fact that his audience were only men is thus reflected in the text. Gender segregation in Sufi communities takes many different forms; sometimes it is only men that cannot see women, though women see men. In others, the separation means that women can hear the sermon but cannot see, neither the men nor the shaykh. The congregations of the Haqqaniyya in Latin America vary from setting to setting in their gender disposition in space, but in most cases, there is a strict gender division in place at congregational spaces.[13] Considering that the *Enseñanzas* are a compilation of the sermons Rauf Felpete delivered between the years 2010 and 2013 in different Haqqani Latin American communities, the androcentric character shows us the context in which the text *takes place*, i.e., in this case it denotes the maleness of the addressee. However, that women seem to significantly outnumber men as consumers of Sufi literature, at least in Western European contexts and across the Americas, is a seeming irony that deserves further scholarly consideration, especially when noticing that the androcentric character of Rauf Felpete's texts is not necessarily an exception within the broader field of the modern Sufi literary genre.[14]

In the *Enseñanzas*, men are presented as default to refer to all the humans. This is not only apparent in the use of the aforementioned masculine forms of the plural, but more specifically, in that the adressee of the text is always a man. Examples of this are plentiful and I mention here just a few. One of the sermons, in which he defends the institution of marriage, is entitled *Dos Regalos Para la Felicidad del Hombre* (Two Presents for *Man*'s Happiness, my emphasis); similarly, when the author counsels the reader to be realistic and

do not aspire to be with more than one woman, he asks *him:* "how many men do you know that are satisfied with the wife they have?" (p. 16); or, when the author asks the reader to behave responsibly and not abandon his *wife* (p. 23); or, when he solicits the reader not to let "our children" [. . .], "our women" [. . .], and "our elderly" depart from the right path (p. 41); as well as, when he pleads him to never miss having lived another life, with "another wife, another family" (p. 71). In sum, all throughout the book, the reader is assumed to be a heterosexual, married, and monogamous man. I want to note, however, that although marriage as well as heterosexuality are discussed in the *Enseñanzas* in more detail, monogamy is never addressed but simply assumed normative throughout the text.

The *Enseñanzas* is a collection of *sohbats* to diverse groups of men-only audiences of Haqqani devotees in different Latin American locations. The exception to this is the sermon Rauf Felpete delivered to his female followers in 2012, a *sohbat* contained in this book, and entitled *Secretos De Las Mujeres* (women's secrets, hereafter *Secretos*). In this sermon, Rauf Felpete lifts the androcentric paradigm and even questions it. *Secretos* was written having an only female audience in mind. However, the day he invited only the women of the community (in the Patagonian lodge) to the event, some of the husbands also showed up. We lack the details of what exactly did happen on that day, but we can sense, by reading the text, a certain degree of tension in the air. Accordingly, *Secretos* begins by asking (to a then improvised mixed audience):

> why do we need to exclusively speak to women? Then, the answer comes alone, as one realizes, because everybody speaks only to men. Women need to be treated in a special way "from now on" [my emphasis added] because they are the jewel of creation. (p. 141)

We also lack the larger context that motivated the calling for a women-only meeting in the first place. However, this seems to be an event that wanted to set the base for a *new way* of treating women within the community. The *from now on* pronounced at the beginning of the discourse seems to indicate the wish for a change in attitude, something that, nevertheless, does not necessarily imply pursuing gender egalitarianism in other situations. Instead, a closer look at the text reveals that Rauf Felpete believes in natural sex differences that determine distinct roles for men and women in society, something, worth noticing, concomitant with the idea of addressing them separately. The model of society he proposes, according to his religious ideals, centers around gender determinism, and articulates around a monogamous nuclear family based on a heterosexual union; one supporting a division of gender roles, i.e., the breadwinner father and the childrearing mother.[15]

3. Individual Willpower, the New Age and Minority Religions

The utopian (rural) society envisioned by Rauf Felpete is built around the family, one of the most important tropes in his writings. According to his views, it is by creating families that the perceived moral decadence of our societies can be overcome. Consequently, he asks the reader to abandon any intention to transform society at the grand level and to do it, instead, by building a family. The call to this goal heavily relies on individualism:

> What are we doing with our lives? We with ours, not our neighbour with his, neither what are the [north] Americans doing with theirs and with the immense portion [of theworld's wealth] that they have got, nor the Chinese. No; [we with] ours. Because ours is the only one we can change. [The person] who changes himself can change his family, and by changing his family can change his neighbour's and by changing his neighbours can change the neighbourhood. And, if he changes the neighbourhood, he can change his town. And [the person] who changes his town can change his country, can change a continent, and can change the remaining six [continents] (pp. 22–23).

In other passages, individual willpower is also considered positively, as it is believed to allow the person to make sound decisions, despite the difficulties. Making the decision

of joining Islam, is one, perhaps amongst the most important, of them: "light your little lamp on and go in the search of your path, without having anyone before or after you" (p. 65). One may wonder whether the support for individualism can be seen as a strategy, a tool that helps in gaining followers to a minority religious group. After all, do not all the followers of religious minorities need to celebrate individual willpower when they choose a lifestyle away from the mainstream? How to reconcile this individualistic drive, when it is used to attract people to a religion, such as Islam, fundamentally family-based? Rauf Felpete's encourages disciples to rely on the willpower of the individual to make the initial decision, and with this determination, persuade their families to join them, "put everybody [that you can] after the light, [your] wife, [your] children and whoever that wants to enter, [s/he] will be welcomed" (p. 65). Individualism appears related to the constituent feature of the movement as a minority religion. The individualist determination is a key ingredient in calling people to join in. It works, in a way, a rhetoric tool used for religious proselytization.

We may also note that the adoption of this kind of individualistic, self-motivating approach to social change echoes with the post-idealist stance characteristic of the religiously unaffiliated in many parts of the world. It is also characteristic of the New Age. In fact, the idea that the society begins to change at home was popularized as part of the political disenchantment after the end of the hippy era, causing new agers[16] to develop this characteristically self-reliant approach to social ethics. Nonetheless, the problem we face in identifying whether Rauf Felpete's ideas about the willpower of the individual can be related to the New Age lies in the fact that, as Franck (1999) has reminded us, ideas of social ethics based on individualistic self-empowerment that can serve as the basis for social change are not exclusive of New Age circles anymore. In fact, they have surpassed the circles of alternative spiritualities and have become characteristic of the mainstream in our societies.[17] One may wonder whether Rauf Felpete's individualistic approach is the result of his prior/current relationship with the New Age.

His relationship to the New Age is evident. It is not only that the Haqqaniyya has been identified as being part of the New Age field (Montenegro 2016, p. 88); most of its current followers have this background, including Rauf Felpete himself. He has publicly declared he has been Catholic, Buddhist, atheist, and that his spiritual quest ended up bringing him to India first and to Cyprus later.[18] He is known for making a living as an osteopath (he has proudly pointed out in a number of occasions that his religious duties as a shaykh are not remunerated),[19] and natural birthing techniques and fitotheraphy are promoted in the website of the Patagonian group.[20]

I suggest that, considering the close connections between the group, the master and the two ideological references that are here at play, the New Age and Islamic conservatism, it is fair to suggest that both, the shaykh and the group have developed a distinctive identity that swiftly gravitates between beliefs and practices that are characteristic of the former and others that are habitual of the latter. Remarkably, some features may *simultaneously* be characteristic of both. In line with the suggestion made by Dickson and Xavier (2021) in their recent article about Sufism in North America, the Latin American Haqqaniyya also contributes to add nuance to our understanding of the interplay between the Islamic and New Age fields. Previous scholarship tended to view these categories as mutually exclusive, a group would either belong to one or the other. However, the case here analysed suggests that, not only that our definition of *Islamic* needs to significantly broaden (as suggested by (Ahmed 2015)), but also that movements that may be considered Islamically conservative, can at the same time display a number of New Age features. In particular, in the Latin American Haqqani case, it is observable, (a) the use of an individualist approach to religion, at least in the initial stages, that helps appealing individuals towards Islam—once the person becomes a Haqqani, individualism is ideally dropped in favour of a communal lifestyle; (b) an interest in alternative healing techniques; and (c) a genealogy of spiritual seeking prior to joining the Haqqaniyya. However, most of the gender norms promoted

by Rauf Felpete are of the Islamic conservative kind and do not portray the liberal fluidity more typically attributed to some New Age groups.

4. The Marriage Imperative

Most Muslims would agree in that Islam highly values marriage.[21] The diverse engagements Muslims today have with religious texts, despite being very varied, show us that commonly, sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad are being used in their praising of marriage as a religiously sanctioned activity. Among those sayings, it is the widely used, *marriage is half of one's religion* (meaning that one has completed half of the things one should do as a righteous Muslim only by the act of getting married).[22] Additionally, there seems to be an emphasis on getting married and not merely on the ways in which married life is made appropriate, a set of indications often referred as the *mahramiyyat*. This is particularly relevant in contexts in which Muslims are a minority, when an even greater divergence over family values is observable across generations, and where the idea that a Muslim may possibly have non-Muslim offspring is more present; for example, studies in European Muslim families prove that discussions on parental authority, child rearing, relations to the extended family, and on husband–wife relations become more prominent in the European context than they were in the previous generations and in the country of origin (Rytter 2014). Moreover, in some contexts, whether it is because people hold liberal values, and/or due to the fact that the age of marriage worldwide has been delayed due to the rising levels of educational attainment, the non-married Muslim adult has become a socially recognized category, something that is quite new to many. However, and despite all changes, marriage is expected from most Muslims, and it is often viewed as both a sacred act and a key legal agreement, one that lies at the centre of the ways in which people are socialized into the world, constituting a central mechanism for the organization of societies. From that perspective, the unmarried Muslim adult is an incomplete person. The importance of marriage in Muslim contexts is highlighted by existing studies on the field, "marriage is the goal of every Muslim" (al-Faruqi 1985, p. 64), "[marriage is] the single most important event [in the life of a Muslim]" (Fluehr-Lobban 2004, p. 98).

Rauf Felpete echoes the importance Islam grants to marriage in his *sohbats*; it is one of the preferred topics in his work. He encourages people to marry: "those of you who are not yet married, get married!" (p. 140),[23] and assigns sacrality to marriage, advising his followers, "be respectful and caring, and take care of the sacred marriage" (p. 141). If Muslim youngsters are oftentimes socialized to look forward to their wedding as one of life's most important events (Murphy-Geiss 2010, p. 41), the Spanish-speaking singles in the Haqqaniyya are actively driven towards the same goal. Additionally, in those cases, the indication is to try to marry within the *tariqa*,[24] as the order, similar to many others,[25] helps individuals to find a partner:

> Additionally, to those of you that are searching for [getting married], [I say] insha'llah ask for a dua, visualize the face of Kamaludin [a high religious authority within the order in Latin America]; ask [him] to get married. Insha'llah, ask and Allah will provide you with what you are asking for (p. 140).

The Argentinian shaykh perceives marriage as the central institution in the establishment of a worldly spiritual order, "the holy marriage is the pillar of Allah (peace be upon him) for the spiritual development [of people] on this planet" (p. 137), a position also common in Islamic literature. By contrast, he seems less interested in topics of also common concern in the Islamic marriage genre. For example, the (in)suitability of marrying particular members of your kin, a common theme in most modern Muslim marriage booklets, is non-existent here. Polygamy is also overlooked.

Answering the question of how similar Rauf Felpete's family ideology is to the positions adopted in the New Age is rather difficult, given the diversity of positions in this regard that the New Age adopts. In keeping with the attempt of locating his religious ideology, what we can say is that Rauf Felpete's traditional, heteronormative family model

mostly resonates with an Islamic conservative frame, but also with the family ideologies developed by the Catholic and Evangelical churches (especially its leadership), readily available in the Latin American context of Rauf Felpete's readership.[26] In addition, it is worth noticing that in Argentina, the percentage of adult population married has steadily declined over the last decades and it is today lower than in most Western European and North American countries.[27] The point is thus not only that marriage is Islamically appropriate and therefore encouraged, but also that insisting on people getting married makes a lot of sense in a context in which presumably getting married may not be a priority for many of his (current and potential) devotees.

5. Family Ideology as a Conservative Counter-Discursivity

Rauf Felpete's family ideology reverberate quite closely with the discourse of the Latin American Christian right (specially of the more normative and activist voices); in particular, seeing the emergence of a plurality of family arrangements in terms of deterioration of the family as an institution—the loss of a past glory—is common in both the Islamic and Christian conservative fields.[28] Rauf Felpete expresses this position in this way:

> society is sick, very sick; [. . .] but this is new, because a hundred years ago this was not like this. Remember, because we will soon need to explain this as if it was ancient history; that the family existed as a real thing, and that it had existed for a very long time until not that long ago. Nowadays, the family is under attack, dismembered, destroyed, and broken; and the central axis of the family are women. (p. 144)

In the context in which Rauf Felpete speaks, this position can be considered counter-discursive in that what the mainstream Latin American public normally sees as the steady gaining of rights, a gradual progression that has occurred over the last half a century, he sees as a continual process towards social decadence:

> there are countries more advanced in the attack [against the family], like Argentina, and others less so, like Uruguay or Chile. However, in all the cases, they are all being attacked by Satan, by Shaytan, who has decided to break the family apart, because the family is what brings us to God, what brings us to religion. I remember when I was a child, that on Sundays we had to go to church, you had to go with [your] family. Until the sixties and seventies it was this way. Then, craziness begun, the youth's rebelliousness, the hippie movement [. . .]; we let them break the family, so that a better system could arrive, but that system never came. (p. 145)

He perceives the introduction of a diversity of family arrangements (what he calls *breaking the family*) as a path of no-return; now it is common (albeit the great degree of diversity that exists depending on social class and geography) that these diverse arrangements are somehow more socially accepted. As a result, a gap between a conservative religious preaching and liberal social practices is observable, a phenomenon that also occurs in other societies around the world. In some Muslim majority societies, for instance, we can perceive a difference between the burgeoning consolidation of conservative religious positions in contexts in which diversity in family arrangements are appearing. I suggest that these re-traditionalisation of the religious discourse can therefore be seen as a practice of counter-discursivity, because religious counter-discursivity seems to be common in social *milieus* that find themselves in transition towards practicing and accepting more diverse family structures.[29] What we may thus infer is that religiously driven family ideologies mirror, and aim to respond to, the societal metamorphoses in which they emerge—and this is, and has been, the case in a number of historical and modern-day scenarios.[30] Rather than thinking about these discourses as the repositories of a pristine reality that is progressively breaking apart and disappearing, as the content of the discourse itself wants to imply, we may better understand them as counter-discourses, current responses to ongoing change.

Thus, despite Rauf Felpete's subjective way of historicizing the process of decline in the family as an institution, a process of decadence that he historically traces back to the last third of the twentieth century, we can more recently situate the tension in which this discourse emerged. Specifically, we can relate Rauf Felpete's discourse with the rapid gender-related social changes that Argentina has undergone since the first presidency of Cristina Fernández de Kirschner, who assumed her duties of office in December of 2007. Since then, a number of laws broadening rights in marriage and family-related matters have been passed, such as the legality of same-sex marriages and the right to adopt children by homosexual couples (since 2010), or, the legalisation of abortion during the first fourteen weeks of gestation (a long-held demand of feminists that finally became law in 2020).[31] Rauf Felpete's ideas belong to a conservative sector of society that opposes such changes—see for example the video in which he explains, quite honestly, his views on the interruption of pregnancy.[32] This conservative counter-discursivity, resonates with the anti-modernism of a number of trends (Guenonianism, for example), as Felpete writes:[33]

> all what is offered to us from this civilization is dark. Religions have been darkened, politics are darkened, the social [domain] is darkened, the family is darkened, everything [is darkened]. (p. 65)

However, it is also present in a number of (more overtly) religious fields. It adopts positions similar to those of the Christian right; it also stands close to the apocalyptic nonconformist position of some New Age authors, and at the same time, it relates to Islamic conservatism, where a discourse in defence of the patriarchal family as the tool to fight the *disintegration* of traditional society has existed since colonial times. More recently, in the Muslim Mediterranean, where the Haqqani original ideologues come from, declining fertility rates and changes to the structure of the family have given neopatriarchal family ideologies a renewed vigour ((Kandiyoti 2008); on the relationship between these ideologies and the rise of women right's activism, see (Moghadam 2004)).

6. Domesticity: Restriction Seen as Protection

Although sacralised ideas of the home are present both in Islamic and Christian discourses, the emergence of this trend is, historically speaking, quite recent and can be traced back only to the second half of the nineteenth century both in Europe and the Middle East and is primarily concerned with urban areas (e.g., Van Osselaer and Maurits 2020; Tucker 1979, 1985); other regions, less affected by industrialization, followed in later historical periods.[34] In the case I am analysing here, the sacralization of domesticity, although inspired in the Islamic ethos of Nazim al-Haqqani, needs to be read in the context of the profound social transformations in which it occurs. The position on gender produced by Nazim al-Haqqani uses sacralised notions of the home to restrict female participation in society (on this, see (Böttcher 2006), the only study that has been carried out insofar analysing gender ideology in the Haqqaniyya).

Once married, Rauf Felpete encourages men to actively work towards preserving their marriages, by looking after their wives:

> be caring and respectful, take care of the sacred marriage and take care of your wives; [. . .] if you want to be happy you must have a wife, and if you have a wife, you must take care of her (p. 141). I speak to the men in our tariqah, take care of your wives [. . .] we the Latinos, heirs of the Spaniards and the Italians, have this thing of being very "macho". So, we have to become less "macho" [. . .] take care of your wives. (p. 137)

One of the reasons why women must be, according to his view, protected, is because they are considered the central pillar of families; thanks to them, a family is maintained:

> a man can be hit, be hurt, go to prison, be a sailor, die . . . but if a woman stays put, family endures. A man can go back home after being six months away and his home is in order. Take the woman away [from her home] and try to figure out what can the man do [without her]. Exceptionally, there may be an incredible

man that can fulfil both roles, but the vast majority of us, cannot simultaneously be dad and mum. Women can, men cannot. (p. 144)[35]

The case of a man staying away from home for long periods of time while the wife stays at home taking care of the children, is one known to many members of the Haqqaniyya order. In the times when Nazim al-Haqqani was the living master of this *tariqa*, he would travel on a regular basis and stayed away from his home in Lefke for prolonged periods of time. The order has a large female following, people who knew about how exhausted shaykha Amina, wife of Nazim al-Haqqani and mother to their four children, was due to his continuous travelling abroad; the story is still retold today by female disciples, and has also been scholarly recorded by Böttcher (2006, p. 262). During the mid-2000s, the female discipleship of the Haqqaniyya, especially some of the members (mostly British) of the European groups, showed disagreement with the gender approach adopted by the order's authorities. In particular, the fact that shaykha Amina has been trained by the same master than his husband in Damascus, shaykh 'Abd Allah, and for longer than him, yet, never was granted the *idhn* (spiritual authorization) to impart spiritual teachings (*tarbiyya*), stands out as an example of some of these critiques (Böttcher 2006, p. 261). As a result of this still ongoing tension, the female relatives of the leaders are nowadays (informally) considered role models, especially for the female disciples (Hermansen 2006), but they have still not been accorded formal leadership roles. Scholars disagree on whether gender norms vary according to geography, whereas some consider that the branches of the Haqqaniyya under the leadership of Hisham Kabbani and established in English-speaking countries follow more progressive gender norms than most of the continental European groups[36], other authors still consider the supposedly liberal North American Haqqaniyya, "a strictly Islamic Sufi movement" (Hermansen 2006).

Central to this conservative position is the extolling of domesticity, "women are the queens of their well-equipped home", and that male's guardianship over them is important in order to control their whereabouts, "all the evil in the world comes from women who leave their houses without asking permission" (Nazim al-Haqqani in (Böttcher 2006, p. 263)). Echoing Nazim al-Haqqani's ideas, Rauf Felpete takes on the trope of *the queen of the home* to introduce a traditional frame of gendering relations to his Latin American audiences. However, he subtly modifies the discourse, uses a silkier tone whilst adapts this conservative position to suit the particulars of gender in the Latin American context. This is possibly why, infidelity (and here, one may note, it always appears as being of men towards women) emerges as a key concern—the number of times in the book in which he refers to this topic is significant, seven times in an explicit manner,[37] many others implicitly:

> How many men do you know that are satisfied with their wives? I mean really satisfied. Thank you, God, my wife is my queen, the most beautiful queen that exists, this is what you should say. Additionally, if you say it, accept it and believe it, Allah in the darkness of the night will turn her into the most beautiful queen of beauty you could have never imagined. (p. 16)

Women are always associated with the domestic sphere. In replicating Nazim al-Haqqani's perspective, he implores men to turn women into "the queens of the household" (p. 137), as they have a fundamental role in taking care and guarding the home, sometimes *the queen* is presented as *the patron* (*la patrona*, in Spanish),

> we need the castle [referring to the home] to be guarded, well-guarded. Additionally, in order for the castle to be well-guarded 'la patrona' [my emphasis added] of the castle needs to feel she is the owner of this castle. Do the possible and the impossible for this to happen, this is the treasure you should look after. (p. 139)

The excerpt can be understood to be an adaptation of the gender conservatism characteristic of the previous generations of Haqqani leaders to a context in which women may not so readily accept staying at home. The rather passive role of *the queen* is turned into the more empowering role of *la patrona*. Something worth noticing is that, in going back to the question of the textual androcentrism, although Rauf Felpete's addressee is still nominally a man, his message here seems to be implicitly directed to women.

One may contend that in a society in which women are so commonly harassed as to having motivated a number of campaigns to stop violence against them, Rauf Felpete's (even if idealistic) proposal may feel appealing to some. Harassment is indeed of grave concern to women in Argentina (as well as to those in most Latin American, and other, of course, societies). In Argentina, this concern has resulted in a series of legislative measures: in 2018, a major campaign against street harassment ended up in passing a bill for which it became a crime punishable with a fine; the Argentinian National Congress ratified in 2020 a Convention against Violence and Harassment in the workplace with legal consequences for offenders;[38] and, the government has also launched a major campaign against child grooming. Whereas the legislative advances are welcome, there are difficulties in implementing them (for example, fears that result in lesser reporting to Law Enforcement, or the fact that the authorities in charge of their implementation, i.e., the police and the judiciary, are sometimes known for their overtly misogynist attitudes). By contrast, Rauf Felpete is offering a (likely to be utopian) *mode de vivre* that promises a protection that oftentimes Law Enforcement is finding difficult to put in place. Thus, one can understand, the potential appeal that importing Nazim al-Haqqani's family ideology into a Latin American context can, under these circumstances, have for some.

