Special Issue Reprint

Sufism in the Modern World

Edited by
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Editorial

Preface to the Special Issue "Sufism in the Modern World"

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"Sufism is the major sacrifice offered by Islam on the altar of its modernization", declares a contemporary scholar while explaining the modern challenges faced by Sufism (Weismann 2015, p. 260). Prior to the advent of the "modern age"—itself a category with a baffling set of competing and conflicting definitions, which we consider here as a period of vigorous cultural change roughly after 1600 (Hodgson 1974)—*tasawwuf* became ubiquitous throughout the Muslim world. It eventually reached such a degree of influence in personal, social, and even political life of Muslims that it became indivisible from various dimensions of Islam per se, and, in many cases, one could not easily determine who is a Sufi and who is not (Green 2012, p. 154). Such embeddedness and integration in culture and in social and power relations were yet disputed and disrupted in the early modern period. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while a new wave of rethinking and revival began among different and incoherent Sufis and Sufi orders—a process referred to by the controversial rubric "Neo-Sufism" or "Sufi reform" (Rahman 1979, pp. 194–95; Radtke 1996; Voll 2008)—other revivalist movements, which were later labeled by such titles as Wahhabiyya and Islamic fundamentalism, considered mystical Islam a major part of, and reason for, Muslims' deviation from an imagined, pristine Islam. They began denouncing what they regarded as "folk" Sufism, a religiosity categorized in Ernest Gellner's problematic model as the ecstatic "low Islam" of the masses vis à vis the scripturalist "high Islam" of the scholars (Gellner 1981), despite the connection or even affiliation of several proto-fundamentalists with Sufism (Sirriyeh 1999, pp. 22–23). The fundamentalist critique of Sufism was accompanied by a fresh wave of Sufi antagonism by Muslim modernists and secular thinkers from the nineteenth century onwards, who often regarded Sufism as "medieval" superstition and practice and something belonging to the past and thus incompatible with the present. The culmination of this disparagement and rejection at the state level, interwoven with nationalist and Westernizing motivations and agendas, can be seen in Kemal Atatürk's ban of Sufism in Turkey in 1925 and the seizure of the property and other assets of the *tariqa*s by the Turkish secular government. To these should be added the battle against Sufi orders and their far-reaching networks by European colonial powers, who would see resistant Sufi brotherhoods such as the Sanusiyya, Qadiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya as a major obstacle against their colonial expansion from North Africa to the Caucasus and South Asia (Vikør 2014; Zelkina 2000), though one should not overemphasize the role of Sufism in Muslim anti-colonialism (Knysh 2002).

Notwithstanding these intense and multifarious critiques and oppositions, Sufism has remained a vibrant part of Muslim life and culture in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority areas throughout the modern period. Though Sufi orders have lost much of their sociopolitical influence and popularity, they have sustained, developed new branches, and partly transformed into a formal organization in its Weberian sense (Gilsenan 1973). Mystical poetry and literature have continued to spiritually, intellectually, and aesthetically inspire Muslims from the Balkans to Bengal (Ahmed 2016). Sufism has also played an important role in the modernist programs of some Muslim intellectuals. Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), Ali Shariati (d. 1977), and Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010), who understood the mystical in line with modern Weltanschauung rather than being inharmonious with it

(Zarrabi-Zadeh 2020), are cases in point. Mystical Islam has also rendered itself as an alternative to political Islam, as can be observed in the support of the Budshishiyya by the Moroccan government in its battle against Islamism and Salafism (Bouasria 2010; Sedgwick 2015, pp. 106–8). In addition, the modern era has witnessed the expanding activity of Sufism in new areas and environments such as Europe and America, where Sufism has been imagined and interpreted on the basis of their own intellectual ethos (Lipton and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2023).

The presence of Sufism in the Euro-American sphere, which is the topic of several articles in this Special Issue, has become a growing field of research since the turn of the millennium (e.g., Schleßmann 2003; Malik and Hinnells 2006; Geaves et al. 2009; Dickson 2015; Sedgwick 2017; Hermansen and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2023b). The first encounters of Westerners with Sufism took place in premodern times through the existence of *tasawwuf* in Ottoman territories in Europe and in Muslim Iberia, the Europeans' visiting or living in the "Orient", as recorded in the *Tractatus de moribus* by George of Hungary (d. 1502), and occasional travels of Sufi shaykhs to Europe. However, it was only during the modern age that Sufism became the object of earnest Western concern. Such concern began in the late eighteenth century, when Sufi texts were translated into English, German, French, and Russian by Orientalist scholars and colonial administrators who had learned languages such as Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. The Romanticists of the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in German-speaking areas, played a pioneering role in this enterprise. Around the turn of the twentieth century, a number of spiritual teachers influenced by the mystical traditions of the East emerged due to an increasing interest in Oriental esotericism in the West. Figures such as Ivan Aguéli (d. 1917) and René Guénon (d. 1951), and a few migrant Sufi masters, most notably the Indian Sufi Inayat Khan (d. 1927), propagated a universalistic view of Sufism as a perpetual Truth and meditative practice shared by all religions. During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of the younger generation, mainly from the middle classes, showed a vigorous interest in the mystical traditions of the Orient, which they regarded as the home of spirituality compared to the "materialistic" West, and Sufism became part of new forms of syncretic and "New Age" spiritualities. Since the 1970s, there has been an increased tendency towards the re-association of Sufism with its religious background in the Muslim world and reasserting its connection with Islamic "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxy" (Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019). Most recently, and in the age of Cyber Sufism (Rozehnal 2019), one can observe among Sufis and Sufi-oriented Westerners an inclination for a more "affective" association or affinity rather than allegiance to a single order (Hermansen and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2023a, pp. 18–20).