Rauf Felpete reframes men's control over female's actions into a male's *protection* of females against the violence exerted on them by other males. He asks women to abandon their careers to become housewives, by using the appeal of *protection against threat*.

> The ones [referring to women] that have husbands must stop working. They must take care of their children [instead]. If you do not want to stop working, this is fine, work from home. All those women who can, work from home. The least you leave the home, the better. These are very bad times for women. Try not to be out at night. Do not be exposed, do not be exposed (p. 147).

In a country with female participation in the workforce of similar rates than in some European countries,[39] telling women to abandon their jobs to exclusively devote themselves to housewifery may prove difficult.[40] As a result, the tone of the discourse is softened, from the obligatoriety we could see when expressed by Nazim al-Haqqani, to the level of *recommendation* ("all those women who can, work from home"). Similarly, *working remotely* instead of *not working* is a further cushioning of Nazim al-Haqqani's position, understanding that the women to whom Rauf Felpete speaks may be reluctant to quit the workforce.[41] Furthermore, the forms of female control clearly articulated in Nazim al-Haqqani's discourse are reframed by Rauf Felpete as forms of persuasion, "we should clarify this [that they should stay at home] to them [to our wives]. We cannot prohibit, but we should clarify" (p. 43).

A domestic life is celebrated as a mechanism of protection, that must be actively enacted by men, "are you going to let them [your wives] participate [of doing] things you do not know what they are [?], be careful!" (p. 43). This mechanism of protection implies, in his perspective, safety for the wife and, by extension, for the rest of family members,

> we should try to safeguard our children, [. . .] our women [. . .] our elderly from the multitudes [. . .] as with regard to ourselves, will you let your children walk at night in the city? will you let your wives walk at night in the city? (p. 43)

7. Motherhood as Sanctifying

In Rauf Felpete's understanding of gender norms, women should stay at home because their main role is to procreate, "[women] are the jewel of creation!" he extols, "the act of procreating in itself demonstrates that the Lord has put her in this role" (pp. 141–42)[42]. Although we are familiar with that there are Muslim family ideologists who are enthusiastically pronatalists (e.g., see the following studies, Parkes 2005; Sholkamy 2021; Sachedina 1990), rapidly declining fertility rates in all Muslim-majority countries over the last thirty years (Courbage and Todd 2014, p. xii)[43] seem, again, to indicate that there is a gap between these forms of religious preaching and social practices (Moghadam 2004).

In the Argentinian context, Rauf Felpete uses the ideas often presented by other conservative religious groups in favour of *natural laws,* and, in particular, condemning same-sex parenthood, often also against the ideas of evolution. On this, Rauf Felpete's ideas can be situated within a section of Islamic conservatism that stands against the theories of Darwinism (see Riexinger 2010), but he equally echoes conservative Christian voices, some of which are quite prominent in Brazil, Argentina and other countries of South America, of the anti-gender ideology movement, a trend that defends the natural attributions of sex and opposes the conceptualization of gender advanced by gender theorists.[44] For Rauf Felpete,

> if the Lord would have wanted men, like some animals that exist in nature to have reproductive organs [he would have done so] [. . .] but the man is arrogant and does not think that he was made this way for a reason. Thus, the woman was specifically made this way, [we] do not come out of a cabbage, neither we come from monkeys [. . .] we have been created precisely in this way and should ask ourselves what is the secret behind the fact that women can procreate and men cannot" (p. 142); "women have a magnificent secret, the one of creating life [. . .] without a woman there is no possibility of [the existence of] life. Thus, women are something [and I remark here, he literally says "something"] magnificently created with a goal and a finality [. . .] the first role of a woman is being a mother [. . .]; a woman needs to be a mother in order to be complete, to be fulfilled, to have a meaning in life [. . .]; of course that God has made some women not able to have children [. . .] but the ones that can, must have [them], the sooner, the better. (p. 143)

The idea that maternity comes naturally to women and that it is linked to her instinct, is perhaps best illustrated in this passage:

> I have had seven children with my wife, and I know what is to wake up at two or three in the morning to console a baby. Fathers can only partly calm down babies, it is a mechanical consolation. We check that she [the baby] is clean, that she has eaten, that has no pain here or there [. . .] and then we cannot do anything else, but the baby keeps crying. Then, one puts the baby in the breast of the woman and she gets [instantly] calmed. (p. 146)

The excerpt illustrates the *natural and instinctual* character attributed to motherhood by Rauf Felpete. It is also a good illustration of the delicate balance he tries to strike between the advancement of a socially conservative message on gender and the recognition of the fact that his audience may presumably be more liberal than him. As such, he acknowledges a certain degree of male's involvement in the duties of care of small children ("I know what is to wake up at two or three in the morning to comfort a baby") but ultimately, ("one puts the baby in the breast of the woman and the baby gets calmed") denotes the unique connection between mother and infant. With this argument, he posits this form of gender determinism not as an ideological choice one makes, but rather as something dictated by nature. Likewise, gender determinism is not presented as a restriction to women but as empowering; in this view, the ultimate authority on childcare, is held, due to her *natural instinct*, by the mother. In following this line of thought, Rauf Felpete is heavily critical of (professional) childcare, blaming women for leaving their children in those facilities:

> After forty days [after giving birth] mothers go back to work and leave children eight hours in creches [. . .]; what do we expect from them when these little children abandoned at forty days [of age] will be twenty [years old]? (p. 143)[45]

8. Gender Reconfigurations and the Utopia of Rural Life

In order to ask women to stay at home (and to feel gratified by it), the Haqqaniyya in Latin America needs to propose a change of paradigm with regard to the role of women in society. On this, Rauf Felpete again gravitates towards an anti-establishment discourse that resonates with some of the more left of centre, anti-system versions of the New Age, one that sees the woman with a career as someone that has lost her (maternal) sensibility:

"the CEO lady, in a hurry, perfumed, with a hairdresser's hairstyle [. . .] she does not want that her son comes to hug her, [because] she does not want to look messy" (p. 143). By contrast, echoing a well-trodden Islamic ideal, he commends women to pursue modesty and simplicity:

> try to go unnoticed, do not think that by going unnoticed you will not find a husband [. . .] neither will you lose your seductive power. Be simple, be plain and you will find all that God has for you [. . .] [which is] the best of the world, the best of the best. (p. 147)

He furthers his critique of materialism, a discourse that is also gendered:

> we go to expensive places, such as the shopping centres in airports. [They only sell] rubbish [. . .]; rubbish with normal stones inserted in shiny plastic with plenty of golden [decorations]. They cost a fortune. You may think you are seeing diamonds. No, you are seeing rubbish that women wear and men too [. . .]; or, any of these perfumes of modern brands [. . .] [worn by] six hundred or seven hundred women in the world, all wearing [the same] at the same time, and they all have the same smell, and all of this costs three hundred euros [meaning, it costs a lot of money; think that the average monthly household income in 2016 in Argentina was of 282 euros][46]. (p. 115)

Nevertheless, the anti-materialist stance of the Argentinian shaykh may have raised concerns of an economic kind among his disciples. Especially when he asks women to withdraw from the workforce, many may have wondered how the bills are going to be paid. This is reflected in a sermon he gave once in Panama:

> the married ones [in the feminine form] try not to work. A lot of people come to me and say, I want my wife to stop working, but with a single salary we cannot afford [it] [. . .] but our master Mawlana Shaykh Nazim told more than once, 'when women stop working men increase their salaries in a number of ways' [. . .]; the expenses of the household derived of the woman being out [of the household] are incredible. Children get sick, you need more doctors, you need more psychologists[47] because they are sick, they need after-school support, they need a lot more things [than when women stay at home]. (p. 148)

In relation to the education of children, it is known that Nazim al-Haqqani has in a number of occasions discouraged girls from studying, a recommendation that not even the female members of his family supported. In a trip to Sri Lanka, he reproached his male audience for encouraging their daughters to study, and was critical of a parent who seemingly asked the shaykh to saintly intercede for his daughter to become a prime minister (Böttcher 2006, p. 263).[48] In the *Enseñanzas*, Rauf Felpete does not take a position on girls' education. However, we know that some current and former devotees of the order (specially women) are critical of the conservative views on gender promoted by the organization, and, also, that those living in segregated rural communities tend to be more acquiescent with the conservative model on gender relations proposed by the leadership than those in urban groups. The disciples of rural groups have limited relationships with the peoples in neighbouring villages; most men, for example, either work for the people living nearby, but apart from this discreet labour relations, they are isolated and live away from the rest of society. This is the case of the Argentinian communities in La Consulta (Mendoza) of about twenty families and Rauf Felpete's own group, in Mallín Ahogado (Río Negro) of about ten families (Salinas 2015, p. 107) as well as the one in Órgiva, close to Granada, in Andalusia (Spain). This rural lifestyle is posed as the solution to all problems. Apologetic of a rural lifestyle, the restriction that women who are asked to stay at home may feel, is blamed not on restrictive gender roles, but on the city lifestyle. By doing so, the isolationism that many would attribute to the lifestyle of Haqqani rural communes is shifted in Rauf Felpete's writings; it is the people living in flats in the city the ones who are sequestered. He suggests that,

> if you lock up your wives in the shoe boxes that are built [in the form of apartments] in cities, women will want to escape, because women are not birds to be locked in cages [. . .]. [They do not want to stay] in those horrible apartment buildings [. . .] within four walls. It is logical [that under these circumstances they do not want to stay at home]. [Under these circumstances] what is the [only] freedom that she can choose? work. However, [this is just] because everything [in this plan] is wrong. [On the contrary] if a woman is in a comfortable house [in the countryside], with space, with [the possibility of] movement, [. . .] [of feeling] loved, fulfilling her role of raising children, then [try to] offer her to work. They go out [to work] for necessity, for obligation, because men abandon them, [. . .] [and] because society puts a lot of stupidities in their heads. (p. 143)

He further emphasizes that city life is a life devoid of ethics, which is reason why cities concentrate, in his view, the majority of non-believers (p. 165). The shaykh additionally recommends living in rural areas for the pursue of a simple life; the ultimate goal of being a Muslim (p. 167) is living a life governed by shari'a:

> achieving personal satisfaction is simple, you just have to stop doing all the sinful activities. Those [things] do not generate real satisfaction. They can create a little bit of satisfaction, [that is] subjective, [and] sick, but it lasts nothing. (p. 152)

It is a call to completely abandon one's previous life; he believes that the ego is nourished from the longing of the past (p. 97) and posits this as the reason behind people not sticking to this strict lifestyle. With regard to gender, it is also possible that implementing a lifestyle that requires commitment to gender norms that are at odds with those of most of the rest of the society could be better achieved when one is away from, and has lost all contact with, their previous and regular acquaintances; something that occurs, more commonly, among the members of the Haqqani rural communes.

9. Concluding Remarks

In this article, I argue that under the leadership of Abdul Rauf Felpete, the Haqqaniyya tries to bring potential devotees with an initial interest in alternative spiritualities towards an Islamic way of life, as interpreted and understood by the socially conservative approach to Islam of the order former's leader Nazim al-Haqqani. Those disciples formerly interested in the New Age represent a wide array of ideological positions, from the more liberal (perhaps numerically better represented) to the quite conservative; and, yet, for all of them, adapting to the lifestyle advocated by the Haqqani shaykh implies major life changes. The text, markedly androcentric, exhorts people to build families as the only possible mechanism available against civilizational collapse. It defends a conservative family ideology that is inspired in the neopatriarchal discourses readily present in the Muslim Mediterranean; in this case, the position on gender adopted by the former head of the Haqqaniyya, Nazim al-Haqqani, works as the main source of inspiration. At the same time, such gender norms are adapted to the Argentinian context of the rapid societal changes that occurred since 2007, time of significant broadening of sexual and gender-related rights. In this sense, Rauf Felpete's ideas can be seen as a practice of counter-discursivity, akin to that enunciated by other conservative religious actors in the region, notably the Christian right. In that sense, the emphasis placed on gender determinism and pronatalism as weapons against a perceived civilisation collapse, makes the positioning of Rauf Felpete's ideas between, on the one hand, the Latin American Christian right, and, on the other, the Middle Eastern Islamic conservatism, particularly unique.

Although the relationship between Rauf Felpete's ideas and Islam seem quite straightforward, the influence exerted by the New Age is far more complex. This distinctive form of Sufi Islamic conservatism evinces a number of features that we can identify in the New Age; first, *a New Age past* for most members, a background of *countercultural zeitgeist* (Chryssides 2007), in that a good number of both, leaders and devotees within the movement, have had, in the past, an approach to religion that can be defined in those terms—a genealogy of spiritual seeking prior to joining the Haqqaniyya; second, the recurrence

of an individualist discourse, particularly used in reference to the moment a person has to make choices that may be deemed unpopular in her/his social *milieu* (whether this is building a family, abandoning a career to stay at home, or joining Islam); third, explored only tangentially in the article, a certain interest in methods of healing that fall beyond the conventional; and fourth, a *countercultural* tone that re-appears in the call to break away from society, escape materialism, and move to the countryside to live in a commune. In terms of gender, the Islamic ideal of female modesty and humility is reinterpreted with a somehow anti-materialist, anti-capitalist twist more typical of New Age fringe groups than of traditional Sufi orders.

Conversely, the movement is certainly *not* represented in the most important features we normally consider as typical of the New Age (see them as defined, for example, by (Sutcliffe 2002)): first, holistic theology with the subsequent emphasis on the spiritual authority of the self—in contrast, the Haqqaniyya is a highly hierarchical group that places in the authority of charismatic individuals, such as the former and current leaders of the order, as well as Rauf Felpete himself, great importance; second, the belief in multiple deities and communication with them through channelling—contrariwise, the Haqqaniyya promotes monotheism emphasising *tawhid;* and third, a tendency towards de-traditionalisation—whereas Rauf Felpete tries with his ideas to do the opposite, to traditionalise, by bringing towards an Islamic field people akin to less conservative lifestyles.

With regard to gender norms, Rauf Felpete's ideas are an attempt to bring the traditional religious discourse of Nazim al-Haqqani into the Latin American context, with a quite straightforward call for gender determinism and pronatalism, as understood by Sufi Islamic conservatives, such as Nazim al-Haqqani's. In this view, the most important role of women is to procreate; they should concentrate in doing just that. Maternity is portrayed as a sacred duty, and such exclusive dedication is not presented as limiting the women's potential by not allowing her to explore other aspects of her identity, but on the contrary, as returning her to a natural, instinctual state of being. Rauf Felpete presents these ideas as if they were not a personal opinion, but rather a matter of fact; he aims at *demonstrating* that the instinct of women *is* childrearing and there is no choice to be made on deciding whether this is the case. In terms of asking women to stay at home, there is also a discursive shift. What is often considered as a restriction, is here presented as a priviledge; the stay-at-home woman is said to be a queen, protected by her husband from the vices and perils of society. If she feels uncomfortable in this role, her duty is reinterpreted to become the more empowering *patrona.* All these complex yet subtle rhetorical techniques allow us to conclude that Rauf Felpete's gender ideology is an act of counter-discursivity, an effort to pull people away from the more liberal understanding of gender, and bring them closer to a conservative lifestyle inspired in the Haqqani way of living Islam. As such, ideas shared by neopatriarchal Christian and Muslim ideologues that resonate with the debates on gender of the Latin American contexts (and beyond), are here also crucially discussed; namely, abortion, homosexuality and infidelity.

In this article, I have argued that Rauf Felpete's ideas on gender and the family are as much inspired in the conservative Islamic model that proposed his master Nazim al-Haqqani, as they are a reaction against the deep societal transformations with regard to gender rights that is experiencing Argentina at the time in which he is writing and delivering his sermons. The diversification of family structures is considered an error by the author and an ideal traditional family, monogamous and heterosexual, is presented as a natural structure proper of the *good old days* threatened with extinction. He seems to be aware of the fact that his audience may be reluctant to embrace his conservative ideals, and for this reason, a number of negotiations appear in the text; ideas that are *a must* in Nazim al-Haqqani's discourse are reframed as mere recommendations, a woman that should not work becomes a women that better does not work; the wife, in theory exclusively a caregiver, can work from home if she wishes so; the husband, in theory exclusively a breadwinner, comforts a crying baby in the middle of the night. The most controversial aspects of Nazim al-Haqqani's views on gender (for example, his stance

against girls' education) is absent in the *Enseñanzas*. However, all of these are discreet concessions, and, overall, the distinction of roles remains clear and gender determinism is overtly defended.

Rauf Felpete's unique way of importing a Sufi conservative religious ideology with a number of selective borrowings from other religious sources opens up a number of interesting questions that will deserve further study. It seems clear that his closest committed disciples share at least to a certain extent his support for a conservative lifestyle. It also seems clear that the book tries to appeal to a public much wider than his current discipleship; a wider audience, possibly interested in countercultural, *seen as oriental*, religious movements and ideas. The text seems to me to be an attempt to bring towards a conservative Sufi way of living Islam people with a diffuse New Age background, and by this, I mean, an interest in alternative spiritualities, broadly defined. However, the precise features of this audience are still unknown. It would be interesting to know who reads the text, what is the reception of the text not only among the followers, but also among the readers. Does this wider readership accept and reproduce the gender values that Rauf Felpete promotes? Do they selectively learn, renegotiate and critically incorporate some of the gender norms contained in the *Enseñanzas?* If so, how? How effective is Rauf Felpete in his project of Islamizing the New Age field in Latin America through the Haqqaniyya? How central is the promotion of a gendered lifestyle to his overall religious project? To what extent does this text need to be approached simply as a utopian model, thus *aspirational* in character? How appealing is for people his model of gender conservatism in the Spanish-speaking world of the early 21st century? Additionally, for those who feel attracted to his call, what do they, exactly, find in the message appealing?

The case of the writings of Abdul Rauf Felpete is an interesting illustration of the adaptations Sufi messages undergo once they travel through different geographies and cultures, trying in as much as they can, to be faithful to the authentic call of the initial message, yet bearing in mind the need to adapt, at least to a certain extent, to the identity of those reading and receiving it. Instances of cultural transmutation are also clear; the text is written clearly responding to the particular circumstances of the Argentinian context in which Rauf Felpete writes, and the conservative Islamic model of gender relations he proposes is used to make sense and respond to the rapid social transformations that the Argentina of the early 21st century is undergoing in terms of gender and family values.

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Notes

[1] In the case of the study of Islam in Latin America, some of the first most significant contributions were contained in the edited volume *Crescent over Another Horizon* (Logroño Narbona et al. 2015); relevant in this volume with regard to the Argentinian context is Montenegro's (2016) contribution. Additionally, of value were the first attempts to survey and map the presence of Islam in the region (Chitwood 2016, 2017). The volume *Islam and the Americas*, edited by Khan (2015) also contains valuable case-studies but mostly concentrates on Central and North America and has a notable specialization on Caribbean communities. A recent journal issue edited by Frank Usarski (2019) about Judaism and Islam in Latin America contains recent research and a number of interesting cases, although the only contribution dealing with Argentina is a comparative perspective of conversion to orthodox Judaism and Islam, see Siebzehner and Senkman (2019a), for a version in Spanish see Siebzehner and Senkman (2019b). Studies about Sufism in Argentina are still rare. A worth mentioning recent contribution is Montenegro's (2020) study of the practice of saint's visitation to an Alawi *wali* by Argentinian devotees of both the Alawiyya and the Haqqaniyya.

[2] In this article, I will refer to the Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya of Rauf Felpete simply as the Haqqaniyya. Although devotees of the group favour the use of the term Naqshbandiyya, rather than Haqqaniyya, to refer to themselves, I have chosen the latter to avoid confusion with another Naqshbandi group that also has a transnational presence in the Southern Cone region (i.e., in Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina) as well as in Mexico and Spain; I am referring to a Western Sufi group, less conservative, which consists of

followers of Omar Ali-Shah (Sedgwick 2018, p. 17). The Haqqaniyya I am referring to in this article, is also different from, the more worldwide famous Haqqani network, an Afghani jihadi group with connections with the Taliban. I also would like to note that some authors refer to the group as the Naqshbandiyya Rabbaniyya or as the Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya Rabbaniyya, as the complete name of its current leader, the son of Nazim al-Haqqani, is Mehmet 'Adil al-Haqqani al-Rabbani (Sedgwick 2018), whereas others call them Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya or Haqqaniyya (e.g., Piraino 2016). I follow this tradition for the sake of simplicity.

3 There is a wealth of literature on the group, specially though, on its European and US branches; see for example, Piraino (2016); Yarosh (2019); Nielsen et al. (2006) and Milani and Possamai (2013). Furthermore, in his overview of the Sufi trends and groups that exist in Latin America, Sedgwick (2018, p. 23) gives details of the groups of the Haqqaniyya that exist in Argentina. He also provides an informative account of the order in Mexico, Chile and Brazil.

4 In this article the terms *liberal* and *conservative* represent the opposite ends of an ideological spectrum on social values. By liberal I mean the inclination to adopt and tolerate change or innovation in reference to social norms. In contraposition, by conservative I mean the position of aversion towards change or innovation in social mores and the holding of traditional (those that have been held by the majority over long time) values.

5 The majority of Haqqani devotees in Latin America today recognise the authority of Rauf Felpete, although there are still groups with a stronger attachment to the North American Haqqaniyya, mostly Mexican, but not only.

6 These differences have been partly addressed by Piraino (2016) who has described the different groups that exist in *the West* in his study of the Haqqaniyya's presence online.

7 The followers of the New Age come from diverse ideological backgrounds; whereas some (the numerical majority) support liberal mores, others, come from conservative (Catholic and non-Catholic) backgrounds. It seems obvious that for those closer to the political Left, adopting the lifestyle proposed by Rauf Felpete implies major changes. However, these forms of Islamic conservatism also imply major life changes for Argentinians ideologically conservative, as one should not assume that the conservatism proposed by different religious traditions is all the same.

8 Although there is difficulty in having reliable data, this is the number provided by the association of descendants of the Syrian-Lebanese diaspora, https://web.archive.org/web/20100620004217/http://www.fearab.org.ar/inmigracion_sirio_libanesa_en_argentina.php, last visited on the 3 September 2021. An interesting recent study of the Arab migrations to Argentina is Balloffet (2020).

9 Lucía Amparo E. Salinas (2015) as well as Susana Pilgrim (2018) have both conducted ethnographic work with Argentina's communities of Haqqanis; these are the most in-depth studies existing on the group.

10 Semán and Viotti have explained that, in particular, the Argentinian followers of the New Age that had an interest in *Oriental* religions were ideologically diverse: *"the interest in Eastern religions was heterogeneous and could not be ascribed to a single faction or ideological tendency. It mostly occurred among intellectuals of liberal and socialist origin but also among positivists and Catholics"* (Semán and Viotti 2019, p. 198); some of the Catholics, I would add, could presumably be ideologically more conservative. The coalescence of New Age and conservatism in Argentina is best represented by the conservative former president Mauricio Macri, a public figure that is often considered a New Ager, because to his scarce knowledge of the Catholic religion has to be added his public recognition of sympathizing with the "*Buddhist ideology*" (Macri in Semán and Viotti 2019, p. 193).

11 This is the word used in this order for referring to religious sermons. Although the most common spelling of this word is by obeying to the modern Turkish form, *sohbet*, throughout the text I use the term *sohbat* (with an -a- instead of an -e-) in respecting the form used by Rauf Felpete in all his written output.

12 Spanish, like other romance languages, has a clearer binary character than English. Pronouns, adjectives and nouns are all gendered; its plural form is regardless of the gender of the constituents, expressed in masculine form, marked with an -o. The alternative that gained popularity in Argentina and that was from there exported to other parts of the world was the practice of replacing with an -e the original -o; the new variant is neutral in that it neither represents the masculine -o or the feminine -a. Other language-inclusive alternatives have existed for years—language inclusiveness begun in the 1970s in the country, coinciding with the rise of feminism- such as the replacement of the -o with a @ or an -x, but the -e, it is often argued, defies binarism (unlike the @) and it is easier to pronounce (than the -x). Thence, its use quickly gained popularity in other Spanish-speaking countries as well, to the extent that it pushed in 2019 the Royal Spanish Academy, the institution recognised as to be in charge of preserving the normative standards of the Spanish language with safeguarding its *correct* (my emphasis) use, to decide whether the neutral form of plural -e, was to become accepted as correct—to which the Academy decided against. Despite of this, the use of inclusive language has become increasingly common, and specially in Argentina, it has been normalised in a number of mediums, from television, to social media.

13 The same seems to be the case in the Haqqaniyya in North America, where women also participate in the gender segregated rituals but are never granted leadership roles (Hermansen 2006).

14 I am not aware of any existing research dealing with the gender dimension of the readership of Sufi literature. That women outnumber men as readers of Sufi texts is an impression I have personally obtained over the years spent conducting research among Sufis, but further research would be needed to obtain a realistic picture.

15 An interesting study of gender complementarianism in Islam explores the dynamics of this form of gender determinism in Indonesian households, with interesting parallels to the case here presented, see Rinaldo (2019).

16 The term New Age encompasses a vast plurality of religious phenomena and as such, the New Age ideas on politics reflect this diversity, although it has been agreed that a number of core themes as well as some direction in the political direction is identifiable. The first to note this was Kyle (1995), whose study on the political views among New Agers is still today relevant, partly because the interplay between New Age religion and politics, remains largely understudied, with a few but notable exceptions (Höllinger 2004; Fonneland 2017). In Argentina, the New Age field was at the same time, autonomous from, yet to a certain extent influential to a range of leftist political movements in the last quarter of the 20th century (Manzano 2017a, 2017b).

17 An example would be the rocketing numbers of individual support to and participation in NGOs since the 1990s; an example of how people feel as having the power to exert change in realities that are much larger than themselves (Franck 1999).

18 Interview given to the Argentinian Newspaper *La Voz*, on the 14 July of 2014; see, https://www.lavoz.com.ar/supletemas/guardianes-de-la-ultima-frontera/, last accessed on the 10 January 2022.

19 He has explained in an interview he has given to the Argentinian Newspaper *La Nación* on the 26 December of 2004 that he is a "huesero" (bonesetter), not a commonly used term, technique of bone accommodation he ensures has learnt from his grandmother, see, https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/rauf-abdul-felpete-el-sheik-sufi-de-la-patagonia-nid666031/, last accessed on the 10 January 2022.

20 See https://www.rabbaniargentina.com.ar/?page_id=238, last accessed on the 10 January 2022.

21 I am not here interested in discussing whether this is actually the case, but rather in noticing that Islam is often invoked by Muslims to legitimize their actions in relation to the realm of marriage. In this approach to Islam that emphasizes the dialectal nature of religious praxis, we may want to note that, marriage is not explicitly celebrated in the Qur'an but what it appears is a rather vaguer encouragement to mating for procreation, with perhaps the exception of sura 30:21: "Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect". The verse is used sometimes by Muslims today to sustain the idea of the sacredness of marriage in Islam. Among the examples of the notion of mating I consider 7:189 ("It is He who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her: when one lies with his wife and she conceives a light burden, going about freely, then grows heavy, they both pray to God, their Lord, 'if You give us a good child we shall certainly be grateful'"), and 42:11 ("The Creator of the heavens and earth. He made mates for you from among yourselves—and for the animals too—so that you may multiply. There is nothing like Him: He is the All Hearing, the All Seeing") the most illustrative. Moreover, there is in far more abundance verses indicating the modes of behaviour appropriate in relation to one's wives; on these regulatory aspects of behaviour related to marriage there is plenty of verses, see for example, 2: 187, 2: 221–223, 2: 226, 4: 3–4, 4: 19–25, 23: 5–7, 24: 3, 33: 37, 70: 29–31, 58: 1–4. Hadith literature is also abundant with indications of this kind. (All the Qur'anic quotations in this article have been translated into English, and for that I have used the 2015 edition of the English translation by (Abdel Haleem 2015)).

22 Examples of religious literature in the English language asserting the *half of your religion* injunction are manifold, here just a few: Maqsood (1995); Ahmad (2018, p. 3). For academic works discussing the directive, see for example, al-Faruqi (1985); Fluehr-Lobban (2004) and Hassouneh-Phillips (2001).

23 Perhaps in line with the encouragement provided by the Qur'an in verse 24:32: "Marry off the single among you, and those of your male and female slaves who are fit [for marriage]. If they are poor, God will provide for them from His bounty: God's bounty is infinite and He is all knowing".

24 Arabic word used to refer to an Islamic Sufi Order.

25 This is also the case, although quite informally conducted, among members of the Haqqaniyya in other parts of the world, as well as in the transnational order of Moroccan origin Qadiriyya Budshishiyya.

26 When looked comparatively, the ideas on the family of the Haqqani shaykh are quite similar to those of the Catholic and Evangelical Latin American right (see, for example, the studies of Carbonelli et al. 2011; Jones and Cunial 2012).What seems to be in sharp contrast with Rauf Felpete's position is not the ideas of Christian leaders but of devotees, with a number of studies indicating a wide ideological gap between leadership (leaders and small groups of Christian religiously pious activists) and discipleship, in ideological terms (Bonnin 2009). Preliminary observations of Haqqanis in Latin America, especially in urban settings, also seem to indicate that liberal attitudes are more common among them but further ethnographic research would be needed to verify those claims.

27 In 2011, the percentage of married people per 1000 inhabitants in Argentina was of 3.16, whereas in France was 3.58 (2012), in Spain was 3.53 (2012), in the UK 4.46 (2010) and in the US 6.8 (2012), https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/People/Marriage,-divorce-and-children/Marriages-per-thousand-people, last accessed on the 10 September 2021.

28 For example see Felitti's (2011) study. At the same time, there is a widespread similar approach to the diversification of family structures among Islamic preachers (not only Sufis). Although one might suppose that a wide array of positions appears represented within the field of Sufi family ideologies, they have never been systematically studied. In the broader Islamic field, see the remarkably similar approach that sees the diversification of family structures as a deterioration of the institution of the family in, for example, Yusuf al-Qaradawi's (2019, p. 159) approach.

[29] See for example, the interesting discussion of the transitioning of Arab families towards a more diverse model of family, eloquently presented by Courbage and Todd (2014, chp. 3).

[30] For Christian family ideologues of the 19th century, time in which industrialization brought about major changes to the family structures of some Western European countries, see Van Osselaer and Maurits (2020).

[31] Although debates both in the streets and at a level of Parliament have existed since 2005, when a nation-wide organization called the Campaign in Favour of Legal, Safe and Free Abortion Rights was founded.

[32] Illustrative in this regard is the video of the shaykh condemning abortion in an interview he gave to a local newspaper and that has been posted in Facebook by his followers: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1764544513589431, last accessed on the 27 December 2021.

[33] The anti-modern stance of the Guenonian philosophy has been masterly analysed by Sedgwick (2009).

[34] For a discussion of diverse historical contexts in the Muslim world (mostly in the Middle East, though) and on how they have changed over time with regard to family values and approaches to gender, see Kandiyoti (2008). The use of the family (and of religion) as the sources of salvation from a perceived as a civilizational collapse, is neither unique to the Middle East, nor to Islam. A number of Christian churches across the globe conceive religiously sanctioned notions of home, family and domesticity as a cure to what they consider is a political and moral chaos pervading their societies (e.g., Ellis and Ter Haar 1998; Newell 2005). In the nineteenth century the cult of domesticity emerged, the idealization of the home as a safe and calm space separated from a perceived as dangerous external world. This makes sense, as some studies have noted, before the nineteenth century there was very little that could be categorised as homey about most houses (Van Osselaer and Maurits 2020). Rather than places for relax, they were production and consumption sites, and thus rather crowded and busy. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, the household ceased to be a production centre, especially in industrialized and urban areas, both in Europe and in the Middle East. Tucker's study of nineteenth-century Egypt suggests that the strongly interventionist state policies of the Muhammad 'Ali period resulted in women's recruitment into public works, state-run industries, and expanding sectors of health and education, moment in which ideas of womanhood and an elaboration of the cult of domesticity became prominent. For more information on this particular case-study see Tucker (1979, 1985).

[35] Although, it is also worth noticing that this is the same person that encourages women to cease to work outside of the home to focus on the caregiving of family members; thence, contradictorily enough, who is to fulfil the breadwinner role if she has to stay at home?

[36] Germany and Spain are the countries where the largest continental European groups are based. They also have some of the most conservative members.

[37] Instances in which there is an explicit discussion of the issue of men being unfaithful to women appear in the following pages of the *Enseñanzas*: 16, 23, 70, 71, 96, 140, 152.

[38] Further information on the numerous Campaigns against Gender Violence undertaken by the Argentinian Government can be found in the government's website, please see, https://www.argentina.gob.ar/generos/plan_nacional_de_accion_contra_las_violencias_por_motivos_de_genero, last accessed on the 10 January 2022.

[39] Although this data does not include the informal work sector, that increases heavily the proportion of women who actually work in most countries; still, Argentina has female participation parameters that are much higher than those in most Muslim-majority countries, and specially in those Middle Eastern countries where the leadership of the Haqqaniyya has a presence, namely, Turkey and Syria. https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS/rankings, last accessed on the 11 September 2021.

[40] It is known that in the US the expectation of conforming to conservative gender norms by American Sufi women causes oftentimes discomfort and that when *Western* women have visited shrines in the Muslim world they have been accorded privileges not granted to other women (Hermansen 2006).

[41] It is also known that the suggestion of women staying at home is equally difficult to implement in Europe, where the majority of those female followers that decide to obey to those recommendations are mostly those living in Haqqani communes in the countryside, e.g., in Andalusia, Spain, there is one of the largest Haqqani communities in the world in which women conform to these traditional role models.

[42] Although Muslims supportive of the idea of the motherhood's sacred character look at the Qur'an for legitimising their views, the verse most often used in this regard speaks of the need to honour mothers (31:14), yet nothing specific about their sacredness is stated.

[43] In the year 1975, the average number of children per woman in the Muslim world was of 6.8 children, in 2005 was 3.5, with some countries having very low rates, such as Azerbaijan with a rate of 1.7, and others in which the fertility rates are similar than those in France, such as Iran and Tunisia (Courbage and Todd 2014, p. xii).

[44] Quite famously, anti-gender activists belonging to evangelical Christian groups burnt an effigy of Judith Butler in Sao Paulo in 2017, see the protests in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhlDqBM9vYU, last accessed on the 8 September 2021.

[45] This attitude against pre-primary education is also common, it seems, among at least some of the Haqqani devotees both in Europe and in Latin America; it also resonates more widely with societal attitudes towards pre-primary education in the Middle East, where Nazim al-Haqqani comes from. Correlative to their respective GDPs, the Middle East, with the exception of Algeria, has

among the lowest enrolments in pre-primary education in the world, see https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRE.ENRR, last accessed on the 1 September 2021. Algeria's rapid expansion of pre-primary education is considered a success, a country whose pre-primary education gross enrolment went from 2% in 1999 to 79% in 2011 (El-Kogali and Krafft 2015, p. 78). For further information about the relative lack of pre-primary education in the region see (El-Kogali and Krafft 2015, chp. 2).

[46] The data (in USD) can be obtained by dividing the Annual average household income into 12 months, https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/argentina/annual-household-income-per-capita, last accessed on the 25 January 2022.

[47] Argentina being a country worldwide known for their close relationship with psychoanalysis and with high rates of people in therapy, especially in larger cities.

[48] The case contradicts the common view that suggests that charismatic religious leaders are blindly followed and never questioned; this time, the audience seems to have reacted with uproar.

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Essay

Goddess of the Orient: Exploring the Relationship between the Persian Goddess Anahita and the Sufi Journey to Mount Qaf

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Abstract: This paper explores the possible connections between the Persian Goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita and Sufi cosmology. How can we trace images, symbols and functions of the goddess in the symbolic journey to Mount Qaf in Sufism? The research question was posed by the author after a collision of mystical experiences and dreams with the figure of Anahita while being on the Sufi path. The paper offers a linguistic, scriptural and hermeneutic analysis of Anahita in the Avesta and her role in Zoroastrian cosmology, while looking at the symbolic importance of Mount Qaf and the figure of Khezr in Sufism. The comparative study draws on the work of Henry Corbin and Shahab al-Din Sohrawardi to explore the threads between these two ancient Persian traditions.

Keywords: Aredvi Sura Anahita; Sufism; Mount Qaf; Divine Feminine; Xvarnah; Khezr; mystical experience

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1. Introduction

Amongst the contemporary rising interest for the re-discovery of the Divine Feminine has been also a growing interest to study and research the ancient Persian Goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita. The unique research element of this goddess is that she was not exiled but included in the Zoroastrian cosmology and sacred scriptures. Moreover, she held an important role assisting Ahura Mazda himself, the Zoroastrian Godhead. Her role was so significant that when we study the scriptures carefully, we can read that Ahura Mazda was in fact himself dependent upon the blessings and guiding force of the goddess, to bring his religion to humanity through his prophet, Zarathushtra.

For this paper, I will explore the figure of Anahita through first elaborating on two personal experiences I had with a figure named Anahita. These initial encounters coincided with the year that I came to the Naqshbandi Sufi order of which I became a student and practitioner. The parallel and synchronistic experiences I had in the subsequent years with the figure of Anahita as well as classical Sufi experiences, made me question and research their interconnectivity and symbolic relationship of the two. This paper culminates the first part of this research.

Through both a textual and historical study, we will explore the goddess' name and role in the Zoroastrian scriptures. Furthermore, I will draw on the work of Henry Corbin (1903–1978) to explore the significance of the goddess in the Zoroastrian cosmology.

Henry Corbin was born in Paris and came into contact with Louis Massignon (1883–1962), director of Islamic studies at the Sorbonne. When Massignon gave him a volume of the work of Sohrawardi, he said "through my meeting with Sohrawardi my spiritual destiny for the passage through this world was sealed. Platonism expressed in the terms of Zoroastrian angelology of ancient Persia, illuminated the path that I was seeking".[1] He went to Iran in 1939, and later also Istanbul, to immerse himself in Islamic and Persian mysticism where he spent much of his time studying and translating the work of Sohrawardi. He succeeded Massignon in the Chair of Islamic studies at the Sorbonne in 1954. He wrote his three major works in the same decade, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi (1969)*, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth (1960) and Avicenna and the Visionary Recital (1960)*.

Corbin only wrote a few passages about Anahita, and in each of them she is described as an important deity in Zoroastrianism:

> "There is in Eran-Vej a mountain called Hukairya (Hugar, the very high), a mountain which is as high as the stars, and from which pours down the torrent of the heavenly Waters of Ardvi Sura Anahita, the High, the Sovereign, the Immaculate, a torrent possessing a Xvarnah as great as all the Waters together which flow upon the Earth. There it is that the earthly abode of the goddess of the heavenly Waters is imagined. She thus appears as the paradisal source of the Water of Life. Marvelous plants and trees grow in or around this wellspring, and above all the white Haoma, "Gaokarena", of which it is said: He who partakes of it becomes immortal. That is why the Elixir of immortality will be made from this at the moment of the final Transfiguration. The tree which cures all ills and "in which are deposited the seeds of all plants", grows next to the white Haoma. Indeed, the fertility of all beings in all their forms depends on the goddess or feminine Angel Ardvi Sura Anahita" (Corbin [1960] 1977, p. 26)

The exploration of the goddess will be followed by a comparative study on the Sufi journey to Mount Qaf, the emerald green mountain that marks the arrival of the traveler in Sufi cosmology. I will then discuss the Sufi archetype of Khezr, his significance for Sufis and the symbols and roles associated to him. Finally, we will explore the Zoroastrian Light of Glory (Xvarnah) of which the scriptures say that Anahita is the guardian and keeper of. This Light of Glory is the prophetic light that leads Zarathushtra to Ahura Mazda and it is the divine grace that he needs on his journey.

2. Personal Experience

For the context of this paper, I have chosen to elaborate the personal impetus and context that impelled me to explore the relationship between this ancient goddess and Sufi symbolism. I will share one hypnagogic[2] dream and one mystical experience, both with the figure of Anahita. These experiences came to me in the same year that I met a Sufi teacher (*shaykh*) from a Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya order.[3] It was also the same year that I started my training as a Jungian Analyst and was in the process of psychoanalysis myself. I was familiar with the idea of the personal and collective unconscious, archetypes and various myths and deities from around the world though was not yet familiar with any goddess figures from my own Persian heritage.

My interest for Sufism was an intuitive one, rather than an intellectual pursuit, thus I had not yet familiarized myself with Sufi doctrine or studies. The way I was led to my Sufi teacher was through a series of synchronicities and dreams as I was not looking for a teacher or a Sufi order at the time. The dreams and experiences with a figure that named herself Anahita happened a couple of months before I was to find my way to a Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya order. It is interesting to note that all of my experiences with Anahita have happened in an in between waking state, the so-called hypnogogic state:

> The first time this feminine presence appeared to me, I was half asleep in a state of agitation, my body was sweating and I was in an overall state of discomfort and unease. I was feeling a presence with me that was keeping me half awake and yet I didn't know what or whom it was. At a certain point I could feel it was a feminine presence and I recognized it as Persian and a familiar sense came over me, as if she was some far distant ancestor I did not know. In that hypnagogic state I asked '*who are you?*' and a voice answered '*Anahita*'. 'That is a Persian female name' is all I knew and thought. Then, I went into a dream-vision state in which I was shown a narrative through a series of images that was accompanied by a strong physical sensory awareness.[4]

The images shown to me during the vision that followed the experience eventually became one of the most important dreams[5] in my psychoanalytical process which opened up an important and psychological untangling from the so-called negative animus.[6] It goes

beyond the scope of this paper to go into that dream and its psychological interpretation. However, it is significant to mention that this dream and its visceral bodily experiences opened the gateway to the relationship that was to be established with the feminine archetype, which is in line with the Jungian thought of the feminine individuation process. (Jung [1937] 1959, par. 490).

In the next days and months, I started researching Anahita and to my surprise immediately found out that Anahita was a Great Mother or Goddess figure in ancient, pre-Zoroastrian Persia and a Zoroastrian Angel-Goddess. My exploration of Anahita and deepening interest in Sufism started to unfold parallel to each other, though I was not conscious of this at the time. It was not long after meeting the teacher of the Naqshbandi order and practicing the heart-meditation and practice (*zikr*) of this Sufi Order, that Anahita again revealed herself to me, this time in a very different way.

> In that hypnagogic sleep-waking state I felt my heart whirl open and a vibrational field enter my body. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced before.[7] Its intensity gripped every cell in my body and it was beyond my control, doing, or will. All I know is that there was a presence with me again and I witnessed myself asking the same question: "*Who are you?*" It again answered, but this time in the same vibrational field and frequency that was running through my body. The vibration spoke thoroughly: A–N–A–H–I–T–A. The slow vibrational presence of the letters encompassed my whole body. I was in what I can only describe as awe. I was conscious enough to recognize her as the feminine presence that had visited me before. The recognition helped me trust what was happening to my body and allow the vibrations to remain for a short amount of time, though I have no awareness of time and how long the encounter actually took.[8]

These visitations continued over the course of the next years, as did my experiences on the Sufi path. And so my curiosity for this feminine presence grew stronger: Who is Anahita? What is her connection to the (spiritual) heart and to Sufism? The questions lead me to finding historical links between this ancient goddess and the Sufi journey, more specifically the quest to Mount Qaf. At the time, there was only a few contemporary pieces of literature on Anahita. In recent years more has been published and fortunately there has been an increasing academic and anthropological interest in the study of this ancient Persian goddess.

3. Aredvi Sura Anahita

Anahita is a pre-Zoroastrian water goddess of Persia who was widely venerated during the Achaemenid (7300–330 BCE) and Sassanian (224–651 CE) times (Boyce 1967, p. 37) with the earliest material evidence currently known dating back to the Median Period (c. 1100–c. 550 BCE).[9] What is unique about Anahita is that she did not disappear with the monotheistic emergence of religion that started with Zoroastrianism in Persia. She was incorporated into the Zoroastrian pantheon and angelic hierarchy as an Angel-Goddess and became venerated as a *yazata:* an angel "worthy of worship". For the purpose of this paper, I will focus mainly on the descriptions we have of Anahita from the Zoroastrian scriptures. She became known in the Avesta, the sacred scriptures of Zoroastrianism, as *Aredvi Sura Anahita*. She therefor occupies an important place in the history of religion as a bridge between the matriarchal and patriarchal era as she is one of the few goddesses that has been integrated into an orthodox faith (Boyce 1982, p. 202).

If we look at the linguistic translation of Aredvi Sura Anahita, there seems to be a general consensus about the second adjective *Sura*, which is translated as 'mighty' or 'strong' (Saadi-Nejad 2021, pp. 46–49). The first adjective, *Aredvi* is often translated as 'moist' (Ibid, pp. 45–46) or 'the moist one' but not all scholars agree on this translation as some refer to a dialectic translation from the Avestan '*aredra*' which would translate as 'the competent one' or 'she who succeeds' (Ibid, p. 46) (Kellens 2002, p. 322).