The contributors to this volume analyze and examine different aspects of the presence of Sufism in the modern world and scrutinize the dynamics of its beliefs, practices, institutions, interpretations, conceptualizations, and aesthetics. In the first article, William Rory Dickson (2022) problematizes a major characteristic of the modern conceptualization of Sufism, at least before the second half of the twentieth century, that is questioning the Islamic nature of Sufism. Emphasizing that only few debated the Islamic provenance of Sufism in premodern times, he suggests that in order to better understand the nature of Sufism and avoid reducing Islam to only one of its aspects, the broad and inexact question "What is Sufism's relationship to Islam?" should be replaced with the more precise question of "What is Sufism's relationship to *shari'a* or Islamic law (*fiqh*)?" By such an analytic shift, he opens the door for contextualizing contemporary Sufism within the long history of Sufism-*shari'a* orientations before the modern period. These orientations are clustered under three main categories: juristic, supersessionist, and formless Sufi approaches. The first approach, which was the norm for many, if not most Sufis historically, organically relates *tasawwuf* with *shari'a* and considers Islamic law as a framework within whose moral and ritual boundaries Islamic mysticism functions. Supersessionist Sufism situates the law as important, yet not ultimate in its significance. Although the law is not wholly superseded in this approach, it becomes drastically decentered and is given a deeper meaning. Formless Sufism, called "antinomian" by some scholars (Karamustafa 2015), goes one step further

and prioritizes the internal experience of the Divine over external practices. It chiefly rejects the norms of Islamic law and advocates a spirituality detached from religious rules. This tripartite typology is then utilized to map contemporary Sufi movements in the West. Different Shadhili Sufis who are (also) active in the West, including the Palestinian shaykh Muhammad Sa'id al-Jamal, the American convert Nuh Ha Mim Keller (Darqawi-Hashimi branch), and the Algerian Sufi leader Khaled Bentounes (Alawiyya-Shadhiliyya branch) are regarded as juristic Sufis; Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998; Maryamiyya branch of the 'Alawiyya-Shadhiliyya), and to a lesser degree his successor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, as well as the Iranian Sufi Javad Nurbakhsh (d. 2008; Ni'matullahi) and his son Alireza Nurbakhsh, are considered supersessionist Sufis; and the British teacher Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, who founded the Golden Sufi Center in Northern California (rooted in Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya), and Inayat Khan (associated primarily but not exclusively with Chishti tradition), and to a lesser extent his grandson Zia Inayat-Khan, are introduced as representatives of the formless Sufi approach.

A comparison of the modern selfhood with the premodern Sufi-Islamic self is made in the next article. Muhammad U. Faruque (2022) establishes this comparison upon a conceptualization articulated in the works of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (b. 1931), particularly in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Taylor 1989). According to Taylor, selfhood is a distinctly modern phenomenon, which is connected to inwardness, authenticity, inner depths, and creativity and is based on "radical reflexivity", an introspective awareness that one can adopt toward one's own consciousness. He believes that the ultimate starting point of selfhood and subjectivity is René Descartes (d. 1650), and this specific notion of the self cannot be found before him. This is exactly the point that Faruque disagrees with and attacks. In order to substantiate that selfhood is not a modern invention and is not as radical or unique as it might appear, he shows how a variety of authors from the nonmodern Islamic tradition situate reflexivity and inwardness at the core of their conceptions of the self, while at the same time accentuating the self's multidimensional, multilayered, and indefinable nature. In doing so, he first explains Taylor's prior understanding of what constitutes the reality of the self and portrays the context of modern selfhood by reference to theories of disenchantment, subtraction schemes, exclusive humanism, reductionism, disengagement, immanent frame, and the affirmation of ordinary life. Then, after explaining the genealogy of Taylor's modern self and its evolution from Plato onwards, Faruque uses Taylor's criterion of radical reflexivity and inwardness—despite his own critiques against their conceptualization by Taylor—to investigate whether a concept of inwardness can be found among premodern Muslims. Therein, a plethora of textual evidence from Muslim authors, mostly Sufis but also including non-Sufis, is presented, featuring figures such as Avicenna (d. 1037), 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani (d. 1131), Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (d. 1191), Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), Rumi (d. 1273), Hafez Shirazi (d. ca. 1390), Mulla Sadra (d. 1640), Mir Dard (d. 1785), and Lalan Faqir (d. 1890). These evidences demonstrate not only an emphasis on the self's interiority and reflexivity but also the way it is situated in terms of love, bewilderment, and the paradoxes of self-identity. The author is well aware that the Taylorian modern inwardness is not exactly the same thing as those found in Islamic mystical and philosophical literature, which, in contrast to the Cartesian self, do not reject inner depths and expressivism.