Anahita has generally been translated from the Avestan language as 'immaculate' or 'pure' ('an-ahita' translated as 'not polluted' or 'not-soiled' (Nabarz 2013, p. 118). Pirart suggests in his essay on the linguistic analysis of Anahita's name and role in the Avesta that a more specific translation would be "the one who cannot be obscured or affected [by darkness or pollution]" (Pirart 2003, p. 201). I adhere to this translation and interpretation as it seems closer to her nature. Namely, it takes the emphasis off the virgin-like interpretation of Anahita as 'immaculate' or 'pure' into a powerful deity that is the very Source of Life itself—a source that cannot be polluted or affected by any shadow forces within creation. This aspect would make her most fitting for the role as the holder of the Zoroastrian Light of Glory, the *Xvarnah*. I will go into a more in-depth exploration of the Xvarnah later in this paper. For now, I would like to refer to the term as it is used and defined by Corbin: "It is the all-luminous substance, the pure luminescence of which Ohrmzad's (Ahura Mazda's) creatures were constituted at their origin.[10] It is the Energy of sacral light which gives coherence to their being . . . " (Corbin [1960] 1977, p. 13). Corbin continues to elaborate on the "eschatological hope" this Light is associated with as it is to ensure the Earth Angel *Zamyat*, is able to ensure the transfiguration and renewal of the Earth. (Yasht 19.11).

An alternative translation has been argued by scholars Kellens and Oettinger, who translated Anahita as 'unrestrained' (Kellens 2002, p. 322) or 'unbound' and 'like her original nature as torrential river' (Kellens 2002, p. 322; Oettinger 2001) as argued by Saadi-Nejad in her linguistic analysis of the varieties of translations for the goddess' name (Saadi-Nejad 2021, p. 47). For this paper, I propose the following translation and interpretation for the goddess: 'the Mighty, Unrestrained Torrential River'.

This torrential river is not only seen as an earthly river, but as a celestial one (Pirart 2003, p. 200), sometimes referred to as the symbolic Milky Way (celestial nourishment) itself (Nyberg and Schaeder [1938] 1896; Saadi-Nejad 2021, p. 53). This view of Anahita is a significant one for giving the Feminine back her place in the Celestial spheres, as to not only associate her to the earthly and material planes. The Zoroastrian God Ahura Mazda invites and pleas for Anahita to come down to the earth:

'Then she went forth, O Zarathushtra, Aredvi Sura Anahita,

from yonder stars,

to the Ahura-created earth

Then she spoke, Aredvi Sura Anahita".

—Yasht 5, paragraph 88

The fifth Yasht ("Aban Yasht" or "Hymn to the Waters") is one of the longest and most elaborate hymns where Anahita plays a significant role and is described thoroughly in the dialogue between Ahura Mazda and Zarathushtra. The Yashts (approx. 1000–600 BCE) are a collection of twenty-one devotional hymns to the *yazatas*, preserving the Young Avestan oral tradition. In this dialogue, we find a remarkable passage that illustrates the significance and importance of Anahita. In paragraph 18 of Aban Yasht (Yasht 5), Ahura Mazda makes a boon and asks Anahita to guide Zarathushtra into his religion.

"Grant me this, O good, most beneficent Ardvi Sura Anahita!

That I may bring the son of Pourushaspa, the holy Zarathushtra,

to think after my law, to speak after my law, to do after my law!"

—Yasht 5, paragraph 18

In this significant passage, the Zoroastrian God is dependent upon the blessings of the Goddess for bringing his religion to his prophet. He is even dependent on Anahita to have Zarathushtra follow him and his law. From a hermeneutic perspective, this would make Anahita into the bestower of prophecy, and a guide for Zarathushtra to Ahura Mazda himself. Symbolically, it is in this passage that we find the importance of the translation of Anahita as 'unbound' and 'unrestrained'. She who is unrestrained has the freedom and the ability to move between the levels of reality, connecting heaven and earth, prophet and

his Lord. This particular function of Anahita will become important in our analysis and comparative study to the journey to Mount Qaf and the archetypal guide figure of Khezr.

In the beginning of the Aban Yasht, Ahura Mazda describes Aredvi Sura Anahita as the "life-increasing and holy, herd-increasing and holy, fold-increasing and holy, wealth-increasing and holy, country-increasing and holy" who is "worthy of praise".[11] She purifies the wombs of all females and the seeds of all males, providing milk in the breasts of the mothers "in the right measure and quality".[12] Her waters are as large as "all the waters upon the earth" that originate from her dwelling place that run from the high Hukairyra[13] down to the great sea Voroukasha upon which the world rests. Thus, this gives Anahita a dwelling place that is at the peak of the highest mountain from where she flows and nourishes the entire world. In her dwelling place, she "reigns over a large Fortune"[14], the Xvarnah, or Light of Glory. This makes the goddess both the keeper, protector and nourisher of life on the material plane as well as the guiding celestial—and as we have seen, prophetic—light of God. Her role in the prophetic tradition cannot be underestimated nor overlooked, as Corbin writes:

> "Furthermore, we should never lose sight of the eschatological role of Aredvi Sura (parallel to the primordial role of Spenta Armaiti[15], whose helper she is) in preserving the Xvarnah of Zarathushtra in the waters of the mystical lake, with a view over the conception of the final savior who will be brought into the world [. . .]. All these figures give substance to the idea of a feminine Divinity whose presence is precisely in accord with the characteristic features of Mazdean religious feeling. We also wish to point out that Joseph Campbell, recently indicated how one could discover, in the Zoroastrian dualist reform, the resurgence in Iran of religious factors that belong to the pre-Aryan matriarchal world" (Corbin [1960] 1977, pp. 278–288 n 46).

In the same commentary Corbin reminds us that the "supreme God" of the Aryans Ohrmzad (Ahura Mazda) is in fact a priest (Yasht 1.12), but "how is it possible that he has become the priest of the goddess and address prayers to her?"[16] He concludes that this important Yasht, as well as the importance of the role of other Feminine Angels in the Zoroastrian cosmology create a justifiable hypothesis that the early Zoroastrians community lived in a matriarchal system.[17]

Thus, Anahita as an Angel-Goddess is not only the nourisher and sustainer of life on the material, earthly plane (in her role as fertility goddess) but also a celestial nourisher, protectress of Divine Glory and a guide for the prophet. Furthermore, she holds an important role in the transfiguration of the Earth and is closely involved as nourisher, protector and helper of the Earth Angel (or Sophia) Spenta Armaiti.

Even though in the Avestan scriptures she is still created by Ahura Mazda himself, we cannot but conclude to give her a more equal position when we look at the culmination of all these attributes, roles and responsibilities that make Anahita into nothing less than the feminine aspect of the Godhead.[18]

4. Sufi Cosmology & the Journey to Mount Qaf

Mount Qaf in Sufi cosmology is known to be the mythical or cosmic mountain that encompasses the earth (Jalāl and Chittick 1983, p. 356 n. 11 and p. 357 n. 5). It is the dwelling place of the archetypal figure of the Simorgh (Persian phoenix), symbolizing the Sufi saint or the one who has made the journey back 'home' (Corbin [1990] 1998, p. 157). Henry Corbin describes Mount Qaf as the cosmic pole, the emerald rock or where the world of Hukairya (*Al-Malakut*) begins (Corbin [1960] 1977, pp. 71 and 28). It is equated with the physical geographical mountain of Alborz in northern Iran (Ibid, p. 74), within which the highest mountain of Iran is based, Mount Damavand. While Alborz holds both a mythical and geographical significance to Persian culture and literature, Mount Qaf and Hara Berezaiti[19] hold a purely imaginal and cosmological significance to respectively Sufism and Zoroastrianism. Both the places refer to the same mythical mountain of revelation

where the Spring of Life can be found. It is the imaginal locus between the worlds, where the visible and invisible spheres meet. Shahab Al-Din Sohrawardi (1154–1191), the great Persian philosopher and mystic, named this place *Na-Koja-Abad*, which translates as "the Abode of No-Where".[20]

> "This, Sohrawardi declares, is the world to which the ancient Sages alluded when they affirmed that beyond the sensory world there exists another universe with a contour and dimension and extension in a space [. . .]. It is the "eighth" clime or *keshvar*, the mystical Earth of Hurqayla[21], with emerald cities; it is situated on the summit of the cosmic mountain, which the traditions handed down in Islam call the mountain of Qaf" (Corbin [1978] 1994, p. 43)

In Sohrawardi's work, we find the repetitive motif of the journey to Mount Qaf, where the seeker will find the Spring of Life which marks a 'return to the Orient' and a freeing from the 'exile in the Occident'. This Orient is not the geographical one, but a symbolic arrival at the highest peak and center of the cosmic mountain; the Emerald Rock at the summit of Mount Qaf (Ibid, p. 44). It is in this center that the Spring of Life is found. One who bathed in this Spring is reborn and "becomes like Khidr" (Corbin 1971, pp. 142, 144).

As we have seen above, at the summit of the older Avestan mount Hara Berezaiti there is also a Spring of Life—embodied by the Goddess Angel Aredvi Sura Anahita—who possesses the Xvarnah, the Zoroastrian Light of Glory (Corbin [1960] 1977, p. 26). It is in the waters of Anahita that are held the seeds of the primordial man Yima, or according to the Avesta the seeds (or gold, light) of Zoroaster and his *Saoshyant* (offspring) who will serve at the end of our Aeon (Ibid., p. 49). Connections between these ancient mythological mountains are not difficult to find in the writings of Corbin as the work of Sohrawardi—whom Corbin's lifework is partly based on—is rich with these ancient Persian esoteric motifs and connections. It is in his work that these traditions come together and find each other in the various overlaying motifs.

5. Khezr: The Green One

One of the figures in Sufism associated with the 'Water or Spring of Life' is Khezr.[22] Let us look closer at this figure and his possible symbolic relationship to Anahita. Khezr is known by Islamic and Sufi scholars as the archetypal guide for the seeker. Tom Cheetham writes: "Khidr is the personal guide, and Corbin says, equivalent to the Paraclete and the Hidden Imam, to the Christ of the Cross of Light; he is the *Verus Propheta*, the inner guide of each person, the celestial Anthropos and Angel of Humanity whose appearance to every person is each time unique" (Cheetham 2005b, p. 122). This description, especially the latter, gives us a reference to the reflective and perhaps even androgynous nature of Khezr, which welcomes a comparative study on the connections to goddess Anahita whose very nature as water *is* reflection. Sohrawardi makes a clear statement about what it means to be a disciple of Khezr: to be initiated by him is to *become* him (Corbin [1969] 1997, pp. 60–61). This means that Khezr's role is to lead each disciple to him or herself, and thus own unique individuality. He is the colorless guide who wears the green mantle of truth (*haqiqa*), that will reveal a different note and image to the unique spirit of the time, place and people. Why this is especially important for the experience of the Feminine nature of the Godhead, I will elaborate on later in this paper.

In the Qur'an (Sura 18: 60–82) Moses asks God if there is anyone more knowledgeable than him, upon God confirms that he can be found 'where the two seas meet' and where the caught fish that they have brought with them comes alive and swims away. Moses sets out to find him and when he eventually does at the juncture of the two seas, he asks to be his companion for a while. Khezr warns that he will not be able to bear with him, but Moses insists. As they travel, Moses becomes more agitated with Khezr's seemingly unjust (sinking a boat, killing a boy) actions until they eventually part, only after Khezr explains to him the hidden reasons behind his actions, invisible to the first gaze on the situations they encountered (Ibn Kathir and Azami 2003, pp. 131–34). The story illustrates the place from where Khezr operates, which is a place of polarity and paradox, held within Divine will. It

is a symbolic reference to his transcendent function. He is the hermeneutic guide figure who is "one of our servants, whom we have endowed with our grace and our wisdom" (Sura 18: 65). The place he can be found is the place where two worlds meet (the seen and the unseen) and where the dead fish, symbolising the exoteric knowledge comes alive into an esoteric one or *gnosis*. He is sometimes referred to as the 'prophetic soul' within the human (Jalāl and Barks 1995) or the organ of perception that can be accessed through the eye of heart *(ayn al-qalb)* through which one sees and encounters God directly (Markwith 2009, p. 111). Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes that Khezr is regarded as the guardian of the fountain of life and the ever present initiatory function in the Islamic tradition (Seyyed 1989, pp. 89 and 108 n. 10):

> " . . . Man must therefor seek the fountain of life, led in this quest by the figure whom Islamic esoterism call Khidr, the guide upon the spiritual path, the representative and symbol of the Eliatic function which cannot but be always present. Having drunk of the water of immortality, which is also the elixir of Divine knowledge, man regains his original consciousness and primordial abode. His wandering ceases and he arrives after his long cosmic journey at that from which his true self never departed" (Ibid., p. 277)

6. Khezr and Anahita

The likeness between the description, symbolism and role of Khezr and Anahita is so close that a connection between these two figures can be assumed. What this connection entails exactly, is a subject for more in-depth research and discourse. It has been argued by Kathryn Babayan that it is one and the same figure, especially when we study Khezr from the cultural and anthropological perspective, where he is known as a fertility saint and women evoke him at childbirth or when they have the wish for a child (Babayan 2002, p. 368). Similarly, the places of goddess worship that once belonged to Anahita, slowly converted into Muslim shrines of worship of 'real' women from legends that spread after the Arab invasion. Boyce, in her well-known essay *Bibi Shahrbanu and the Lady of Pars*, shares in her field research the transformation of these sacred sites from the worship of a deity to the worship of a deceased holy person (or hero) and in some cases Khezr, and the underlying religious reasons (Boyce 1967, pp. 30–44). Although I agree that the earthly aspects of the goddess have gone underground, or rather undercover, partly through the invocation and worship of the figure of Khezr, I suggest a slightly different view on the esoteric relationship between Khezr and Anahita.

If indeed, Khezr is the guardian of the fountain or Spring of Life as argued by Nasr, or the archetypal guide figure toward this Spring, then Khezr could be seen as the personification of that aspect of the human soul that has the capacity to merge and unite with the Water of Life or the feminine 'ground of being' that underlies, protects and nourishes all of creation, known in ancient Persia as Anahita. In this merging, they are indeed one and the same guiding force that leads the innermost part of the human being home to the world of the soul. Perhaps this is symbolically best imaged in the relationship of the Sufi hoopoe bird and the great Simorgh (the Persian mythological bird or phoenix).

In one of Sohrawardi's works "The Incantation of Simorgh"[23] we find a feminine[24] description of the mythical Simorgh, who was first the 'hoopoe bird that set out on its journey to Mount Qaf'. Upon arriving there, she strips herself from all her feathers with her own beak, until the shadow of Mount Qaf would shine upon it for a certain time, transforming the hoopoe bird to the eternal Simorgh whose song awakens those who have fallen asleep.[25]

> "Simorgh flies while immobile, she takes flight but covers no distance; she comes closer and yet there is no separation. She possesses every hue but has herself no color. Her nest is in the Orient but it is not absent from the Occident. She is involved in everything but not dependent on anyone. All knowledge is derived from the modulation of this bird, just like the sound of all musical instruments emanates from it". (Corbin 1971, p. 146)

This description of Simorgh echoes many of the attributes of Anahita, who is the giver and sustainer of all of life, though unbound and unrestrained. Her dwelling place is the High Hara *(Hara Berezaiti)*, the peak of the cosmic mountain where the color green abounds, but she flows down through a thousand channels into all the waters of the Earth (Yasht 5.4). As the water of life, she will reflect all colors, but has herself no color. And within her dwelling place is found the Haoma tree, the tree that possesses all the seeds of creation, and within her waters is kept the most important fire in Zoroastrian cosmology; the Xvarnah, the Light of Glory.

7. Xvarnah—The Zoroastrian Light of Glory

In the old Mazdean stories, as well as in the Avesta—the primary sacred texts in the Zoroastrian religion—it is the *Xvarnah* (or *Farrah*, *Farnah*, *Farr* or *Khurrah*[26]) that plays an important role in both the prophetic initiation of Zoroaster as well as the return to Primordial Man (Yima) or state of being. It is generally translated as the (celestial) Light of Glory or Victorial Fire (Corbin 1971, p. 53). As we have seen above, this Light is not only a personal, transcendent Light but a universal one that Zoroastrians worshipped and made sacrifices to (Yasht 19). It is the Light that has an "eschatological hope" as argued by Corbin (Corbin [1960] 1977, p. 13) and a significant role in the purification, renewal and restoration of the Earth from the powers of ignorance (Yasht 19.18). This is highly significant as Anahita is also known as the 'coworker' *(hamkar)* of the Earth Angel Spenta Armaiti who plays a key role in the preservation of the Xvarnah that is to bring forth, or activate, the archetypal hero of the final restoration *(apokatastasis)* within humanity (Ibid, p. 50).

In the second Volume of his magnum opus, *En Islam Iranien* (Corbin 1971), Corbin gives an in-depth analysis of the etymology, history and various definitions of this word, since there are various levels of *Xvarnah* to be studied in the ancient writings. We find the practical or royal *Xvarnah* or 'divine favour' that was granted to Kings and leaders as well as the more mystical and celestial dimension of the *Xvarnah*, which Corbin is more interested in. He compares the receiving of or 're-uniting' with the *Xvarnah* as the 'resurrected body of light' that can pass through 'Mount Qaf without difficulty'. It is this 'body' that becomes the organ of perception in the 'eighth clime *(keshvar)*'.

Corbin makes an in-depth comparative study between the Mazdean *Xvarnah* and Kay Khusraw's dwelling in the 'hidden castle'[27] and the Western Holy Grail[28], whose analysis falls outside of the scope of this paper.[29] After an elaborate analysis of the word *Xvarnah*, its historical context and a comparative study with the motifs of the Holy Grail, Corbin draws the following conclusion:

> "So Kay Khusraw's mysterious castle, *Kang-Dez-Behesht* (Kang-Dez-Paradise) is itself erected in this 'eighth clime' where the city of Hurqalya belongs, i.e., the 'intermediate Orient'. City and castle make up the 'celestial pole', the sources of *Xvarnah* where the theophanies contemplated by the Sages of ancient Persia are born in an eternal aurora". (Corbin 1971, p. 113)

This comparison with the Holy Grail is indeed important to note, since the Holy Grail could indeed be another image of the Source or Water of Life found in Mount Qaf or the Zoroastrian Hara Berezaiti.

8. Water and Light

The links between the Xvarnah, held by Anahita and the symbolism of water is a significant one in our analysis. Corbin writes that water and light are traditionally interchangeable as sources of life and knowledge: "The Source is itself not an object of knowledge, but that which makes it gush forth". Thus, Anahita, as the container, source and torrential river of light can be seen the bestower of knowledge; she connects the seeker with the knowledge, making her into a benefactress and enabler of *gnosis*. This interpretation brings clarity to why Ahura Mazda, the almighty Mazdean God, would need the Goddess to guide his prophet Zarathushtra toward 'his good religion'. She has

the power to both bring knowledge *down* from the 'belly (Pirart 2003, p. 200) or tongue (Saadi-Nejad 2021, p. 63) of Ahura Madza'[30], the world of Light. She then holds, contains and reflect that Light to Zarathushtra and 'his offspring', which gives her the power to move and guide the prophet *toward* knowledge. Anahita, unbound and unrestrained to anyone, pure, clear and unpollutable, has the capacity to move anywhere without difficulty and reflect the Light of Glory to the seeker that is ready.

The links between Anahita as a water deity and water symbolism in Persian Sufism have also been made by Milad Milani in his book *Sufism in the Secret History of Persia (2013)* (Milani [2013] 2014) where he elaborates on the symbolic links between the two traditions:

> In Persian Sufism, Anahid is a prevalent and subliminal feature. Here she is not invoked in name, but being "associated with the ocean" is metaphoric for the act of becoming the disciple of a master and of traversing the Sufi path.[31] In the Sufi tradition, the ocean is temperament, the dangers contained within it, and the subtle rules that govern it govern the rules of engagement with the master of the path or, in effect, God. Traditionally, Zarathushtra received his revelation at dawn, at the foot of a riverbank during the *Haoma* (*Soma*) ceremony, whereby young priests would offer penitents to the waters (*Aban*). (Milani [2013] 2014, pp. 49–50)

9. Conclusions

Personal mystical experiences on the Sufi path that coincided with the appearance of a figure named Anahita in both my dreams and hypnagogic (sleep-waking) state were the impetus for an inquiry and research on the possible connections between the ancient Persian goddess Anahita and the Sufi journey. A textual and comparative analysis of the scriptures of the Avesta (Yasht 5) show that the goddess Anahita was not only incorporated into the Zoroastrian orthodoxy but has also been venerated as a highly significant Angel-Goddess that goes by the Avestan name *Aredvi Sura Anahita*. Her full Zoroastrian name implies that she is a 'mighty celestial torrent that is unrestricted, unbound and unpollutable'. She contains and preserves the most important Light in Zoroastrian cosmology: the *Xvarnah*, the Light of Glory. Anahita is not only an earthly Goddess who is responsible for fertility of women, men, soil and plants but she also plays a crucial role as a powerful deity that is responsible for preserving the celestial Light, that, in the words of Corbin carries "eschatological hope" (Corbin [1960] 1977, p. 13). She has an important role to play as a coworker *(hamkar)* of the Earth Angel Spenta Armaiti—the Persian Sophia—in the final restoration and renewal of the Earth according to Zoroastrian scriptures (Ibid., p. 50). She is the Goddess-Angel that preserves the 'seed' and Light of Zarathushtra and guides him to Ahura Mazda and his 'good religion'. She is therefor, a guiding force that Ahura Mazda needs in order to bring the prophet to himself (Yasht 5.18).

Furthermore, Anahita is described as a water deity in the Avesta and as the Source of Life that is situated at the highest point of the Zoroastrian mythological mountain Hara Berezaiti. It is this place that brings us to a very significant connection to Sufi cosmology and the journey to Mount Qaf. At the top of Mount Qaf is also situated the Water or Source of Life where the color green abounds and where the archetypal guide-figure of Khezr has his dwelling, the abode of which he is the guardian. Khezr is also known as the archetypal guide to those that are 'without a master' in Sufi literature. As the 'Green Man' he embodies the essential qualities of both heaven and earth and is the archetypal *isthmus* that comes forth out of—and guides the seeker into—the imaginal realm; the Mundus Imaginalis as described by Corbin, or the Source of Life at the summit of the mythical Mount Qaf. Here, Khezr can be seen as the 'embodiment' of the Zoroastrian *Xvarnah*, the Light of Glory that is the guiding Light which Anahita preserves. The connections between these two figures is worthy of in-depth research and further comparative study.

It is well-known and argued by scholars that ancient sites that once belonged to the era of Goddess worship or that were temples for Anahita slowly transformed in either Zoroastrian temples that later again became mosques or that became places of worship

for legendary or holy women (Boyce 1967) that were said to have lived as humans, rather than a deity. Worship of an invisible Goddess slowly became unacceptable and started to disappear during and after the increasing orthodoxy of Zoroastrianism and the later Islamic conversion of Iran. Therefor the traces of the ancient goddess Anahita have been veiled by these later traditions, stories and symbols. It is thus of no surprise that Anahita could not be named explicitly in Sufi cosmology and literature. This does not mean however, as we have seen, that Anahita has altogether disappeared from these cosmologies as a *living symbol* and 'Goddess of the Orient'.

With the rise of female practitioners in many mystical traditions, including that of Sufism, it is becoming increasingly important from both a psychological as well as phenomenological perspective to acknowledge the feminine aspects and symbols of these traditions, as well as the feminine deities associated with the mystical quest. It is through the images, symbols and the names of these figures in our heritage that practitioners and seekers relate to the imaginal realm. As it is well known in depth-psychology, these universal guiding forces can appear in their feminine form in a woman's psyche. These symbols or apparitions will not be recognised and remain unacknowledged or even dismissed if they are only interpreted within the framework of masculine oriented religious symbolism and iconography. Fortunately for our research on Anahita, she has been well-preserved as—perhaps one of the few—Goddess 'Names' that made it from a matriarchal, pagan society into a monotheistic one. Therefore, she occupies a unique position in reflecting the importance of the Divine Feminine in religion and mysticism.

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Notes

1 Quoted in Jambet (1981, pp. 40–41). See T. Cheetham (2005a, pp. 16–17).

2 A hypnagogic state of consciousness is referred to the transitional state between wakefulness and sleep in which visions, images and bodily experiences (including the more common phenomena of 'sleep paralysis') can occur. Cognitive schools of psychology sometimes refer to this as a 'hallucination'. However, from a Jungian or depth-psychological perspective, these are inter-dimensional or archetypal experiences that can transcend the psyche. These are sometimes referred to as 'psychoid' experiences, see Jung ([1947] 1960, para. 368).

3 I became an official student of this order in the subsequent years.

4 Diary entry from a dream-journal (no. 1) kept during my Jungian training.

5 More on the importance of dreams as a connection to the sacred during Jungian psychoanalysis: Jung ([1934] 1970, pp. 304, 864).

6 Carl Jung coined the masculine component within a woman's psyche 'animus' and the feminine within a man 'anima'. Coming to terms with the 'negative animus' is one of the difficulties in a woman's psychoanalytical journey. For more on the concepts of animus see: (Jung [1955] 2008).

7 The experience of a 'presence' via the heart correspond to Sufi mystical experiences 'through the power or intend of the heart' (*himma*), see Corbin ([1969] 1997, pp. 219–20).

8 Diary entry from a dream-journal (no. 3) kept during my Jungian training.

9 Saadi-Nejad, *Anahita*, p. 120.

10 "From it Ahura Mazda has created the many and good … beautiful, marvellous … creatures, full of life, resplendent". (Yasht 19.10)

11 Yasht 5.1 as translated in Nabarz (2005, p. 194).

12 Yasht 5.2-3.

13 This is also known as Hara Berezaiti (the High Watchpost) or the 'highest peak on high Hara', (Yasht 10. 88) and see also Boyce (1982, pp. 136–37).

14 Yasht 5.96, see for full translation Saadi-Nejad (2021, p. 55).

15 Corbin equates Spenta Armaiti to the Western Sophia, or the Angel-Soul of the World according to Zoroastrianism. Thus, Anahita is clearly related *but not equated* with the Soul of the World, or the Anima Mundi. This gives Anahita yet again an important differentiating role in the cosmology of the Divine Feminine.

16 Here Corbin refers to Yasht 5.18 where Ahura Mazda prays to Anahita to lead Zarathushtra to him and have him "attach to him".

17 See also Nyeberg, *Religionen des Alten Iran*, pp. 252 ff., 271–72 (Nyberg and Schaeder [1938] 1896).

18 There are similarities between the role, function and description of Anahita with the Jewish Shekinah that are worthy for further research. See: Baring (2013, p. 49): "In this extraordinary cosmology, the Shekinah or the feminine face of the godhead is named as Cosmic Womb, Palace, Enclosure, Fountain, Apple Orchard and Mystical Garden of Eden. She is named as the architect of the worlds, source or foundation of the world, and also as Radiance, Word or Glory of the unknowable ground or godhead. [. . .] This center expands or is sown as a ray of light into what is described in some texts as a sea of glory [. . .]. From here it emanates as a radiant cascade, a fountain of living water, pouring forth light to create, permeate and sustain all the worlds or dimensions into being".

19 As mentioned in the Avesta, where the dwelling place of Anahita is.

20 Corbin (1976, p. 2). Henry Corbin, in this famous essay, translates *Na-Koja-Abad* as 'the Place of No-Where'. I suggest a more specific translation for the Farsi word *abad*. Translating it to 'abode' would be a more fitting translation as *abad* doesn't literally translate as 'place' but a 'place that has come alive, or habitable'. Therefor the 'Abode of No-Where' will give the reader the sense that this place has become a dwelling place for the seeker, a place where (s)he can reside. See Steingass (1892, p. 3).

21 Corbin uses here the term *Hurqayla* to refer to the 'Realm of Dominion' in Islamic cosmology, also referred to as 'Al-Malakut', the celestial or angelic realm. This is linguistically not the same name as the Zoroastrian *Hukairya* (meaning 'of good activity) which refers to the cosmic mountain Hara Berezaiti. The *place* that both terms refer to however, can be equated to each other as both refer to the realm of the imaginal, where the worlds of the seen and unseen meet.

22 Also known as Al-Khadir, Khidr, Khadr translated and known also as the Green or Verdant One.

23 Sometimes also translated as "The Shrill Cry of the Simurgh". See for an English translation: Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi, *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises: A Parallel PersianEnglish text*, trans. Wheeler Thackston, Bibliotheca Iranica, intellectual Series, No. 2 (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1999), pp. 91–92.

24 Translations between a feminine and masculine pronoun differ. Henry Corbin refers to the Simorgh as 'she'. The original language (Farsi) in which it is written by Sohrawardi the word *ou* is used, which is neither feminine nor masculine, but can be either.

25 The figure and symbol of Simorgh appears throughout Persian mythology and literature, with the most famous story being a poem by Farid ud-Din Attar (1146–1221) called 'The Conference of the Birds' (1177) (Aṭṭar et al. 2011). This is a particularly influential and important story amongst Sufis.

26 These are a variety of names in the old Persian texts. *Xvarnah* is the original Avestan word, where *Khurrah* is the Persian derivative of. *Farnah* is from the old Aechemenids and *Far* and *Farrah* are both old Pahlavi names for this same Light of Glory.

27 Kay Khusraw is a legendary character in the epic of *Shah-nameh* and one of the most important heroic figures in Persian mythology. At the end of his heroic deeds, it is said that Kay Khusraw withdrew into a mystical castle called 'Kang-Dez', a place that heroes and saints withdraw to without physical death. The comparison Corbin makes is between Parcifal and Kay Khusrow.

28 Specifically, as it occurs in the work of Wolfram von Eschenbach (c. 1160/80–c. 1220), i.e., the tale of 'Parzival'.

29 For more see Corbin (1971, chp. 4).

30 Yacht 5.6 as translated in Pirart as 'belly' whereas Saadi-Nejad translates the same lines in the hymn as the 'tongue' of Ahura Mazda: "*And I, Ahura Mazda, created her by the impetus of my tongue (speech?)*". In both interpretations, Anahita is a substance or river that gushes forth out of the godhead as a current of light. This image corresponds to the role of the goddess as the *guide to* or *enabler* of gnosis or direct revelation.

31 As quoted in footnote by author: J. Nurbakhsh, "Associating with the Ocean: Becoming the Disciple of a Master", *Sufi* 50 (Nurbakhsh 2001), 18; "The Drop and the Ocean", in J. Nurbakhsh, *Discourses on the Path* (London 1996), 30–31. Nurbakhsh, of course, had adapted Rumi, in whose verse the analogy of water and reference to the "ocean" is a constant theme throughout; cf. *M*, 5:3853–9 ("Love is an [infinite] Ocean, on which the heavens are [but] a flake of foam").

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The Feminine in the Poetry of Yunus Emre: A Case Study in the Hierophanic Dialectics of Mystical Islamic Experience

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Abstract: This article is about the most important Turkish Sufi poet and, more specifically, about the presence and the pragmatics of 'the Feminine' in his experience—inasmuch as the latter is reflected in his work. To be sure, this is a case study, in the sense that it aspires to provide only an idea as to how 'the Feminine' pervades Sufi hierophanics/religion, and also in the sense that it does not assume to be a comprehensive and exhaustive discussion—not even of Yunus Emre himself. Select(ed) poems of Yunus Emre are explored in the methodological light of what Mircea Eliade has dubbed 'hierophanic dialectics', and what Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva regard as 'the Feminine' in relation to the sacred/religious from the perspective of social anthropology and psychoanalysis. In the poetry of Yunus Emre 'the Feminine' turns out to be the subtle yet decisive challenge, opposition, and subversion that, on the one hand, negates symbolic Islam and, on the other, affirms imaginary Islam in the name of the Islamic real—to evoke the terminology of Jacques Lacan.

Keywords: Yunus Emre; the Feminine; hierophanic dialectics; mystical experience; deconstruction; literary analysis; phenomenology of Sufi

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1. Introduction: Yunus Emre Contextualised

Yunus Emre[1] (c. 1240–c. 1320) is regarded as the greatest and most important Turkish Sufi poet; a poet that sanctified, so to speak, the vernacular Turkish language of his time—doing, in this respect, something similar to what his contemporary Dante Alighieri (c. 1265–1321) did for the spoken Italian language of his birthplace. Yunus Emre was a peasant whom life turned into a nomad. He lived under the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum or Iconium (1077–1308) and during his lifetime the socio-political environment was so volatile that no less than ten successive rulers assumed power. Moreover, he was born at the year of the so-called Baba Ishak revolt (1240)[2] and witnessed the violence and the devastation of the Mongol conquest. Contrary to another contemporary of his, namely, Jalaladdin Rumi (1207–1273), Yunus Emre never had anything to do with the circles of authority at the Iconium court, where the culture of the day was heavily influenced by Byzantium.

The fluidity, tension, and violence of his era were especially due to a number of changes that took place rapidly and abruptly. In particular, the activities of the *ghazis* that came from the East contributed to the nomadisation of much of subsistence and material culture, causing thus a shift from land cultivation to livestock and setting in motion successive waves of migration (Vryonis 1975). In this sense, the world of Yunus Emre was a world of dislocation, both physically and spiritually. It was especially the spiritual dislocation and uprooting that necessitated a quest for identity consolidation, which to a great extent was satisfied thanks to the rediscovery of tradition in Central Asian culture. The so-called *babas* were the ones that took the lead in this by introducing a revolutionary new spirit regarding 'roots'. In this connection, some of the most famous *babas*, who also seem to have had some kind of direct bearing on Yunus Emre, were Haji Bektash Veli (1209–1271), Taptuk Emre (c. 1210–?), Sari Seltik (?–1298), and Barak Baba (1257–1307).

Along with the Babai movement came an appreciation of the matriarchic structure that characterised old peasant Turkish society—an element that one should definitely keep in mind when delving into 'the Feminine' in the poetry of Yunus Emre. Furthermore, the masses of Anatolia were exposed to ancestral shamanistic beliefs and practices that stressed God's fatherhood and compassion through such names as *Tan(g)ri* and *Chalap*, respectively (Boyle 1972, pp. 177–93). All this, combined with the Shi'ite and Sufi background of the *babas*, as well as the official Sunni religious agenda, created a highly heterogeneous, yet inclusive and syncretic, state of affairs. Thus, it is not only reasonable, but even more so expected that from within the dialectics of the latter substantial challenge, opposition and subversion could be generated. In terms of a socio-political understanding of religion, the turmoil of the time was a real crisis and as such became the perfect context and occasion for the emergence of prime mystical experience and subsequent forms of institutionalised mysticism.

To put it otherwise, Yunus Emre was born and bred within a crisis and he took it upon himself to find a way out of the crisis. This is the whole point in the dramatic endeavour of his hierophanic quest, his radical experience and, finally, his unique poetry. Living at the margins, he made the mountain his existential space; through his escape into the Taurus Mountains he sought consolation, at first, and then encouragement: a leap of mystical love. This was the love into which Yunus Emre was initiated by the obscure yet formidable figure of his spiritual master, namely, Taptuk Emre. As far as the present study is concerned, in the case of Yunus Emre's erotic experience of Taptuk—in some respects, the equivalent of the relationship between Rumi and Shamz—the feminine and the masculine are just too obvious as the two sides of the same coin. However, the truly pressing question that one feels the need to pose is the following: who stands for 'the Feminine' and what exactly are the latter's qualities?

2. Theoretical and Methodological Clarifications: Looking for the Hidden

The perspective of 'hierophanic dialectics' in the present study follows more or less the meaning that the term has acquired in the work of Mircea Eliade (1949, pp. 1–50), that is, the co-existence of the profane—which he identifies with the physical and/or the social—and something that defies it within one and the same means of manifestation of the Sacred (i.e., a hierophany). Where I deviate from the great Romanian scholar is in relation to his cosmological orientation—since hierophanies can also refer to history –and in the sense that the dialectics I will be utilising in this study is one that features between the field of sameness (society) and the field of otherness (hierophanies), on the one hand, and between what undermines society (i.e., the profane) and what underlines society (i.e., religion) in the experienced presence/absence of what is regarded as the Sacred. It is this particular understanding that enables me to relate a prominent *religionswissenschaftliche* idea with the psychoanalytical insights of Jacques Lacan, which I will clarify at the end of this section.

To be sure, in a study that is in search of 'the Feminine' one should always keep in mind that the point is not, primarily and basically, to identify the elements that are about or come from women or even feminism—although these are significant in themselves as well—but to discover and bring to the fore the elements that have been silenced—especially in texts of the past—by the dominant religio-social order, which by nature or habit has been the main embodiment of 'the Masculine'. This rationale, in particular, has been pursued by two prominent women scholars, namely, Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva, in their book *Le féminin et le sacré* (1998), within a framework that lies in the interstices of anthropology, studies in religion, and psychoanalysis. In what follows I critically present their perspective, upon which I will heavily draw, based on what I have written in a review of their work.

The topic of the book is ' . . . the feminine. Not women—at least, not more than men—and of course not feminist ideology. What then? What is this feminine after all? . . . to the extent that this book is about the feminine, equally so it is about the masculine.

For how is it possible to speak about the former, if at the same time one does not speak about the latter? Hence, for the authors, if the masculine is the Father, the feminine is the Mother; if the masculine is the Law, the feminine is Nature; if the masculine is Power, the feminine is Tenderness; The Word over against the Body. However, the easier one utters the words "mother", "nature", "tenderness", and "body", the harder they can determine them via the structure of language, that is, via the masculine. Consequently, if [these words] are to belong truly to the domain of the feminine, they have to be linguistically indeterminate; they have to function in terms of memory. In this manner, though, they acquire a different access to the Sacred: they "remind" to us that there is always a lack, a fundamental deprivation in Being.

But what about the masculine? What happens with the relationship between the masculine and the Sacred? The authors . . . allow us to articulate an answer on the basis of what they say about the phenomena that belong to the order of the Word of the Father. To appreciate, though, such an answer, one should take into consideration what *Religionswissenschaft* calls "hierophanic dialectics". This is about a synthesis between the constitution of the structures of culture and their rupture . . . In other words, since the Sacred is totally absent, what we see in a hierophany is the aspect of the profane on the one hand, and the aspect of the rupture of the profane on the other. The profane is not the opposite of the Sacred, but the aspect which is necessary for the idea of [the] deprivation [of the Sacred] to be constituted. It is possible to speak about rupture, about something referring to a "ganz Andere", only if there exists a quasi-constituted structure, a Same. So the masculine is precisely this Same, whatever constitutes one within history and culture as a structure/subject. The masculine is the profane aspect of every hierophany, whereas the feminine retains for itself the role of the much disturbing, but also much required Other aspect. In this manner, "hierophanic dialectics" is a constant transition from the Other to the Same, and vice versa; a constant negotiation of what is profane and what is not.' (Adrahtas 2002, pp. 238–40).

This critical feminine perspective ties up thoroughly with 'hierophanic dialectics', although I will not be utilising the specific descriptions of the profane and the Sacred as Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva present them. Nevertheless, I will be thoroughly utilising the consequences of their descriptions, namely, the fact that 'hierophanic dialectics' entails ruptures that are suggested by the use of indeterminate language—feminine language, for that matter—and bring forth the deprivation of Being. Of equal importance is not only the constant re-negotiation of what is profane, but even more so the consistent challenge of the limits of religion. To put it in terms directly applicable to the present study, 'the Feminine' in the poetry of Yunus Emre lies in everything that disrupts the authority of religion, not so much to the detriment of religion, as to its transformative re-affirmation. In the poetic language of Yunus Emre anything that subverts common or institutional—in both cases, patriarchal and masculine—forms of Islam, even if they are part of *tasawwuf*, represents the only genuine embodiment of 'the Feminine', that is, the mystical experience of Allah.

In turn, Jacques Lacan's famous triptych 'imaginary (*imaginaire*)—symbolic (*symbolique*)—real (*réel*)' (Lacan and Granoff 1956, pp. 265–76) is applied in the present study in a quite specific way, that is, without the negative connotations that accompany these terms. The latter are rather used in a positive heuristic sense, in order to bring forth the supressed or implicit dialectics, negotiation, and interplay between 'the Masculine' and 'the Feminine'. In particular, since in the case of Yunus Emre there is a triptych involved in the 'hierophanic dialectics' that his poetic message exemplifies, Lacan's own triptych seems quite pertinent methodologically to distinguish between the images associated with the experience of Yunus Emre (imaginary Islam), the signifiers the latter uses or opposes (symbolic Islam), and the 'reality' that exceeds and lies beyond both his experience and signifiers (the Islamic real). Moreover, 'the Feminine' in his poetry is not something straightforward, but rather an incessant interaction between what Islamic mysticism is and what it can or should be.

In other words, in the poetry of Yunus Emre mysticism can, but need not be, identified with 'the Feminine', whereas prime mystical experience and 'the Feminine' are equivalent.

3. Deconstructing 'the Masculine', Encountering 'the Feminine'

> Your love has wrested me away from me,
> You're the one I need, you're the one I crave.
> Day and night I burn, gripped by agony,
> You're the one I need, you're the one I crave.
>
> I find no great joy being alive,
> If I cease to exist, I would not grieve,
> The only solace I have is your love,
> You're the one I need, you're the one I crave.
>
> Lovers yearn for you, but your love slays them,
> It has God's images—it displays them,
> You're the one I need, you're the one I crave.
>
> Even if, at the end they make me die.
> And scatter my ashes up to the sky,
> My pit would break into this outcry:
> You're the one I need, you're the one I crave.
>
> Let me drink the wine of love sip by sip,
> Like Mecnun, live in the hills in hardship,
> Day and night, care for you holds me in its grip,
> You're the one I need, you're the one I crave.
>
> 'Yunus Emre' is my name,
> Each passing day fans and rouses my flame,
> What I desire in both worlds is the same:
> You're the one I need, you're the one I crave. (Smith 1993, p. 124)[3]

If it is easy to say that Yunus Emre identifies with the 'I', who is the 'You' he repeatedly refers to in the poem? 'You're the one I need, you're the one I crave' (Bana seni gerek seni)! Is it Allah or is it Taptuk Emre? Or could it be both as one? In either case, the language used is so much loaded with erotic emotionality[4] that one cannot escape posing the question of 'the Feminine' in relation to Yunus Emre's experience of the Sacred, on the one hand, and the understanding of himself within this experience, on the other. But let us take this poem line by line. First of all, let us start from the force—even if it should be taken as a mild one, as 'aldı benden' entails—that is implied at the very beginning: 'Your love has *wrested* me away from me' (Aşkın aldı benden beni) (my emphasis). Love is mentioned as a force, something powerful and thus, one could say, rather masculine. Then the natural connotation or implication would be to imagine a masculine force—divine love, for that matter, as a whole field of religious signification—being exercised upon a female. In this respect, divine love is the condition of possibility for the experience of 'the Feminine' to emerge—as a rupture in the signification of religious language and as a profanity in the dialectics of hierophanic experience. In any case, the power of divine love that wrests brings Yunus Emre forward as the agent of 'the Feminine', regardless of who exactly is 'the Masculine', Allah or Taptuk Emre in lieu of Allah.

'Need' and 'crave' (gerek) are two verbs that do not seem—at first, at least—to lend themselves especially to 'the Feminine', but then why should the semantics of power we just saw be intertwined with the semantics of helplessness and dependency? Yunus Emre uses words that affirm power and at the same time subvert it. His poem might make perfect sense grammatically, but experientially it proves to be so self-contradictory that it explodes under the sheer pressure of its linguistic meaningfulness. The point is not that philosophically one could see here a balance of oppositional forces (power—helplessness), but the very fact that there is power on the one hand, plain and simple, and

there is helplessness on the other, plain and simple. In other words, balance is only the rationalisation attempted in light of the disturbing possibility of unbalance. This is exactly what the balancing power of 'the Masculine' is really afraid of! (cf. Monick 1991).

'I *burn*, *gripped* by agony' (Ben yanarım) (my emphasis). Divine love not only behaves like a power that wrests, but also like a force that burns and grips. The image herein is one of suffering and pain, which in themselves once again point beyond 'the Masculine' through 'the Masculine'. The latter comes up as a valid consideration, although the poem does not mention it, because at a more fundamental level the image under discussion is about violence. However, this means that it is thanks to the force of 'the Masculine' that the emotionality of 'the Feminine' emerges in the experience of Yunus Emre, as if the one cannot be without the other. This is true insofar as there is a further existential register—however elusive it may appear in the original Turkish—namely, agony, insinuating that something has been suppressed and silenced, but not totally or once and for all. Agony is, in a sense, the sinister face of divine love; a face that bespeaks of a tension within one and the same experience. On the one hand, there is the content, so to speak, of the experience and, on the other, what the experience lacks. Moreover, the mystical experience of Yunus Emre is not fueled so much by its content, which seems to be informed by the violence of 'the Masculine', as it is by what it lacks and desperately needs, which is what 'the Feminine' stands for . . .