The first case study of the Special Issue copes with the reception and appropriation of yogic practices in Sufism in early modern South Asia. The late Soraya Khodamoradi and Carl Ernst (2024) examine the voluminous Persian Sufi romance *Nala-yi 'Andalib* ("The Nightingale's Lament"), the masterpiece of the Indian Sufi Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib (d. 1758), who used to elaborate his teachings in the form of stories and parables. 'Andalib was a disciple of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi shaykh Muhammad Zubair (d. 1774) yet founded a new system called the "pure Muhammadi path" (*tariqa Muhammadiyya khalisa*), which ultimately dropped its identification with the Mujaddidiyya and claimed to be the most authentic transmission of the Prophet's message. The examination here is made with references to *'Ilm al-Kitab* ("Knowledge of the Book"), the chef-d'oeuvre of Khwaja Mir

Dard of Delhi (d. 1785), 'Andalib's son and successor and the theoretician of the new path. The article shows that 'Andalib's overview of yoga practices and Hindu thought is incomprehensive and ambiguous, oscillating from an explicit association of them to the views of heretical Sufis to an implicit recognition of them as divine revelation to earlier ages of humanity which may bear spiritual and physical benefits. Notwithstanding this ambiguity, 'Andalib tries to appropriate certain yogic elements in his Sufi system partly through connecting them to Muhammad's practices and teachings. For instance, the Prophet's command to use a wooden toothbrush (*miswak*) provides Muslims with a practice that accomplishes the same results as the cleansing methods of the yogis. Or, the Prophetic declaration about the belly having three parts—one third for food, one third for drink, and one third for breath—is a statement supporting yogic breath control or *svarodaya*. Similarly, Islamic restriction on diet and conversation and kneeling in ritual prayer results in yogic breath control and divination by breath. Based on the claimed authentic Sufi pedagogy of the pure Muhammadi path, 'Andalib states that the disciple is advised in all these cases only to follow the practice of the Prophet while simultaneously achieving the goals of yoga practice. Accordingly, yoga supplies the criteria for judging the successfulness of Sufi practices, and breath control, dental hygiene, or postures for prayer are regarded as meeting the demands of both Islam and yoga. 'Andalib's attitude toward yoga showcases the complexities that South Asian Muslims encountered during the eighteenth century—a fertile and vibrant period in the Islamic world prior to the systematic European encounters (Dallal 2018).

Gianfranco Bria's (2022) study of Sufi dynamics in the Balkans takes us from India to Europe. He distinguishes between the Bektashiyya, a Sufi order widespread in the Ottoman Empire named after Hajji Bektash Veli (d. ca. 1271), and Bektashism, a religious community or even autonomous religious sect in Albania that resulted from the transformation of Bektashi heritage in conjunction with nationalist movements. Such transformation started by figures such as Naim Frashëri (d. 1900), one of the most influential Albanian cultural icons of the nineteenth century, and it continued both during the rule of the Communist regime (1945 to 1991) and in post-socialist Albania. Taking this distinction into consideration, Bria focuses on the book *Syri i Tretë* ("The Third Eye") penned by the prolific Albanian author, poet, and politician Moikom Zeqo (d. 2020) in order to analyze the evolution of Bektashi doctrines in the post-secular era, and more broadly, the modernization process of Sufism. After outlining the Bektashi legacy in Albania and its rebirth during the 1990s, the article delves into the conception of neo-Bektashism in *Syri i Tretë*, which describes and defends Bektashism as a balance between Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Bektashi pantheism, Shi'ism, and Sunni Islam. According to Bria, the book combines mystical doctrines with Albanian culture and presents an elected model—or a third way between West and East, antiquity and innovation, and science and religion. It is a New Age reworking and elaboration of the Bektashiyya, though it does not contain any evidence of the direct impact of Western esoteric or New Age doctrines. Influenced by the extensive literature consulted by Zeqo, mainly written by scholars of Sufism and Balkan history, the book is a representative of Bektashi reconstruction that tries to harmonize positivism and mysticism and intermingle science, spirituality, and poetry—a reconstruction resulted from, among other factors, radical socialist secularization. The inclusive approach of Zeqo has yet resulted in a constant tension between a universalist and a particularist conception of Bektashism. On the one hand, Bektashism has been imagined as a universal and unitive ecumenism common to all humanity and beyond specific religions. On the other, it is constructed in a dialectical relationship with Albanianism and considers the Albanian culture the only one capable of grasping divine enlightenment and the esoteric third eye of human knowledge. One may wonder to what extent Zeqo has been successful in rectifying this internal dissonance.