Suddenly the tense atmosphere of the poem turns into tenderness: '*The only solace I have is your love*' (Aşkın ile avunurum) (my emphasis). Divine love is not portrayed anymore as a violent masculine force, but as a comforting female presence. At this point 'the Feminine' is quite pronounced and in stark opposition to everything that has been implied thus far. One is almost tempted to think that this opposition is an additional linguistic feature that (re)orientates the attention of the audience to a true challenge against 'the Masculine' in the poem and the experience the latter reflects. In other words, it is only natural to dub such a challenge 'the Feminine', especially when the 'solace' (avuntu) mentioned in the line examined is suggested as '[t]he only' one; whereas 'the Masculine' could be a 'solace' of some kind, it could not be the only, that is, the real one. All this rationale becomes even more likely, since what follows in the poem reiterates the masculine contour of the poem: the violence that the divine love exercises upon her lovers knows no limits—it simply 'slays' (öldürür) them!

Divine love '*has God's images—it displays them*' (my emphasis), which means that it is not identified with Allah, although Allah is relatable through that love. Again, what the Muslim regard as their Sacred is not relatable directly through this love, but through the images of Allah that it bears (witness to). To be more precise, divine love 'displays' the images of Allah literally, 'fills with manifestation' or 'is fully transformed' (Tecellî ile doldurur)—just like a woman might display, manifest her beauty and become fully transformed in the process. The connotations of 'the Feminine' cannot be missed here, but the real issue lies in the mediation of Allah. More specifically, who embodies divine love? Is it the authority of 'the Masculine' Islamic that prescribes what this love is and what it is not, or is it the elusiveness of 'the Feminine' Islamic that creates a space of communication? In more specific terms, does Yunus Emre have in mind an orthodox religious channel through which divine love is expressed, or does he find it embodied via an unorthodox manner in the person of Taptuk Emre? I think that the whole poem is much more inclined towards the second option, which means that it functions as a kind of allegory.

In the second last stanza of the poem, the mentioning of Mecnun (Majnun), whose story of course makes no sense without Leyla (Layla), places quite explicitly 'the Feminine' right at the core of the poem. The crazy lover of Leyla becomes the archetype of what Yunus Emre feels and goes through; of what he wants to be(come) in his relation with the beloved Sacred. To phrase it in the terms of the image that is invoked, what Yunus Emre regards as the Sacred arouses him through a power—this time not violent, but no less strong—that resembles that of 'the Feminine'. It is as if only the erotic experience of the male towards the female can encapsulate and depict the love the mystic feels towards God. Nevertheless,

the violence of 'the Masculine' is not obliterated; on the contrary, it remains quite visible and felt, for the mystic is called to 'live in the hills *in hardship*' (my emphasis), being still in the 'grip' of an ambivalent 'care'—both denoted in the original Turkey by 'endîşem'. The latter is associated, to be sure, with his craving, but it also pertains to something that keeps him constantly in a state of alert. Once again, the language employed in the poem signifies the tangible experience (of 'the Masculine'), but also the intangible condition (of 'the Feminine') that make the experience possible.[5]

In the same stanza Yunus Emre implores, 'Let me drink the *wine* of love sip by sip' (Aşkın şarâbından içem) (my emphasis). The image of wine brings automatically to mind intoxication, and the latter recalls directly the notion of ecstasy (see Smith 2013), which stands opposed to the spirit of order and rationality, typical metonymies of 'the Masculine'. In this respect the poem presents 'the Feminine', through the metonymy of 'wine', as the condition of experiencing divine love. Yet, once again, the hint is not bereft of ambivalence: as implied in the original Turkish, the wine of divine love will be consumed 'sip by sip', which means slowly and most likely—that is the insinuation—tantalizingly, since the mystic lover (*âşik*) cannot take it all in at once, even though they desperately want to. Because of their partial status within 'the Masculine' symbolic of religion, that is, the legalistic implementation of *sharia* and the ritualistic pursue of *tasawwuf*, the wine of love is simply too much for them, and so its consumption requires caution. The same ambivalence reverberates at the very end of the poem, where Yunus Emre says, '[e]ach passing day fans and rouses my *flame*' (literally, 'my wood', presumably burning up, in the original Turkish; my emphasis), since the image of the flame can be thought of both as a destructive and a creative element. It seems that the love of Allah (re)creates the lover the very moment it destroys them! This is the most succinct way to conceptualize Yunus Emre's experience of *fana wa baqa*.

In the poem titled 'A Single Word Can Brighten the Face', two are the features that point to 'the Feminine': the image of ripening and the state of silence itself. The poem is about 'the value of words', which one way or another reflect and belong to the order of the symbolic within religion, that is, to 'the Masculine', but the value discussed is something that transcends this order and refers to the deep identifications in the existence of the mystic. This is where the imaginary comes into the picture and where the poem starts erupting. 'Ripened in silence, a single word/acquires a great energy for work.' Here the ripening (olgunlaşmak) of the word is portrayed as the slow and gradual process of human development within the womb. Thus, there is no word, no name, no order of the Father whatsoever, without the formless, without labour, without creation through the Mother. Even more, Yunus Emre prioritizes the latter, since it is only via this aspect of 'the Feminine' that the masculine words are to acquire their efficacy at the end; their efficacy, but not their value. Their value has always been there in the beginning, in 'the Feminine' hierophanic experience of the mystic. Thus, in light of this prioritization, the poem exhorts, 'Let a word mature inside yourself./Withhold the unripened thought.' It is this withholding that bespeaks of the importance of silence that hovers, so to speak, over the whole poem. In other words, Silence (sessizlik) becomes the negative of the Word; both are necessary for the emergence of the hierophanic order and, for that matter, its mesmerizing power: 'Yunus, say one last thing/about the power of words./Only the word "I"/divides me from God.'

'Ask Those Who Know' is one of those poems that at a surface reading seem to be totally irrelevant regarding 'the Feminine'; especially for those who think that the latter lies in discovering simply references to women, the female, or feminist sensitivities. Not that these are not significant, but they are totally misleading if they are regarded as the most important or the all-inclusive *topos* of 'the Feminine'. My approach is quite different. It starts prompted by the questions: 'Who is the Khan on the throne? . . . What are all of Solomon's riches?' Then, it ends delving into further questions: 'What are You? What am I?' Questioning amounts to challenging, and in the context of the discourse of Yunus Emre challenging can only be directed to the religious structure of Islam. Besides the poem itself, it is evident that the mystic is challenging not only the validity, but also the very

existence of the wordly/historical realization of Islam: 'Ask Yunus and Taptuk/What the world means to them./The world won't last.' This is a direct reference to the possibility and, for that matter, to the necessity—here and now, in the future, anytime—of subverting (the dominant and masculine) meaning. It is precisely this possibility/necessity that the hierophanic prerequisite and aftermath of religion owes to 'the Feminine', the quintessence of the Sufi experience that Yunus Emre inherited, perpetuated and, most of all, transformed.

3.1. I Am Before, I Am After

I am before, I am after.
The soul for all souls all the way.
I'm the one with a helping hand.
Ready for those gone wild, astray.

I made the ground flat where it lies,
On it I had those mountains rise,
I designed the vault of the skies,
For I hold all things in my sway.

To countless lovers I have been.
A guide for faith and religion.
I am sacrilege in men's hearts.
Also the true faith and Islam's way.

I make men love peace and unite;
Putting down the black words on white,
I wrote the four holy books right.
I'm the Koran for those who pray.

It's not Yunus who says all this:
It speaks its own realities:
To doubt this would be blasphemous:
'I am before, I am after', I say.

In the first stanza of this poem the hierophanic prerequisite and aftermath mentioned above is rephrased through a well-known theological trope: 'I am before, I am after', that is, I am the before and the after of religious experience; or I am the one who always was and always will be! However, I think that the focus of the stanza lies elsewhere; not in this quite obvious denotation, but in a rather elusive connotation. In particular, Yunus Emre seems to be referring to the element of compassion (*rahma*)—so cardinal in Islam. Yet the mentioning of compassion is done in such an emphatic way that it moves beyond the conventional understanding of being lovingly accepting. Here it is about '[t]he soul' that is there, present 'for all souls' and, for that matter, '*all the way*' (my emphasis). But what is this 'soul for all souls' (canlara can), this 'soul' that can support and sustain 'all souls'? It seems to be something prior, through and beyond religion itself; something without which religion would not have been possible in the first place. The connotations of compassion go on—'I'm the one with *a helping hand./Ready* for those gone wild, astray' (my emphasis). Now the female contours of the poem become even more explicit, leading to the somewhat unforced conclusion that one is indeed encountering 'the Feminine' in the poetry of Yunus Emre. Nevertheless, not everyone can claim the 'helping hand' of this 'Feminine' compassion in their lives; only those who have 'gone wild, astray' of the prescriptions of religious law for the sake of religious truth.

The second stanza is rather cryptic as to why one should associate it with 'the Feminine', but once the text is left aside for a while in favour of its possible intertextuality—written or oral—then the invisible starts becoming visible. To be more specific, I think that the image of compassion in the first stanza gives its place to the image of Sophia/Wisdom, operative in the world and the universe at large. 'I made the ground flat where it lies,/On it I had those mountains rise,/I designed the vault of the skies,/For I hold all things in

my sway.' It is hard not to read in these lines the echo of certain texts that come from the wisdom literature of Judaism and Christianity, where the Sophia of God is the prime means of creation (cf. *Proverbs* 8: 27–29). Likewise, it seems that in Islam Allah is the creator but there is a 'Feminine' involved; not that the creative act of Allah is disputed or challenged, but what is indeed disputed or challenged is the exclusively 'Masculine' character of Allah's creativity. In light of this, the supportive and sustaining qualities revealed in the hierophanic experience of the mystic are corroborated further by a fundamental creative attribute with regards to what is regarded as the Sacred.

The third stanza of 'I Am Before, I am After' is one of those cases where we witness Yunus Emre's *tour de force* of 'hierophanic dialectics'—and it rarely gets better than that. 'I am *sacrilege* in men's hearts/Also the *true faith and Islam's way*' (my emphasis). How can it be both? How can it remain one and the same? It seems that everything depends on the faithful, on how they perceive, react, appreciate, and understand. What is regarded as the Sacred can trigger a vast number of responses, of course, but ultimately they all come under the mode of either underlining or undermining the conventions that make human life-forms possible. So it is this ambivalence in the specific two lines of the stanza that turn one's attention to religion ('Islam's way'), on the one hand, and to the profane ('sacrilege'), on the other. If the former can be validly called 'the Masculine'—and for more than one reasons in history and society it can—then the latter deserves to be called 'the Feminine'. Not only does it deserve the appellation, but it also deserves the consideration of the serious seeker, for it constitutes the more often than not neglected aspect of religious experience, the aspect that makes religion truly religion in the first place, namely, the presence of what is regarded as the Sacred within the latter's hierophanic manifestations.

At last the poet becomes clear, that he is talking about something that goes beyond 'the Masculine'. Indeed the fourth stanza—indirectly, but undeniably—claims that this something-beyond-'the Masculine' is not men's business: '*I* make men' (my emphasis) do this or that, regardless of the latter being religious or not. In a way, whatever men have been doing in history is not due to some kind of intrinsic male quality or power; fundamentally—and on the contrary, one might say—it has been the prerogative of something else. Furthermore, what is of special interest is what men are involved in doing: 'love', 'peace', unity, creativity. However, these are not the usual male things of violence, war, clash, and destruction. Understandably, one could say, for humanity has its female side as well. Thus the poem is having men realizing what women should be presented as doing. This, if anything, is a prime example of 'the Feminine' ambiguity that permeates the poetry of Yunus Emre. The 'black words' is one thing and the 'white' upon which they are written is quite another. Both are needed, however, and the one is there because of the other. The dialectical disposition of the poet goes on and on, ending in a triumphant, so to speak, declaration that brings us back to the theme of Allah's mediation; a mediation that in itself thrives in ambiguity, strengthening once again the allusions of the poem with regards to 'the Feminine'. '*I* wrote the four holy books *right/I'm the Koran* for those who pray' (my emphasis); not Allah but 'I', doing the work of Allah; the real work and not the conventional doings of religion.

The last stanza in the poem under discussion might be about a very peculiar possibility as far as the poet's intention is concerned. More specifically, the poet might be alluding to a certain type of absence within history. 'It's *not* Yunus' (my emphasis), the poem emphatically declares in the negative. 'It speaks its *own* realities' (my emphasis), the poem asserts, thus implying that the actual 'realities' of history represent a negativity; and this is precisely what the poem affirms in what follows. 'To doubt this would be *blasphemous*' (my emphasis). Yet, that is exactly what has been done; has it not been doubted time and again? To be honest, this doubt is the only certain thing, which means that religion itself systematically constitutes an act of negativity. However, the main question is: a negativity over against what? Here is where 'the Feminine', even as a hypothesis, has to come in. 'I am *before*, I am *after*' (evvel âhır heman benem) (my emphasis), not in-between. The latter

is the topology of institutionalised religion run by the force of 'the Masculine', whereas the 'before' and the 'after' remain the utopia of 'the Feminine' . . .

3.2. Knowledge Should Mean a Full Grasp of Knowledge

> Knowledge should mean a full grasp of knowledge:
> Knowledge means to know yourself, heart and soul.
> If you have failed to understand yourself,
> Then all of your reading has missed its call.
>
> What is the purpose of reading those books?
> So that Man can know the All-Powerful.
> If you have read, but failed to understand,
> Then your efforts are just a barren toil.
>
> Don't boast of reading, mastering science.
> Or of all your prayers and obeisance.
> If you don't identify Man as God,
> All your learning is of no use at all.
>
> The true meaning of the four holy books.
> Is found in the alphabet's first letter.
> You talk about that first letter, preacher;
> What is the meaning of that—could you tell?
>
> Yunus Emre says to you, Pharisee,
> Make the holy pilgrimage if need be.
> A hundred times—but if you ask me,
> A visit to the heart is best of all.

To be sure, religion offers knowledge: knowledge of what is regarded as the Sacred. However, is that knowledge enough? Is it 'a full grasp of knowledge'? Is *that* knowledge what the religious seeker has been after in the first place and all along? Yunus Emre is not implying anything anymore; he is rather crystal-clear as to the insufficiency of religious beliefs and practices in themselves. They have failed or, better, insofar as they have failed to enable a person to achieve self-knowledge, they have missed both their objective and the need to stay tuned in with their hierophanic origins and source. What is especially interesting for the purposes of the present study is how Yunus Emre phrases this failure and missing of the point as far as religion is concerned: 'your efforts are just a *barren* toil' (yere) (my emphasis), he deplores. The image of the barren ground, with its unmistakable connotations of infertility, brings to mind the traditional and/or premodern female who fails to fulfill their first and utmost purpose in life. Because what was a barren female in premodern societies? Virtually a mistake, an anomaly, a nobody. Religion risks becoming just like that, when it does not draw upon and adhere to the surplus that makes it possible in the first place. Once again the discourse of Yunus Emre works through the male and the female—and their tropes—in order to signify the presence/absence of 'the Feminine'.

'If you don't identify Man as God / All your learning is of no use at all.' To read this as an example of pantheism would be a total misreading; to read it as a kind of anthropology à la Feuerbach would be just wishful thinking. These two lines can only be read as a rupture that breaks up the poem from the inside, in order to signify that which is not within the signification field of the text itself. To put it in other terms, if the identification of Man and God makes any sense at all, it is because what is regarded as the Sacred can be something more than male—it can be female as well! This simultaneous bipolarity, that is, the affirmation and the negation of the symbolic signification within the 'champs religieux' (Bourdieu 1971), hints at an imaginary identification of the poet in the context of his mystical experience; an identification with the silenced and concealed 'Feminine' that substantiates yet again the transcendentality of the reality of the Islamic Sacred.

Throughout the poem Yunus Emre is criticizing the Muslim scholar or 'preacher' as an authoritative representative of religious law, ritual, and morality. He, moreover, characterizes this representative as a 'Pharisee', echoing in this the famous 'woes' of Jesus against the scribes and Pharisees (*Matthew* 23). This is evidently a case of criticism of the masculine representatives of secondary and derivative religion over against the primary and original religiosity involved in 'hierophanic dialectics'. To the extent that this criticism is dialectical, one can justifiably postulate that the poet is implying this primary and original religiosity all along, and by extension that this religiosity is closer to 'the Feminine' than to 'the Masculine' associated with the power and authority of institutional religion. Practically speaking, this entails and presupposes a refocusing of religious attention, so that the intentionality of the faithful is internalised, on the one hand, and transposed to something more profound, on the other. It is this more profound level that one can call 'the Feminine', for it does irrupt into the mystical experience—seemingly from nowhere, but in effect from the unknown order of the real that is regarded as the Sacred—providing the mystic with qualities that are definitely not what the masculine social order would normally bestow.

'A visit to the heart is best of all'! The mystical experience of Yunus Emre breaks through—and at the same time breaks down—all the conventional requirements of religion, the 'Pillars of Islam' as they are known. The latter are not invalid, but they are not enough. This lack or insufficiency is what brings in the centrality of the heart. Not the mind, reason, or consciousness, but the heart, feeling, and affection are called upon when religion faces the problem of reinvigoration, renewal, and restoration to its prime appeal and impetus. To recall the connotations of the womb, birth, and motherhood I have already referred to, it seems that the heart could be thought of as a metonymy of the innermost place where a new creation can be materialised. In this sense, the heart is the mother, the womb and the cradle of religion; 'the Feminine' Other of 'the Masculine' Same, so much determining and at once too indeterminate in itself to be defined in a definitive way.

4. Truth–Heart–Love–Body–Humility: The 'Feminine' Contours of Mystical Experience in Yunus Emre

One could continue exploring the terra incognita of 'the Feminine' in the poetry of Yunus Emre by visiting and delving into numerous other cases of textual allusion. 'We were dry, but we moistened . . . we married one another and flew . . . in whatever hearts, in all humanity,/We planted the meanings Taptuk taught us', writes Yunus Emre in another poem, giving to 'the Feminine' some kind of flesh and bones through the images of fertilization and marrying. On another occasion the poet would sing in a tone of deep-felt gratitude: 'We became servants at Taptuk's door./Poor Yunus, raw and tasteless,/finally got cooked, glory be to God.' Here Taptuk is portrayed as a motherly figure in a quite unique manner: preparing people for God just like a housewife prepares the daily food for her children! And of course one could go on talking about the importance of tears—hardly a manly expression of emotionality—in mystical life, as we can see in 'The Lover Is Outcast and Idle', or the image of the so feminine rose in the poem 'To Be in Love'.

In order to be as comprehensive as possible, I should mention that Yunus Emre alludes to 'the Feminine' in quite diverse modes and through a wide range of tropes. For instance in the 'If You Are In Love with Love' one comes across the worthlessness of the world, which can easily be translated into the worthlessness of the male and everything that may be implied by this. In 'Those Who Became Complete', the poet reveals the secret of mystical realization: 'Until we transform our Names,/we haven't found the Way'. But such a transformation would virtually amount to the transformation of the given masculine order, either religious or social. In whatever way one looks at it, the radical hierophanic critique of Islam on the part of Yunus Emre becomes a window through which one gets a glimpse of 'the Feminine'. Sometimes the glimpse is quite telling for the poetic language is almost saturated in allusions as is the case with the poem 'To Be Alone with You'.

In concluding this article I would like to sum up what I would dub the mystical experience of Yunus Emre and bring forth the contours of 'the Feminine' that sustain it. In

particular, his experience recognizes Truth (*Haqq*) as first and foremost. In a poem titled 'How Will You Find Haqq?' the poet exclaims: 'Put everything on fire! Burn up, so you can stand up!' Along with the all-pervasive and omnipresent Truth, so cherished in the various Sufi traditions, comes a radical socio-political critique. When the Truth of what is regarded as Sacred is present, the field of the Same reacts by calling it profane, whereas when it is absent the Same takes on Truth's prerogatives by proclaiming itself religion. In other words, Yunus Emre is invoking the present of the Sacred and its Truth so that—even momentarily—everything gets suspended and re-started. Only then the new order of things through the mystic's intervention can have—for a limited time, of course—the aura of authority. But why should this 'hierophanic dialectics' be intrinsically associated with 'the Feminine'?

The answer to this question lies—once again—in the fact that the dialectics of the Sacred emerge as—and result in—attributes anything but masculine. In 'The Mature Ones Are a Sea', the place of Truth is to be found in the affection, the feelings, and the emotionality of the heart; not in the discipline, the order and the austerity of reason. To recall the poet's own words: 'The arrow of Love has pierced my heart', and 'My heart is the throne of the Beloved/the Beloved the heart's destiny:/Whoever breaks another's heart will find no homecoming/in this world or any other'. That is how central the heart is. Nevertheless, 'the Feminine' contours of mystical experience become even more feminine, when the poet declares that he has 'Encountered the House of Realization' in the sheer corporeality of the human being—his own and that of others. In reality, his words reveal a cryptic corporeality of faith, in which the religious experience is realised through the reverence of the human body. Before the body Yunus Emre is compelled to bow and to 'Be a Lover'; a lover whose love transforms into the forbearance and humility of the Feminine—and turns the world upside down for ever.

True Speech Is the Fruit of Not Speaking

True speech is the fruit of not speaking.
Too much talking clouds the heart.
If you want to clear the heart,
Say this much, the essence of all talking:
Speak truly. God speaks through words truly spoken.
Falsity ends in pain.
Unless you witness all of creation in a single glance,
You're in sin even with all your religion.
The explanation of the Law is this:.
The Law is a ship. Truth is her ocean.
No matter how strong the wood,
The sea can smash the ship.
The secret is this:
A 'saint' of religion may in reality be an unbeliever.
We will master this science and read this book of love.
God instructs. Love is His school.
Since the glance of the saints fell on poor Yunus.
Nothing has been a misfortune.

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Notes

[1] In what follows in this Section I mainly draw on (Athanassiadi 1996, pp. 11–30; Cahen 2001; Vryonis 1971).

[2] See (Ocak 2015).

[3] All references to the poetry of Yunus Emre are taken from 'A Collection of Poems by Yunus Emre, Turkish Sufi Poet (AD.1240–1320)' (available online: http://traditionalhikma.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Collection_of_Poems_A_-_Yusus_Emre.pdf) (accessed on 6 January 2021).