The next three articles are dedicated to studying the presence of Sufism in Euro-American space. One of the major issues concerning such presence is the gender dynamics of Sufi communities in their new diasporic context, considering the differences between the

West and most of the Islamic world with regard to their attitudes toward gender (for an overview of contemporary scholarship, see Sharify-Funk 2020). Sara Kuehn (2023a) tackles this subject by examining the spiritual path of Güllizar Cengiz (b. 1957; also known as Neriman Aşki Derviş), a contemporary Bektashi female dervish who was born in Turkey and migrated to Germany at the age of 21. As Kuehn explains, compared to many other Sufi orders, the Bektashiyya has traditionally given more significance to gender equality. Since its foundation in the thirteenth century, female members have participated in the order's ritual practices alongside men without any gender distinction. Female figures such as Kadıncık Ana, a Turkmen woman who became a spiritual successor of Hajji Bektash Veli and is venerated in both Bektashi and Alevi traditions, served as spiritual leaders and played a crucial role in the early history of the *tariqa*. Despite this background and legacy, however, the later development of the order witnessed a tension between patriarchal and gender-egalitarian tendencies, while the former gained the upper hand in the course of the institutionalization of the Bektashiyya. As a result, women could occupy merely a marginal position compared to men, they were excluded from some opportunities and positions in spiritual practice and leadership, and their chance to advance in the order's hierarchy became increasingly restricted. In this context, Güllizar Cengiz, who is the only current high-ranking initiated female Bektashi dervish, presents a rare exception. Based on ethnographic research in Cologne/Bonn regions and Izmir, combined with analyzing documentary sources, Kuehn provides a chronological spiritual biography of Cengiz, which includes her first guidance by her father Dervish Karabulut (d. 1976), migration to Germany, leaving the Alevi Federation subsequent to meeting her second spiritual guide İlhami Baba (d. 2009), initiation into the Bektashi order and promotion from *aşık* (sympathizer of the order) to *muhib* (official member), opening a Bektashi Sufi lodge (*dergah*) in Western Germany, which was later (symbolically) renamed as "Kadıncık Ana Dergah", and achieving the higher rank of *dervish* in Bektashi spiritual hierarchy. Providing abundant first-hand details about this spiritual journey, Kuehn regards Cengiz as an exceptional example of Bektashi's return to their original teachings and conventions with respect to gender equality.

One of the Sufi lineages spread from South Asia to the West and then globally is that of the Indian shaykh Azad Rasool (d. 2006), who established the Institute of Search for Truth (IST) in 1976 for the sake of making his mystical teachings available for the Westerners arriving in India in quest of spirituality. An international community of his students, known as the School of Sufi Teaching (SOST), gradually expanded a global network with a membership transcending Rasool's original target group—including both Muslims and non-Muslims of various backgrounds. Through a combination of textual analysis and ethnography, Michael E. Asbury (2022) studies this lineage associated with the Naqshbandi (primarily its Mujaddidi branch), Chishti, Qadiri, and Shadhili *tariqa*s. Challenging the dichotomy of "change" versus "continuity", which cannot fully explain the multifaceted character of cultural transfers between the Orient and the West, he chooses the notion of "dynamics" as a proper alternative analytical tool to examine such complex transfer (see also Asbury and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2022, pp. 317–18). Having this critical point in mind, Asbury explores the mysticism of Rasool and his heirs on the basis of six key technical terms drawn from Rasool's works and frequently used in the lineage. The terms *nisbat* (the relationship between the aspirant and God/*shaykh*), *lata'if* (subtle centers of consciousness), and *indiraj al-nihayat fi al-bidayat* (inclusion of the end in the beginning) provide the cosmo-psychological basis of Rasool's mystical doctrines, while *muraqaba* (meditation; watchfulness), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and *tawajjuh* (spiritual attention) consist the foundation of his mystical practices and techniques. After a detailed description of these key concepts and their historical background in Islam and in the history of Sufism, especially in the Mujaddidi tradition, Asbury finds substantial continuity between the mystical doctrines and practices of this lineage and those in the early and premodern past. There is also much common ground with other "transplanted" Sufi communities in the West (Hermansen 1997), who have shown more tendency towards adherence to the

Sufism of their places of origin and less degree of adaptation to the Euro-American context. Consequently, the contextual changes, the presentation of Islamic mysticism as rational, scientific, and experiential by Rasool and his heirs, and their making use of language from the Human Potential Movement (HPM) do not necessarily mean an essential alteration of the major mystical elements this lineage received from the Orient. These can rather be understood as an act of cultural translation, or even an example of "integrejection" (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019), which highlights intrinsic compatibilities and resonances yet making them more comprehensible and appealing to new audiences.

One of the rather understudied areas in studying Sufism in the modern age is the exploration of its aesthetic aspect. Focusing on the embodied aesthetic involvement of contemporary artists with Sufi practices, rituals, and concepts, Sara Kuehn (2023b) looks into the work of seven artists who are based in Europe and mostly have migration backgrounds in Muslim-majority countries. Their familiarity with both traditional Sufi idioms and discourses and Western culture has created a cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1994) that enables them to stretch Sufi vocabulary and imagery beyond its conventional limits. In her exploration, Kuehn combines visual anthropology and art history to analyze data from both subjective and objective perspectives. Since most of the artists at hand employ figurative visual language, she also addresses some current debates on the dominant prejudices depicting Muslims as opponents of figural representation. Each artist presents a different type of aesthetic form of lived Sufi experience, or "the skin of religion" (Plate 2012), selected by the artist to produce meaning. The seven case studies are: (1) the calligraphy of the German Naqshbandi Sufi Ahmed Peter Kreusch, which incorporates spiritual practice, corpothetics (Pinney 2004), and creative imagination; (2) the allegorical works of the Iraqi-Swedish artist Amar Dawod inspired by Al-Hallaj's (d. 922) treatise *Kitab al-Tawasin*, which include symbolic meanings and ideas evoked by sensory experiences; (3) the artwork of the Italian multidisciplinary artist and member of the Senegalese Muride Baye Fall Sufi movement, Maïmouna (Patrizia) Guerresi, who employs various creative media ranging from photography to sculpture, video, and installation; (4) the soundscapes of the French Sufi rapper Abd Al Malik, which besides raising emotions, modes of banlieue expression, and aesthetic tastes highlights his fight against racism and neo-colonialism; (5) the work of Hanaa Malallah, an Iraqi-British mixed-media artist, whose works are mostly inspired by 'Attar's (d. 1221) *The Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-Tayr*) and uses the "ruins technique", which evokes both aesthetic and "visceral" reactions in the viewer; (6) a performative, sensorial, and aesthetic digital opera by the Greek director, visual artist, and Inayati Sufi, Elli Papakonstantinou, based on a play written by Inayat Khan's daughter Noor-un-Nisa; and (7) a multi-faith memorial cemetery in southern Tunisia created by the Paris-based Algerian artist and Tijani Sufi Rachid Koraïchi, which activates a string of feeling, aroma, sight, sound, and taste. These cases display not only the transformative effect of Sufi aesthetics to produce an intersensory, "synesthetic" perspective but also the contemporary vitality of Sufi-inspired art in transcultural settings.

The current Special Issue draws on multiple approaches in the humanities and social sciences to document, analyze, and interpret Sufism in the modern world from diverse perspectives. It offers its readership a broad and multidisciplinary perspective on the question of the dynamics of mystical Islam in the modern era and addresses the issue through various academic fields such as religious/Islamic studies, intellectual history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, gender studies, and minority studies. Contributors to this volume have demonstrated that Sufism, like Islam itself, should be understood and scrutinized "in context" and with regard to its constant change-in-continuity.

List of Contributions

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2. Bria, Gianfranco. 2022. Nationalism, Post-Secular and Sufism: The Making of Neo-Bektashism by Moikom Zeqo in Post-Socialist Albania. *Religions* 13: 828. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090 828.
3. Dickson, William Rory. 2022. Sufism and *Shari'a*: Contextualizing Contemporary Sufi Expressions. *Religions* 13: 449. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050449.
4. Faruque, Muhammad U. 2022. Charles Taylor and the Invention of Modern Inwardness: A Sufi, Constructive Response. *Religions* 13: 674. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080674.
5. Khodamoradi, Soraya, and Carl Ernst. 2024. Yoga and the "Pure Muhammadi Path" of Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib. *Religions* 15: 359. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030359.
6. Kuehn, Sara. 2023a. Bektaşi Female Leadership in a Transnational Context: The Spiritual Career of a Contemporary Female Dervish in Germany. *Religions* 14: 970. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel1 4080970.
7. Kuehn, Sara. 2023b. Contemporary Art and Sufi Aesthetics in European Contexts. *Religions* 14: 196. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020196.

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Sufism and *Shari'a*: Contextualizing Contemporary Sufi Expressions

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Abstract: In this article I propose that questions about the nature of contemporary Sufism, especially in Western contexts, can be addressed with further precision and nuance by shifting the focus from Sufism's relationship to Islam, to its relationship to *shari'a*, or Islamic law (*fiqh*). As very few questioned Sufism's Islamic nature prior to the modern period, this analytical shift offers the advantage of contextualizing contemporary debates about Sufism within the much richer history of intra-Islamic difference over Sufism and *shari'a*. I suggest that traditional Sufi-*shari'a* conceptions, though varied in nature, can be categorized for analytical purposes as (a) juristic, (b) supersessionist, and (c) formless Sufism. I propose these terms not as archetypal categories, but rather as a tentative template for mapping Sufi approaches to the *shari'a*, which can allow us to better appreciate how contemporary Western Sufi orientations towards the *shari'a* reflect premodern tendencies.

Keywords: Sufism; Islamic mysticism; *shari'a*; contemporary; intra-Islamic debates

1. Introduction

The exact nature of Sufism's relationship to Islam has long been a subject of debate, both among Muslims and scholarly observers. Is Sufism the heart of Islam—its innermost teachings and highest expression? Or is Sufism fundamentally extra-Islamic, at times coinciding with Islam, but ultimately independent of, and even contrary to it? These questions come into particular focus in Europe and North America, where Sufism has taken root in the modern period. Francesco Piraino and Mark Sedgwick suggest that "the relationship between Sufism and Islam" is "one of the most important issues for the general public" when considering Sufism (Piraino and Sedgwick 2019, p. 1). To cite just one example, during the 2011 "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy in America, public officials sought to distinguish the "Sufi Muslims" behind the Park51 Center mosque from "mainland Muslim practice", suggesting they may represent a more Westernized "hybrid" (Safi 2011).