[4] For this kind of emotionality in Sufism, see (Lewisohn 2014, pp. 150–80).

[5] For a full-blown case of 'hierophanic dialectics' with regards to the couple Leyla and Mecnun and its implication for 'the Feminine', the poem 'I Am A *Fatherless* Pearl' (my emphasis) is quite indicative.I am a fatherless pearl unrecognized by the sea.I am the drop that contains the ocean.Its waves are amazing. It's beautiful to be a seahidden within an infinite drop.When Majnun spoke Layla's name,he broke the meter of his poem.I was both Layla and Majnun who adored her.Mansur did not speak idly of Unity.He was not kidding when he said, "I am Truth."In this world of many,You are Joseph and I am Jacob.In the universe of Unity,there is neither Joseph nor Canaan.That my name is Yunusis a problem in this material world.But if you ask my real name,it is the Power behind all powers.

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The Economics of Female Piety in Early Sufism

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Abstract: This paper examines the economics of female piety between the third/ninth and sixth/twelfth centuries. It traces Sufi approaches to poverty and working for a living (*kasb*) as well as *kasb*'s intersection with marriage and women. Rereading Sufi and non-Sufi biographies and historiographies reveals that there were wealthy women who initiated marriage with renowned Sufis to gain spiritual blessings, and others who financially supported their husbands. While the piety of male Sufis was usually asserted through material poverty, the piety of female mystics was asserted through wealth and almsgiving. This paper examines this piety through different female kinships—whether mothers, wives or sisters. Similar to the spousal support of wives for their husbands, sisters very often acted as an impressive backup system for their Sufi brothers. Mothers, however, effected a great socio-religious impact through the cherished principles of a mother's right to control her son and a son's duty to venerate his mother. This devotion was often constraining financially and Sufis needed to pay attention to the financial implications while still pursuing progress on the Sufi path.

Keywords: *arfāq al-niswān* (women's donations); sisters; mothers; *ḥaqq al-wālida* (mother's right); poverty; charity; *khidma* (service)

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1. Introduction: Changing Approaches to Poverty, Wealth and Renunciation in Early Sufism

Female pietists who lived and acted in Iraq and Syria during the first centuries of Islam did not leave us any documents in their own right. All we have comes from later compendia and biographical collections written by male historians and biographers. Given the common notion that studying the history of women in Islam is almost impossible due to the lack of sources written on women and by women, Afsaneh Najmabadi has shown that "if we use gender analytically, sources about men are also sources about women" (Najmabadi 2005, p. 1).

Prior to the early phase of *taṣawwuf*, female ascetics played active roles in the general fabric of Islamic piety and the early tradition of renunciation (*zuhd*). In his significant paper on female renunciants that lived before the crystallization of classical Sufism in the third/ninth century, Christopher Melchert notes that no works survive from female Sufis or renunciants, not even later references to lost works (Melchert 2016, p. 116). What we do have is dated from the fourth/tenth century onward and consists of a bulk of sayings and anecdotes relating to earlier pious women in Sufi biographies, textbooks and non-Sufi works of belles-lettres (*adab*), historiographies and *ḥadīth* collections of the fourth/tenth century and onward. In this paper, I do not focus on the question of whether the devotional practices and morality of those women constituted either a particular, gender-specific or non-gender-specific common mode of piety. Instead, my paper concentrates on the economics of women's involvement in early Islamic piety and *taṣawwuf*. The time span studied in this paper is between the third/ninth and sixth/twelfth centuries. This paper is a further attempt to raise new questions about the role of women as economic agents. It does so in spite of the lack of sources that could support any full-fledged process of reconstruction. Our main sources are Sufi hagiographies and Islamic biographies, which provide some historical clues and insights (Silvers 2015, p. 26; Curry and Ohlander 2012, pp. 1–14; Salamah-Qudsi 2019, pp. 16–18). Hagiographies enable us to observe changing

mindsets, tendencies and approaches towards pious women in medieval Islamic society. This positive approach towards Sufi hagiographies as significant sources conveying some socio-historical implications builds on recent scholarly endeavors made by Jürgen Paul, Vincent Cornell, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, Alexandre Papas and others.

"Economics" is all about conditions and perceptions of wealth—its production, consumption and distribution. In its cultural dimension, economics also deals with how people interact in terms of values, utility and prosperity. Cultural relationships and processes can also be seen to exist within an economic environment and can themselves be interpreted in economic terms (Throsby 2001, p. 10).

Being a solid system of beliefs, customs and practices, Sufism from its very beginnings identified itself by establishing particular approaches towards owning properties, working for one's living and seeking money, leadership and power (Sabra 2021, p. 27). The early Sufi institution embedded different forms of the transaction of properties among its members, guiding masters and followers. Sufis succeeded in the course of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries to crystallize their collective identity through a massive process of theorization (composition of textbooks and comprehensive manuals) as well as the establishment of particular public spaces in the form of Sufi lodges (Karamustafa 2007, p. 7; Salamah-Qudsi 2019, pp. 3–9). This was accompanied by sessions of learning and the transmission of Sufi doctrines that massively helped adherents put into practice their devotional values and collective spiritual morals across the entire Islamic landscape. The early Sufi textbooks present detailed discussions of the kinds of donations rich and noble people used to give to Sufis (Khan 2021, p. 81).

According to an early and well-documented Sufi ideal, economic prosperity is not an indicator for any spiritual prosperity; in fact, it could be an obstacle to experiencing the higher inner states and revelations along the Sufi path (Reinert 1968, p. 40; Massignon 1954, pp. 258–60). One's search for wealth is very often conceived as a manifestation of being subordinated to one's lower soul (*nafs*), the inner faculty, which is filled with weakness in the face of momentary luxuries and material pleasures. Poverty (*faqr*), therefore, is the preferable value and ideal lifestyle according to the early Sufi system of thought. It is the essential aspect of withdrawing from the world and being both perfectly devoted to God and radically dependent on Him. It is an indication of one's being chosen by God, of one's neediness of material pleasures of this world and of one's passionate quest for spiritual closeness and illuminations.

Furthermore, the very quest for wealth contradicts the necessity of living the Sufi moment (*waqt*). *Waqt* is an early technical term in Sufi thought and indicates a transitory state of experiencing revelations and spiritual observations. "The Sufi lives in the present moment", a fundamental principle asserted frequently in the early Sufi compendia (al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī 1914, p. 396; al-Qushayrī 1940, p. 33; al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī 1926, pp. 480–84). Living that mystic moment is attained through separating oneself from both the past and the future. Al-Ghazālī (d. 555/1111), for instance, was eager to emphasize that working for subsistence, very often, makes the mystic subject to doubtful matters (*shubuhāt*) whose origins and purposes are not legal or spiritually sincere and might even be infected by the ambitions of the lower soul (al-Ghazālī n.d., vol. 2, pp. 102 ff.). One of the most famous anecdotes about the sisters of Bishr ibn al-Ḥārith (d. c. 767/841), an early renunciant-mystic of Merv, relates their request for an advisory opinion from Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal regarding the legality of their work in spinning on the roofs of their house. The question here is whether one could make use of the soldiers' torches that lit up the area since those soldiers were representatives of the state and making use of that light would indicate dependence on the state (al-Qushayrī 1940, p. 59).

In many Sufi textbooks, poverty lies as one of the elementary conditions for embarking upon the Sufi path, and one of the first steps of those who seek God. These textbooks are fraught with anecdotes about renunciant-mystics who used to publicly celebrate their very commitment to poverty. When a man sought to give Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 161/777) a sum of money, the latter harshly rejected the gift, telling the man: "Do you want to

erase my name from the poor list for ten thousands dirhams? I will not let you do so." (al-Qushayrī 1940, p. 134).

While material poverty was one of the renunciatory customs that lay at the very basis of early *taṣawwuf* (on the essential renunciatory features of Sufism, see Knysh 2017, pp. 15–34), a debate is reported on which is preferable in living a mystic life: poverty or wealth. Besides the common approach cited above giving priority to poverty, there were some who disagreed and who gave wealth priority. They argued that because one of God's names is the Ghanī, i.e., the self-sufficient, wealth is preferable while poverty has nothing to do with God's attributes and names (al-Qushayrī 1940, p. 135; al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī 1914, pp. 411–13; al-Suhrawardī 1977, pp. 6–7. On the positive attitudes towards wealth in Sufism, see Sabra 2021, pp. 29–30; Hofer 2015, p. 146).

During early Islam, poverty was valued in the eyes of early ascetics not for its own sake itself but "as a condition of existence determined by God, just as wealth". This means that voluntary poverty, the material type of poverty that ascetics strive for, was not a common practice as has long been thought (Cornel 2019, pp. 114–20). In third/ninth century Sufism, voluntary poverty became widely celebrated. The character of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, the great companion of the Prophet Muḥammad, who chose to forego his properties for the sake of the community of believers, was portrayed as the prototype of voluntary poverty (al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī 1976, p. 71).

In the Sufi writings of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, two major dynamics occur. The first relates to an attempt to emphasize the existence of a sublime state in which the mystic abandons one's own will and fulfils God's will whatever that will is. If the mystic is granted wealth, he/she should not reject it but fully surrender to God's will and accept it (1991, p. 55; al-Suhrawardī 1967, p. 364). The second dynamic relates to an interesting process in which the principle of poverty was gradually given more inner and even symbolic implications. Spiritual poverty would ideally have the mystic choose to mentally forego the acquisition of possessions and wealth even were he/she actually wealthy. Different attempts to classify material poverty into different stages were presented. According to one made by al-Hujwīrī, for instance, there are two levels of poverty: the first is compulsory, while the other, the higher, is voluntary and chosen by the mystic in spite of his life circumstances of wealth (al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī 1976, p. 71).

Sufi poverty, according to some early discussions, was divided into three degrees, the highest of which is merely attainable by a small elite of true mystics who do "not possess and are possessed by anything [originally, nothing possess him/them!]" (al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī 1914, p. 25; al-Makkī 2005, vol. 1, p. 447). Adam Sabra surveys the different doctrines starting with the early Sufi authors through to al-Ghazālī and concluding with Abū Ḥafṣ al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), the outstanding and most influential master of Baghdad during the later sixth/twelfth century. As for al-Suhrawardī, Sabra asserts that his discussion of poverty is "brief and original" (Sabra 2000, p. 26). While I do not think al-Suhrawardī's discussion of poverty was actually brief, I do agree that it was novel. Al-Suhrawardī relates to poverty as part of his profound discussions of renunciation (*zuhd*). He indicates that there are three degrees of *zuhd*, the highest of which is the *zuhd thālith* (the third degree of renunciation), which allows the mystic to have material wealth while keeping the sublime title of "poor", *faqīr*. This means that the acquisition of possessions can no longer harm the mystic since the mystic is not controlled by that wealth or the engagements and commitments that are tied to that wealth. This notion explains in fact why the lodges of the Suhrawardiyya order in India and Persia were commonly known as very luxurious in comparison with those of the Chishṭiyya order (Digby 1986, p. 64; Nizami 1961, pp. 223–24).

In addition to the question of poverty and its definition, constraints and lived reality, the economics of early Sufis also concerns itself with one's working for subsistence (*kasb*), almsgiving, begging and financial backing for one's family members—whether new initiates or masters in Sufi communities. This financial support includes the institution of service, *khidma*, of giving rest to and guaranteeing the living of a group of disciplined Sufis

who live together in a Sufi lodge and who commit themselves to devotional life. Serving one's "brothers" means that one supports their ritual activities, gatherings for meals and almsgiving for their families; all this is undertaken while these "brothers" are committed to a life of renunciatory journeys and constant roving to effect the noble principle of *tawakkul* (absolute dependence on God). I will return to this phenomenon, *khidma*, and its economic dimensions later on.

2. Between Working for a Livelihood and Celibacy

In the course of the third/ninth century, the Islamic landscape witnessed sophisticated debates over the controversial nature of earning one's livelihood and its conflict with the principle of absolute dependence on God (*tawakkul*). In the eastern territories of Islam, such discussions came to be highly influenced by *karrāmiyya*'s tendency to practice a rigid mode of renunciatory life in which abandoning work was an integral part. M. Malamud points to the most common inquiries that arose among *karrāmī* and non-*karrāmī* ascetics in that period, all of which found their appearance in the writings of early Sufis: How could *kasb* be reconciled with a life of total renunciation? Was voluntary poverty seen as better than earning a living? Did the Muslim renunciant need to reconcile the very basis of one's religious life, one's total dependence on God, with the well-established fashion of earning one's living and supporting families and children? How would the renunciant understand the complete body of *Qur'ānic* verses and prophetic traditions supporting *kasb*?

The principle of *tark al-kasb*, not working for a living, had great influence upon Sufism in general in the period under discussion. It also left its mark on those Sufis who did earn a living and support families. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) refers to the fourth/tenth century Sufi of Nishapur, Abū 'Amr al-Zajjājī (d. 348/959), who urged one of his companions to get married since the observance of the prophetic tradition of marriage would open the doors of livelihood (*rizq*) for him (al-Sulamī 1976, p. 27). Such a notion implies that the fear of marriage's economic responsibilities was a serious consideration for early mystics. Marriage could hardly be experienced without earning one's living. Recent research of the nature of marital relationships during medieval Islam has drawn on different types of early sources to show that the institution of Islamic medieval marriage was, in fact, "fluid", with high rates of divorce and an increasing number of single women who could support themselves independently (Rapoport 2005, pp. 38–44). The issue of large dowries that were imposed upon men was even raised by the fourth/tenth century Sufi author Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) in a detailed chapter in his textbook *Qūt al-qulūb* (The Nourishment of the Hearts) that he devotes to marriage and celibacy. al-Makkī refers to the economic difficulty that young men had to face before marriage. Unlike slave women (*imā'*) who could be taken as wives without dowry, free women required large dowries. Coupled with having to endure the inflexible demands of family commitments and livelihood, *Qūt al-qulūb* presents a reality in which poor, young Sufis preferred to remain celibate for long periods of their lives (al-Makkī 2005, vol. 2, pp. 398–99). Celibacy seemed to al-Makkī wholly acceptable, particularly in light of the fact that it was becoming more and more difficult in his days to earn money and support families without being involved in illegal acts.

Other early Sufi sources imply that among those who married, there were two groups of Sufis: one whose members worked to gain their livelihood normatively, and the other whose members chose to abandon *kasb* and turned to alms and charity to support their families. In addition to al-Makkī, al-Sarrāj severely criticizes this phenomenon (al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī 1914, p. 200; al-Makkī 2005, vol. 1, p. 333). This criticism was occasionally met by attempts to fabricate support amongst early Sufis. One of the few personalities in early Sufism who likely stayed celibate for his entire life, Ibrāhīm b. Adham, appears in Khargūshī's (d. c. 407/1016) textbook *Tahdhīb al-asrār* and is reputed to have emphasized the high rank of those who worked for a living, supported their families and supplied their children with sustenance. Ibrāhīm supposedly urged his fellows to work as heroes (*'alayka bi-'amal al-abṭāl*) for their children's sustenance (*nafaqa 'alā al-'iyāl*)

(al-Khargūshī 1999, p. 299). The disconnect between his life and these statements renders these statements highly improbable. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) urged his followers to continue to pursue their professions and avoid accepting alms or gifts (Sabra 2021, pp. 29–30).

The criticism addressed to the early mystic of Baghdad Ruwaym b. Aḥmad (d. 303/915) by his contemporary Sufi fellows was, most probably, motivated by his involvement in state affairs and his acceptance of the position of deputy for the *qāḍī* of Baghdad. It is highly unlikely that any criticism was the result of his unique teachings on *tawakkul* and family life. Ruwaym did not believe that his involvement in the state's administration would damage his devotional life. He further rejected his critics by publicly being devoted to his children and their support. In response to those who claimed that he was thereby turning "away from the way of the hereafter by choosing the way of this world," Ruwaym said: "My brothers want me to be completely committed to the principle of *tawakkul*, and to avoid taking care of my daughter and of raising her." In the latter part of the quotation, he emphasizes his success to attain exalted spiritual states that none of his contemporary Sufis was able to attain (al-Daylamī 1977, 152).

In light of the ambivalent approach towards working for a living in early Sufism, temporal celibacy was widely adopted with paralleled theoretical support in Sufi literature (Salamah-Qudsi 2019, pp. 39–44). More and more explicit critical references to marriage and the essential contradiction it imposed with one's devotional engagements were clearly reported (al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī 1976, p. 364). At one point in his rules of ethics concerning married Sufis with families, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj indicates that even where wives are wealthy, true Sufis do not live at their wives' expense. "*Laysa min ādābihim an yatazawwajū dhawāt al-yasāri wa-yadkhulū fī rifqi nisā'ihim*" (it is not one of their rules of ethics to marry wealthy women and to let themselves enjoy the wealth of their wives) (al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī 1914, p. 200). The sentence is not only meant to discourage Sufis from living off their wives, but can also be interpreted as discouraging them from even marrying such women. According to al-Sarrāj, a true Sufi should preferably marry a poor woman; however, in the case that a rich woman wishes to marry him, he should avoid her wealth and entirely detach himself from her properties and possessions. This notion does in fact strengthen the assumption that many wealthy women in the period examined here wanted to attain the spiritual blessings (*baraka*) of renowned mystics through the bonds of marriage. Some wealthy women even initiated the marriage by explicitly asking pious figures to marry them. This was the case of Umm Alī Fāṭima of Balkh who, according to al-Hujwīrī, sent a messenger to the famous mystic of Balkh, Aḥmad b. Khaḍrūya al-Balkhī (d. 240/854–855), to ask him to give her the honor of marrying her and allowing her to financially support him and his fellows. When Aḥmad rejected her proposal, she was upset and sent the messenger back to him to tell him that, being a renowned mystic, he was expected to take responsibility in sincerely guiding people instead of putting obstacles in their path to God. Overwhelmed by this claim, Aḥmad changed his mind and married her (al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī 1976, pp. 119–20). Interestingly, Arezou Azad, who deeply examines the case of Umm 'Alī, has shown that the latter's practice of strategic marriage enabled her to obtain access to the highest sources of learning (Azad 2013, p. 53).

Before al-Hujwīrī, al-Sulamī introduced Umm 'Alī in his biographical dictionary of early Sufi women, *Dhikr al-niswa*, as a pious, wealthy woman, a daughter of nobility, who spent all of her money helping poor Sufis as well as her husband Aḥmad and the demands of his devotional life (*kānat mūsiratan fa-anfaqat mālahā kullahu 'alā al-fuqarā', wa-sā'adat Aḥmad 'alā mā huwa 'alayhi*) (al-Sulamī 1999, p. 169).

Despite their limited access to public space, women during early medieval Islam were not passive economic actors. Their involvement in economic life was impressive (Shatzmiller 1988, p. 58) and their being agents of economic and social growth has been increasingly acknowledged by recent studies with socio-historical approaches (such as Azad 2013; Roded 1999; El-Cheikh 2002; Marén and Deguilhem 2002). The economic prosperity of a large number of female Sufis and their profound interest in charity succeeded,

in the course of time, to become an effective form of carrying out the moralistic dimensions of poverty. It increasingly involved female pietists and lay in parallel to the earlier, yet material form of poverty for male Sufis and renunciants. While many male Sufis preferred to maintain material poverty by abstaining from work, there was a group of female pietists who were wealthy enough to serve as strong financial backing for their male relatives, whether husbands, brothers or sons. It was through both this giving mindset and the effective institution of charity that the ideal of spiritual *faqr* was actualized in the work and practice of the female mystics of Islam.

3. Female Prosperity, Charity and Economic Authority

A debate over the existence or absence of a distinctive female piety during the classical period of Sufism is still ongoing. Female scholars, such as Ruth Roded, Rkia Cornell, Arezou Azad and Maria Dakake, emphasize, each in her own way, the existence of different traits and virtues of Islamic female piety: a common "language of domesticity" according to Dakake (Dakake 2007, p. 72), or a common "theology of servitude" in Cornell's words (Cornell 1999, p. 54). Laury Silvers indicates that women's domestic obligations and gendered social norms would have affected their theological perspectives and ritual lives. According to Silvers, if we relate to intersecting socio-historical narratives specifically about women, we can speak about a spirituality particular to women (Silvers 2015, p. 29). Christopher Melchert disagrees with these scholars and relies on content analysis of Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) biographical dictionary, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, to conclude that renunciant and Sufi women during that early stage shared with their male counterparts similar saintly traits, and that both men and women were part of a prevailing pious ideology (Melchert 2016). While Melchert's argument of a similar and prevailing ideology between male and female pietists has some evidence, there is no question that in stories and quoted statements in early Sufi compendia, more pious women were faced with the conflict between one's Sufi devotional life and one's familial–social commitments more strongly than Sufi men. There are no textbooks of early female authors so that we are unable to follow their rhetoric, language and stylistics in comparison with male contemporaries. The earliest Sufi works written by a woman are those of ʿĀʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya (d. 923/1517) of Damascus. Her *Kitāb al-muntakhab fī uṣūl al-rutab fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* (Selections on the Principles of the Stations in the Science of Sufism) and other writings provide interesting insights into the author's female identity and do so through her distinguished voice and rhetoric. Her use of emotional–personal language and intensive poetical metaphors essentially differs from her male ancestors (Salamah-Qudsi 2019, pp. 53–55).

The role pious women played in the process of integrating renunciatory practices and mores with mystical conceptions of divine love, longing and unity, from the late eighth century onwards, succeeded in highlighting the active involvement of women in the public space of the Sufi communal life. Their role could be felt in public teaching and learning, in relating and transmitting Sufi doctrinal system and *ḥadīth* traditions and in taking certain financial responsibilities for Sufi individuals, groups and even more established centers and lodges.