Although such public perceptions clearly reflect a limited understanding of the complexities of Islamic identity and expression, the diversity of contemporary Sufi orientation towards Islam is notable, and can be a source of confusion. Some Sufi groups, such as the Shadhiliyya order in America, founded by Muhammad Sa'id al-Jamal (d. 2015) or the 'Alawiyya in France, led by Khaled Bentounes, explicitly identify as Islamic in nature, with Islamic practice (*salat* or daily prayer, fasting in Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca, etc.) forming key elements of their path. Other Sufi groups however, such as the Golden Sufi Center in America, led by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee and now his son Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee, the London-based Ni'matullahi Order led by Alireza Nurbakhsh, or the Inayati Order in America, led by Zia Inayat-Khan, have far fewer explicit Islamic connections, and may teach that Sufism can be connected to Islam, but remains in essence independent of it. It is perhaps not surprising then that, as Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh notes (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019), several scholars have categorized contemporary Sufi groups in terms of their relationship to Islam (Hermansen 2006; Geaves 2000; Godlas 2005).

In this article I propose that such questions about the nature of contemporary Sufism may be more fruitfully engaged by shifting the focus from Sufism's relationship to Islam,

to considering Sufi approaches to *shari'a*, or Islamic law (*fiqh*).[1] Since very few would have questioned Sufism's Islamic nature prior to the modern period, this analytical shift has the advantage of contextualizing contemporary Sufism within the much more extensive history of intra-Islamic difference over Sufism and *shari'a*. Further, this shift avoids reducing the meaning of "Islamic" to *shari'a* compliance. Ron Geaves helpfully observes that, in considering Sufism in the West, the degree to which one follows the *shari'a* "is not a definitve test of allegiance to Islam" (Geaves 2015, p. 249). As I will discuss in this paper, historical Sufi forms have not always centered the *shari'a*, and are not thereby less Islamic. I suggest that traditional Sufi-*shari'a* conceptions, though deeply varied in nature, can be categorized for analytical purposes as (a) juristic, (b) supersessionist, and (c) formless Sufism. I propose these terms not as archetypal categories, but rather as a working template for mapping Sufi approaches to the *shari'a*. Those familiar with the history of Sufism know well that this subject is a large one, and hence I will approach it here in a necessarily cursory manner. In what follows I will (a) provide a brief overview of Sufism's integral place in classical Islamic traditions, before (b) outlining three traditional Sufi approaches to the *shari'a*, and then (c) exploring how these approaches can help us contextualize contemporary Sufi conceptions of Sufism and *shari'a*.

2. Sufism as Normative Islam

Although Sufism's precise origins in a historical sense likely go beyond what textual evidence can allow us to conclusively determine, it appears as though Sufism (*tasawwuf*) was a formalization of spiritual currents, concepts, and practices found in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), his companions (*sahaba*), and the first generations of Muslims (*tabi'un* and *tabi' al-tabi'in*), collectively known as the *salaf al-salih* (pious first generations of Muslims). This is not to say that Sufism was somehow immune to influences external to Islam. Quite clearly, in its development as a tradition of ascetic, moral, and mystical practice, Sufis would have encountered analogous traditions in the region, whether Jewish, Christian, Neoplatonic, or Persian (Sedgwick 2017; Zarrabi-Zadeh 2021). However, similar to Muslim jurists, who drew upon Late Roman provincial law for example, Sufis integrated external sources, such as Neoplatonism, into a pre-existing Qur'anic paradigm and Prophetic model. As Nile Green notes, "to adapt discrete cultural elements is not to surrender the integrity of the final production" (Green 2012, p. 17). It is probably also worth pointing out that traditions do not emerge into the world whole, but form over time in conversation with pre-existing patterns, making elements of these patterns an integral part of themselves, and Islamic traditions are of course no exception here.

Whether described as ascetics (*zuhhad*) or devout worshippers (*'ubbad*), those Muslims of the eighth and ninth centuries who sought to maintain the intensive devotion of the Prophet and his companions are generally acknowledged as the precursors to Sufism, which would take shape first in Baghdad, with the circle of devotees surrounding Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910) (Melchert 2015, p. 3). As is well documented in classical Sufi and contemporary scholarship, some early Sufis gained both fame and infamy for statements that seemed to transgress the bounds of normative Islamic law and theology, with Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922) standing out as the most celebrated (or condemned) in this respect. Junayd became the early archetype of a more circumspect or "sober" Sufism, one that carefully remained within the borders of conventional orthodoxy, in contrast to al-Hallaj's "drunken", ecstatic utterances rending conventional belief (Ohlander 2021, p. 39). In the generations that followed, Sufis articulated their path more along Junaydi lines as the inward *sunna* (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad, as the highest of Islam's three dimensions (*ihsan*) or as Islam's inner science (*'ilm al-batin*), as opposed to the outer sciences of law (*fiqh*), Qur'anic commentary (*tafsir*), and Prophetic tradition (*hadith*).[2] This kind of Sufism bound by the *shari'a* and embodying the Prophetic *sunna* was given full articulation by Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988), Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. ca. 1021), Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1072), 'Ali al-Hujwiri (d. ca. 1072), and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), and would become normative for what seems to be the majority of Muslims until the modern

period. Interestingly, despite al-Hallaj's controversial reputation, we find many of these later "orthodox" Sufis continuing to revere him, though in a circumspect manner (Ernst 2018b).

By the thirteenth century there was something of a Sunni consensus on Sufism's validity and even necessity; the curricula of most institutions of higher learning in Muslim lands included both *fiqh* and *tasawwuf*, and the two were frequently studied together (Cornell 1999; Safi 2006). This broad consensus largely held until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when anti-Sufi Muslim reformers, whom can be adequately described as Salafis (Meijer 2009), suggested that Sufism was not so much the crystallization of the Prophet Muhammad's deeper teachings, but rather a corruption of those very teachings, essentially foreign to the "soil" of the Qur'an and *sunna*. The most trenchant and influential among Salafi critics of Sufism was Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), who launched a revivalist movement in Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century (Mandaville 2022). Building off of medieval Hanbali concerns about Sufism, articulated by 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201) and Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab then took their critiques further, not simply condemning various Sufi practices and beliefs, but considering the phenomenon itself as idolatry and unbelief.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also saw Orientalists reformulate "aspects of Islamic culture into a separate category called Sufism", suggesting that this separate phenomenon known as Sufism was a foreign transplant, originating not in Arabia, but in India, Greece, or Persia (or perhaps some combination of the three) (Ernst 2018a, p. 4). Many European scholars at this time understood genuine mysticism and philosophy to be products of the "Aryan mind", in contrast to Islam, which was understood to be a quintessential Semitic legalism. Hence Sufism could only be understood as a foreign mystical "flower" somehow transplanted in the legalistic Islamic "desert". Linda Sijbrand summarizes this Orientalist perspective:

> Sufism, however—being mainly expressed in the Aryan Persian language—did not fit the idea of a rigid, legalistic Islam . . . Sufism was seen as originally Indian (Hindu or Buddhist), Persian, Hellenistic, Christian or gnostic, but not Islamic. The one thing that all these origins had in common was the fact that they were Aryan. [Edward H.] Palmer saw Sufism as 'a flower in the desert.' Europeans who could not relate to Islam did appreciate Sufism, and their main concern was how this foreign element had entered Islam. (Sijbrand 2013, p. 101)

Where Salafi and Orientalist perspectives have intersected and taken root in contemporary Muslim communities, there can be genuine surprise and disbelief that Sufism was, for the majority of Islamic history, assumed by Muslims to be an organic aspect of Islam. For most premodern Muslims, conceptually separating Sufism and Islam would have seemed as strange as suggesting that *shari'a* and Islam were somehow distinct from one another. The conceptual split would have been almost completely incomprehensible. In contrast to Orientalist and Salafi theses, what we today call Sufism was assumed to be a natural aspect of the Islamic faith and way. Erik S. Ohlander summarizes the medieval picture well:

> Over the course of this period, Sufi communities flourished as far afield as the Atlantic shores of North Africa in the west to the reaches of Chinese Turkestan in the east, and from central Anatolia in the north to the Malay Archipelago in the south. Wherever Islam went, so too did Sufis, taking with them certain elements associated, to one degree or another, with ideas, traditions, and ways of viewing Islam, the world, the self, and others which were self-referentially conceptualized and referred to as having to do with *taṣawwuf*. (Ohlander 2015, p. 55)

Although the examples that one can draw upon to illustrate this are overwhelming in number, ranging across the entirety of historical Muslim societies, here I will offer a brief overview of the place of Sufism in Egyptian and Malaysian Islam during the medieval period to suggest the larger, shared pattern of a Sufi-oriented Islam functioning normatively in disparate Muslim societies, and to point to the various Sufi approaches to the *shari'a*.

In Egypt, as Nathon Hofer notes, between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, "Ayyubid and Mamluk *amirs* and their households competed with each other to patronise, subsidise, and curry favour with Sufis" (Hofer 2015, p. 2). This trend can be traced back to Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (or Saladin) (d. 1193), the founder of the Ayyubid Dynasty (1171–1250) and famed opponent of the Crusaders. Saladin ended Shi'a Fatimid rule in Egypt and proceeded with a "Sunnification" agenda, with Sufism integral to this project. He was the first sultan to appoint a "Chief Sufi" (*shaykh al-shuyukh*) under his command, the Sufi counterpart to the head Islamic judge (*qadi al-qudat*). This Chief Sufi was then put in charge of the Salahiyya, an extensive Sufi lodge Saladin constructed in Cairo. For Saladin, similar to other sultans of the period, Sunni authority had two pillars: the jurist and the Sufi, representing the outward and inward aspects of Islam, and so it logically followed that a good Muslim leader offered patronage to both. Indeed, it was far from uncommon for a leading jurist and Sufi to be one and the same person; in fact it was something of a medieval ideal of knowledge, that one have mastered both Islam's exoteric and esoteric sciences, that one be both a *faqih* (jurist) and *faqir* (Sufi).