It is worth noting, for example, that if an anecdote focuses on the ritual of remembrance of God's name (*dhikr*) and involves a woman, it is quite common that the general framework of the story refers to this woman's role as a mother, a sister or a wife. Ḥukayma al-Dimashqiyya was the teacher of the famous female mystic of Syria, Rābiʿa bint Ismāʿīl. Al-Sulamī, in discussing Ḥukayma, quotes her as having criticized Rābiʿa's husband and the latter's decision to take another woman as his wife (al-Sulamī 1999, p. 127). Al-Sulamī's work in general displays the high morality of uncompromising female piety that depicts an iconic image of women who succeeded in managing a deep spirituality alongside a sincere commitment to mothering and wifehood. At times, the focus on more familial issues and ties in the biographies of pious women took less iconic forms. We read, for instance, about women who paid tribute to their children's death. Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya is described by Ibn al-Jawzī to have asked visiting women not to console her when her husband's son was

killed but rather congratulate her instead (Ibn al-Jawzī 2000, vol. 2, p. 240). Manfūsa bint Zayd al-Fawāris praises this woman's tenacity and states that enduring the loss of her son is better than the fear of losing him (Ibn al-Jawzī 2000, p. 499). Nusiyya bint Salmān, the wife of Yūsuf b. Asbāṭ al-Shaybānī (d. 199/815), is quoted by al-Sulamī to have said after she gave birth to a son: "Oh, Lord! You do not see me as someone worthy of Your worship, so You have sought to preoccupy me with a child!." (al-Sulamī 1999, p. 93). 'Athāma bint Bilāl b. Abī al-Dardā' is mentioned as a pious mother who continuously reminded her son of prayer times (al-Sulamī 1999, p. 111).

Without using a woman's social status or engagements as an indicator of a distinctive female piety, such hagiographical references show that a woman's behavioral piety had some distinguishing features both in reality and in literary expression. The ideal of poverty was very often asserted in the biographies of male renunciants and Sufis. The title *faqīr* itself became a synonym of a Sufi regardless of the perceived or real state of his wealth. It is very interesting to note that this title does not appear in any biography of any women in al-Sulamī's *Dhikr al-niswa* and in Ibn al-Jawzī' *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* (in two places of Ibn al-Jawzī's work, the title "female poor" appears; however, it is not used there as an indicator for piety but rather as an actual adjective of two women who are mentioned in the biographical accounts of male pietists. See Ibn al-Jawzī 2000, vol. 1, p. 569; vol. 2, p. 298). As for al-Sulamī, one of his strategies to celebrate the devotional status of many women was to assert that they were wealthy and renowned almsgivers.

Prior to the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century, Sufi communities operated in a *ribāṭ*-based framework; different Sufi centers led by charismatic Sufi masters with a group of disciplined Sufis were committed to the collective practices of *dhikr* and *samā'*, of learning sessions and shared fasting meals and journeys (Hofer 2021, pp. 177–78). During the Mamluk period, women's lodges were also founded to provide a residence for divorced and widowed women; however, by the Ottoman conquests, these lodges vanished (Sabra 2021, pp. 33–34). A significant function within the walls of Sufi lodges in general was that of the *khādim* (lit. servant). The term *khidma* (service) itself carries various meanings in early Sufi writings. It commonly refers to the domestic and productive activities of Sufi disciples for the benefit of their masters (Chih 2021, p. 199). On some occasions, this term designates the simple act of serving people (Ibn al-Zayyāt 1997, p. 161), or the sincere will of worshipping God (Ibn al-Zayyāt 1997, p. 183). In the sixth/twelfth century monumental manual of 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), *khidma* came to indicate the wish of lay affiliates to "give rest to disciplined Sufis and let them devote themselves to the inner life with God by guaranteeing their living" (al-Suhrawardī 1967, p. 118). Some of these affiliates were in fact wealthy people who had a strong sympathy towards Sufism without being able to formally and regularly comply with all Sufi rituals and duties. They, therefore, chose to bestow upon Sufis donations and endowments (Salamah-Qudsi 2011, pp. 191–92). Biographies and historiographies of early medieval Islam provide us with a large number of references to figures who were involved in *khidma*, so that they provided certain *ribāṭ* communities with the financial support needed for daily life. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sim'ānī (d. 561/1166), the author of *Kitāb al-Ansāb* (The Book of Genealogies), refers to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Turjumānī who "served Sufis for sixty years and expended all of his properties that he inherited from his father on them" (al-Sam'ānī 1998, vol. 1, p. 479). The prolific historian and biographer Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 747/1346) refers in his Histoire to Munīr b. Muḥammad (d. 548/1153), who "used to serve Sufis by earning money and spending it on them" (*kāna yakhdimuhum wa-yuḥaṣṣilu al-amwāl wa-yunfiqu 'alayhim*) (Dhahabī 1989–2004, vol. 37, p. 339).

The term *khidma* appears very frequently in al-Sulamī's *Dhikr al-niswa* in the biographies of rich women who spend their wealth on poor Sufis. The meaning of *khidma* as financial support given to disciplined Sufis could also be applied to the many pious women in al-Sulamī's work. The biographical account of Āmina al-Marjiyya, for instance, opens with the sentence: "She swore herself to the service of Sufis", and ends with an interesting statement of Āmina on service to Sufis (*khidmat al-fuqarā'*) and the illumination of the heart

that grows from that service (al-Sulamī 1999, pp. 254–55). Fāṭima al-Khānqahiyya was also introduced by al-Sulamī as a pious woman who "swore herself to the service of Sufis," and he quotes a statement of her in which the term *khidma* is clearly asserted (al-Sulamī 1999, pp. 256–57). ʿĀʾisha bint Aḥmad al-Ṭawīl of Merv was the wife of ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Sayyārī (d. 375/985), the renowned mystic of Nishapur. She is presented in al-Sulamī's dictionary as the one who "spent more than five thousand dirhams on poor Sufis" (al-Sulamī 1999, pp. 257–59; Cf. al-Sulamī 1999, pp. 236–37, the biography of ʿAbdūsa bint al-Ḥārith who "served the poor Sufis for in her town for thirty years"). In the famous historiography of Nishapur *al-Muntakhab min Kitāb al-Siyāq li-tārīkh Naysābūr*, another pious woman, Sittīk bint Shaykh al-Islām Abī ʿUthmān al-Ṣābūnī (d. 490/1097), is described as a poor Sufi woman (*al-faqīra*) who "spent all of her wealth on poor and Sufis" (al-Ṣarīfīnī 1993, p. 268).

In her introduction to al-Sulamī's *Dhikr al-niswa*, Rkia Cornell proposes to understand women's altruistic character and distinguished mode of piety based on a servitude that is the essence of women's Sufism. She relates to "a female ethic of chivalry" that parallels a male chivalry tradition known in the history of early medieval Islam as *futuwwa* (Cornell 1999, pp. 63–70). According to Cornell, the practitioners of this female *futuwwa* were usually called *niswān* in al-Sulamī's work in a manner that corresponds with the equivalent term of *fityān*, the male practitioners of institutionalized chivalry (Cornell 1999, p. 66). The term *niswān* is actually an enhancement of the general category of *niswa*, which broadly means women. Cornell relies on another significant work of al-Sulamī, his *Kitāb al-futuwwa*, to conclude that "by feminizing the term *fityān*, al-Sulamī sought to impart to the practitioners of female chivalry their own corporate identity" in spite of the lack of evidence for the existence of any formal associations of *niswān* (Cornell 1999, p. 67). Although I agree with Cornell's reference to the level of enhancement in al-Sulamī's use of the term *niswān*, I do not think that the case for the semantic symmetry between the male and the female concepts has been sufficiently established. The plural form *niswān* was widely used in classical Arabic literature to convey an enhancement of certain qualities of women, both positively and negatively, and al-Sulamī's use of the word fits the broader usage in Arabic literature. Faḍl, an Abbasid singing female slave, was depicted as "*ashʿar niswān zamānihā*" (the most skilled poet among her contemporary *niswān*) (al-Bakrī al-Andalusī n.d., vol. 1, p. 656). Negative implications of the word are also evident (Dhahabī 1989–2004, vol. 33, p. 30). Moreover, among al-Sulamī's women, there are many cases in which almsgiving is asserted while the term *niswān* does not appear (al-Sulamī 1999, pp. 155, 169). Cornell's translation of the expression "*min mutaʿabbidāt al-niswān*" as "practitioner of female chivalry" (Cornell 1999, p. 110) does not belong to the particular context of al-Sulamī's text. The translation offered by Laury Silvers to the term *mutaʿabbidāt* as "the female vigorous worshippers" is preferable (Silvers 2015, p. 26). Early Sufi women did not practice a distinctive form of chivalry; they did not have an organized form of initiation and self-conscious, collective identity. They did, however, share the same great respect for the economic and household support of fellow Sufis as a means of meaningful engagement with Sufi life and ideals (Ridgeon 2010, p. 34).

Women's wealth helped them practice altruism and effectively struggle against their lower souls that strived for possession and control. Through the act of giving, those women succeeded to present a serious challenge to the world/non-world dichotomy suggested by the Belgian anthropologist Jacque Maquet and quoted by Cornell to explain the development of early Islamic asceticism (Cornel 2019, pp. 84–86). Wealth and donations are in fact prisms of the social and economic involvement in "this world". Instead of remaining abstinent of all worldly affairs, and being fully committed to devotional seclusion, those women chose to be both worldly and non-worldly! They committed themselves to Sufi piety while keeping properties and using them as a means to obtain the blessings of the path as well as an effective and pragmatic contribution to the lives of disciplined Sufis. Women played a fundamental role in the economic settings of early Sufism through this impressive institution of donations and charities. The term *arfāq al-niswān* appears quite often in early textbooks and biographies to signify presents, food, money and alms given

by women to Sufis. While this famous tradition of accepting women's support is the subject of many warnings by Sufi masters to their adherents to reject this support, these warnings also indicate the popularity of the custom. Stories about pious women whose donations were not accepted by well-known Sufi masters are very common in early Sufi literature. Such stories often have a similar narrative structure that ends with a decisive response made by the female donor who calls out the hypocrisy of the male Sufi who rejected her support while still boasting of his self-sufficiency and abstention from receiving assistance. One example is provided in an anecdote about ʿĀʾisha bint Aḥmad al-Ṭawīl of Merv, who was ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Sayyārī's wife. She "spent more than five thousand dirhams on the Sufis of her time." When she was told that a particular Sufi refused to accept her gift, she replied: "When the slave seeks glory in his servitude, his foolishness is revealed" (al-Sulamī 1999, p. 259, the English translation of Cornell, p. 258). A similar anecdote relates to Fāṭima of Nishapur, whose donation to the admired Egyptian mystic Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861) was rejected and sent back (al-Sulamī 1999, p. 143).

While at the first sight, such blunt behavior on the part of male Sufis might be seen as misogynist, a concept whose usage in relation to ancient Islamic models is problematic (Azad 2013, pp. 61–62), this behavior needs to be seen, nonetheless, as part of a wider economic, yet non-gender-oriented approach among early Sufis that views "satisfaction with a determined source for subsistence" (*istināma ilā maʿlūm*) as a potential malady (*āfa*) for the mystic. Working for a living, begging and accepting charities are all seen as expressions of the Sufi's will to permanently guarantee his living, which might call into question the sincerity of one's dependence on God (*tawakkul*) (al-Qushayrī 1940, p. 202. On the debates among the early Sufis about accepting donations in general, see Khan 2021, pp. 81–82).

Regardless of their economic status, which could increase their power and authority over their children, mothers in Sufi environments enjoyed great influence and could sometimes navigate the religious/economic decisions of their offspring—even in matters such as making a pilgrimage or roving. Mothers of certain male Sufis had to cope with their children's decision to lead an extremely renunciatory life of actual poverty and harsh physical conditions. Even when those mothers were themselves pietists, they found it very difficult to see their offspring enduring the austerities and brutal demands of the Sufi path. Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Masrūq, the early mystic of Baghdad (d. 299/911–12), is reported to have said that his mother wept on Saturday nights when she saw her son's exhaustion due to his challenging devotional exercises (Anṣārī Haravī n.d., p. 72). Another anecdote about Ibn Masrūq and his mother is related by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī:

> Abū al-ʿAbbās b. Masrūq was heard to have said: "I intended to embark on a journey, so I said goodbye to my mother and left the house. One day I found myself stopping at my place and inexplicably unable to make one further step. Immediately I returned back to my house. When the female servant opened the door, I noticed my mother standing in the narrow passage dressed in black clothes. I was frightened to see her in this situation so I asked her: 'O mother! what happened?'. She answered: 'O son! When you left I decided to remain standing in the narrow passage, to fast and to avoid entering the house until you returned'! I knew then that the reason for my inability to go on my journey was for her benefit". (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 2001, vol. 6, p. 279).

This anecdote is an example among many others that demonstrate the veneration of mothers, even when it comes at the expense of one's devotional career. Dutifulness towards mothers was not only a statement of compliance with Islamic religious law and *sunna*, but also one element of the comprehensive system of a mystic's self-discipline (*mujāhada*). One of the biographical accounts of Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 430/1038) *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* was devoted to a pious man called Abū ʿAbd Allāh Kahmas b. al-Ḥasan, who was known for his unique sense of duty towards his mother. When a group of his companions came to visit him at his home, his mother, who did not like these people, asked her son not to keep company with them. As a result, he asked his companions not to

come again (al-Iṣfahānī 1997, vol. 6, p. 230). According to Abū Nu'aym and Ibn al-Jawzī, Kahmas did not go on a pilgrimage as long as his mother was alive; only after she died did he go to Mecca, where he spent the rest of his life (al-Iṣfahānī 1997, p. 229. For more anecdotes about pietists' dedication to their mothers, see, e.g., Ibn al-Jawzī 1998, pp. 55–56; al-Nawawī 1995, p. 102; al-Tirmidhī 1998, vol. 3, pp. 465–66). Many sheikhs ordered their disciples not to go on pilgrimages or travel for any other purpose as long as they needed to take care of their parents. Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥīrī (d. 298/910), for instance, criticized Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Farghānī for not asking his mother's permission to travel and for assuming that his mother did not wish him to travel. Farghānī, as a result, decided not to travel as long as his mother was alive. When she died, Farghānī traveled to Nishapur to visit Abū 'Uthmān and became his close disciple (al-Khargūshī 1999, p. 328; Cf. the anecdote about Uways al-Qaranī (d. 37/657), a Yemenite contemporary of the Prophet, who was considered by al-Hujwīrī as a mystic whose sincere wish to honor his mother's duty prevented him from meeting the Prophet: al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī 1926, pp. 99–100). The term *ḥaqq al-wālida* (lit. mother's right) frequently appears in early Sufi writings to indicate the family constraints to which the Sufi needs to pay attention while progressing on the Sufi path and approaching the crucial need for traveling (al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī 1926, p. 111; Jāmī 1918, pp. 191, 322; al-Tamīmī al-Fāsī 2002, vol. 2, pp. 106, 129). This was the case of the well-known Sufi master of the sixth/twelfth century 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166), who is reported to entreat his mother, Umm al-Khayr, to let him go to Baghdad. His mother allowed her son to go even while she insisted that she would not see him again until the Day of Judgment (Jāmī 1918, p. 507).

The implications of a mother's right seemed not to be limited to the spiritual needs of Sufis but also have to do with a mother's economic authority and influence. One of the most interesting cases in this regard is that of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, the prolific Sufi author of Nishapur during the fourth/tenth century. Al-Sulamī's biographers report that his parents were Sufis and that al-Sulamī received his earliest Sufi training from them until his father died and his maternal grandfather Ismā'īl b. Nujayd al-Sulamī (d. 465/976) took over the responsibility of guiding him along the Sufi path. Al-Sulamī's *nisba* (a term that signifies the individual's ascription to a group, a place, a concept or a profession) was also taken from the Arab tribe of Sulaym through his maternal grandfather. Al-Sulamī himself mentions this *nisba* in his *Ṭabaqāt* (al-Sulamī 1960, p. 476; Hussaini 2011). It was also reported that the grandfather left al-Sulamī a large legacy that enabled him to travel widely, to compose books and even to build a small *duwayra* (Sufi lodge) for the Sufis of Nishapur.

According to one anecdote transmitted by the famous historian and biographer Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī through the authority of al-Sulamī's close disciple Muhammad b. 'Alī al-Khashshāb (died, according to Dhahabī, in 456: Dhahabī 1982–1988, vol. 18, pp. 150–52), al-Sulamī is reported to have said that when his maternal grandfather died, he left behind large areas of land, and that he had no heirs except for his daughter, al-Sulamī's mother. The following is the passage quoted from al-Sulamī through Khashshāb in Dhahabī's work:

> An imperious man was in charge of this legacy. Thanks to God's protection, this man was not able to seize anything from the legacy, and he conveyed it all to me. When Abū al-Qāsim al- Naṣrābādhī [d. 367/977–78] started undertaking preparations to travel on pilgrimage, I asked my mother's permission to perform a pilgrimage. I sold one *sahm* [a specific space of land!], and then intended to leave [for Mecca!] in the year 366. My mother said to me: "If you wish to go to God's holy place, then you should totally protect yourself from having your two guardian angels (*ḥāfiẓāk*) write down [in the book of men's actions according to the Muslim faith!] anything that may cause you shame afterwards." (Dhahabī 1982–1988, vol. 17, p. 249).

While asking a mother's permission before performing *ḥajj* was a well-documented norm in medieval Islam as the abovementioned examples show, it is very possible that the permission al-Sulamī asks for in the quoted passage relates more to the need to sell the

inherited land in order to obtain money for his long journey. It should also be noted that when Ibn Nujayd died, al-Sulamī was between thirty-two and forty (Ibn Nujayd died in 365 or 366. Al-Sulamī was born in 325 or, according to other accounts cited by Dhahabī, in 330), making it quite possible that his mother remained domineering regarding her father's properties, and that her son always needed her permission before making use of those properties.

This economic power of Sufis' mothers was sometimes overbearing. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Tamīmī of Fez (d. 603 or 604/1206 or 1207) in his *al-Mustafād* surveys Moroccan Sufi piety in the period between the fourth/tenth and sixth/twelfth centuries. One of the Sufis of Fez mentioned by al-Tamīmī was Ibn al-'Abbās ibn Rashīd, whose mother refused to let him go on pilgrimage during his early youth. It was reported that his mother in a dream heard a voice telling her to permit her son to leave Fez for Mecca. She then asked him to leave all his property and money to her as a condition for the permission. The young man left everything that he inherited to his mother, worked for several days in domestic service, and with the money he earned, succeeded in leaving the city (al-Tamīmī al-Fāsī 2002, vol. 2, pp. 118–20).

Many sisters had enormous economic power that allowed their Sufi brothers to thrive in their devotional lives. In early Sufi hagiographies, we read about sisters who acted as solid support for their renowned Sufi brothers while pursuing their own spiritual careers (al-Sulamī 1999, pp. 123, 193, 195, 217). It is worth noting that in ancient matriarchal societies, it was brothers, not fathers or husbands, who were the natural supporters and protectors of their sisters and their sisters' families and children. This basic feature of primitive societies has survived in different forms in both ancient societies and modern civilizations, even though patriarchy has replaced the more primitive matriarchy (Briffault 1927, vol. 1, 498; Smith 2001, pp. 141–42; 1966, pp. 194–95). Sisters and mothers, rather than wives and daughters, are viewed in anthropological studies of different cultures including Islam as women who would have high social status and thus play influential and notable roles (Sered 2000, p. 11). One example of the strong influence sisters had in early Muslim history can be supported by Ibn 'Asākir in his biography of the sister of 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir b. Kurayz. The sister is mentioned as having cursed her brother to the Umayyid *khalīfa* Mu'āwiya. When Mu'āwiya intended to ride his horse, 'Abd Allāh warned him against this woman who was able to stop the *khalīfa* and overwhelm him with an argument at the end of the story (Ibn 'Asākir 1995–1998, vol. 70, pp. 277–78).

One of the most outspoken examples of Sufi Islam of this period is that of Bishr ibn al-Ḥārith, who is portrayed in both Sufi and non-Sufi sources as a reclusive mystic who, due to his extreme austere lifestyle, chose to remain celibate his entire lifetime, lived close to his sister's house at times and that she and her sons provided for his sustenance (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 2001, vol. 7, 556. On Bishr's style of piety, see Cooperson 1997, pp. 71–101). As previously mentioned, Bishr had three pious sisters who worked in spinning cloth on the roof of their house. He even worked with them for a point until one of his contemporaries, Isḥāq al-Maghāzilī, sent him a letter criticizing him for seeking worldly pleasures instead of practicing a sincerely devotional life (al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī 1914, p. 195). Some stories exist in the sources about sisters who shared the devotional life of their brothers while supporting each other financially as well. The sister of the renowned early mystic Sarī al-Saqaṭī (d. 253/867) also worked in spinning and supported her Sufi brother when he abandoned the trade (al-Khargūshī 1999, p. 367). The sister of Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ (d. 291/903–4), Maymūna, shared both home and devotional life with him (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī 2001, vol. 16, pp. 626–27). Khawāja Muḥammad b. Abī Aḥmad al-Chishtī (d. 411/1020?) is reported by Jāmī (d. 898/1492) to have forsaken marriage until the age of sixty-five, and to have had a sister who served him and worked hard in spinning cloth to provide for him. This sister remained celibate until the age of forty (Jāmī 1918, p. 325).

In fact, subsequent to a marriage ending with widowhood or divorce (of which there were many in medieval Islamic society), many women chose to remain single for a long period of time—even unto death (Rapoport 2005, pp. 31–50). While the vast majority of

these working women worked at home in the textile industry, other specific gender-related professions were midwives, hairdressers and washers of the dead (Rapoport 2005, p. 34; Goitein 1999, vol. I, p. 128; Shatzmiller 1988). Some of these now single women eagerly sought to improve their socio-economic ties with their brothers in order to fulfill their own inclinations to Sufi piety.

4. Conclusions

While women have always been an integral part of the ascetic–mystical tradition of Islam, their involvement in the economics of Sufi life took diverse shapes. Besides the famous female ascetic figures whose poverty and harsh austerities are asserted by later authors and biographers, there are many pious women who succeeded to be engaged in Sufi environments, both partially as patrons who sought *baraka* and fully as Sufis themselves, through the effective institution of donations and charities. For these women, poverty, while being a principal condition of Sufi piety, seemed not to be strived for in itself, nor a reinforced ideal that restrains the mystic from practicing active altruism.

While many male Sufis preferred to maintain material poverty by not working for subsistence, there was a group of female pietists who were wealthy enough to serve as strong financial backing for their male relatives. This support was very often called *khidma*. That is to say, the female Sufis discussed in this paper had a very deep understanding of one genuine Sufi saying that describes the true Sufi as the one who, while able to possess anything in this world, is not possessed by anything.

The economic power of Sufi women mainly manifested itself in the domain of familial relationships and kinships. Sisters of famous Sufi figures were working women who succeeded in giving strong backing to their brothers, while mothers enjoyed a great deal of veneration in medieval Islam regardless of any economic capacities. In Sufi contexts, mothers enjoyed an impressive deal of influence over their Sufi children and could even affect the latter's spiritual progress and the timing of life choices.

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