Rachida Chih notes the prevalence of this jurist-Sufi ideal among Egyptian religious authorities, observing that, though there were some jurists who focused more on textual matters, and some more on spiritual ones, "with the influence of the great figures among fifteenth-century Egyptian Sufi jurists", the contrast between outward and inward focusing authorities was largely attenuated among Egypt's *'ulama* (Chih 2019, p. 10). We see this trend illustrated well in the life of Shaykh Muhammad bin Salim al-Hifni (d. 1767),[3] perhaps Egypt's most popular and renowned religious authority in the eighteenth century; al-Hifni was a Shafi'i jurist, and starting in 1757, the rector of al-Azhar. He was also a Sufi master in the Khalwatiyya order, and renowned as a saint (*wali*) and even the *qutb* or spiritual "pole" of his time (Chih 2019, pp. 1–2).[4] The Khalwatiyya were well ensconced in Sunni Islam's premiere institution of learning, as Chih accounts: "The Khalwatiyya was the path of the *azhari* elite; after al-Hifni and until the end of the nineteenth century nine Khalwatis would occupy the position of Shayh of al-Azhar" (Chih 2019, p. 34). For Egyptian Muslims from the Ayyubid to the modern period, jurist-Sufis, such as al-Hifni, were the norm rather than the exception: Islamic leaders were expected to be masters of Islam's disciplines of scripture and law, as well as its spiritual path, and to suggest that the two could be separated would have been alien to Muslim conceptual grammar.

In Southeast Asia, we find that the spread of Islam in the region took place largely under Sufi auspices, such that Malaysian Islam was, for centuries, deeply Sufi in nature. Khairudin Aljunied observes that by the sixteenth century, the region was "drenched" in Sufism: "Sufi traces were found in court texts, fables, songs, and poetry. Sufistic practices were present in Malay cultural and religious activities, in the conduct of feasts and festivities. Sufi motifs also shaped Malay arts and architecture. To be a Malay-Muslim was to be Sufi, by default" (Aljunied 2019, p. 41). However, as we will see, Malay Islam contained within it several at times contrasting expressions of Sufism.

Relevant to my discussion of Sufism-*shari'a* typologies later in this paper, Aljunied describes three kinds of Sufism that shaped Malay Islam: populist, philosophical, and scholastic. Populist Sufis were "master synthesizers", comfortably integrating indigenous Southeast Asian spiritualities with Islamic practice and symbol, practicing various forms of healing, creating amulets of protection, and acting as intermediaries with the spirit world, all through a Qur'anic frame of reference. This was a kind of Islam synthesizing with local spiritualities, based upon a shared understanding of the importance of mediating between unseen and seen realities. Philosophical Sufis, largely following Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi's (d. 1240) school, focused more on developing an Islamic metaphysics, most prominent in the region being Hamza Fansuri (d. ca. 1590), one of the founders of Malay poetic traditions, and himself an exquisite metaphysical poet. However, those whom Aljunied labels "scholastic Sufis" tended to criticize both popularizers and philosophical Sufis as compromising *shari'a* norms and transgressing the bounds of exoteric Islamic theology. These Sufis would have been more grounded in the scholastic traditions of the

madrasa, trained in *fiqh* and *kalam* (Islamic theology; primarily the Shafi'i and Ash'ari schools), and wary of the threat of heresy. Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1658) for example, who was not only a scholastic Sufi, but also the leading Muslim juristic authority (*shaykh al-Islam*) under Sultana Safiatuddin Tajul Alam (d. 1675), issued a *fatwa* against Fansuri's works, which were subsequently banned and even burned (Aljunied 2019, p. 45).

As is clear from the two (representative) examples of Egypt and Malaysia above, *tasawwuf* was integrally Islamic, or we can say Islam was integrally Sufi in orientation. However, this is not to say that *tasawwuf* was without controversy or critique in the premodern period: as we saw in the case of Southeast Asia, juristically-oriented Sufis at times condemned their less orthoprax spiritual colleagues. In all cases however, we do not find the entirety of Sufism itself being condemned, but rather various kinds of contestation over which *kind* of Sufism was Islamically legitimate. The novelty of the thesis of Sufism's entirely extra-Islamic nature can be demonstrated by simply noting that perhaps the classical tradition's most trenchant critic of Sufism, Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya, by no means suggested that Sufism as such was completely foreign to Islam, but rather, similar to Ibn al-Jawzi and other Hanbalis, only critiqued various expressions of Sufism that he deemed foreign to the Salafi spirit, while acknowledging the Islamic nature of the phenomenon more broadly. Ibn Taymiyya even wrote a book on the virtues of Sufism and a commentary on famous Hanbali Sufi 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's (d. 1166) text, the *Futuh al-Ghayb* (Bazzano 2015, p. 118), illustrating his Sufi sympathies in spite of his critiques.

It is really only in the late eighteenth century, with Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, that we find Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Jawzi's critique of Sufism amplified to such a degree that Sufism itself is seen as an idolatrous innovation, ultimately Islam's opposite, rather than its deeper self. The dissemination of "Wahhabi" anti-Sufism has occurred through the auspices of global Salafi networks in the twentieth century, which have proven remarkably effective in marginalizing Sufism in contemporary Muslim discourse, or at least rendering it suspect (Mandaville 2022). In turn some Muslims and scholars have attempted to counter Salafi narratives by highlighting Sufism's historical orthodoxy and organic relationship to the *shari'a*, centering juristic versions of Sufism as normative. In what follows however, we can see that Sufis have had varied approaches to the law, which prefigure the diversity of Sufism we find in the global West.

3. A Sufi-*Shari'a* Typology

As described above, few prior to the modern period would have seriously questioned Sufism's Islamic provenance. However, when we consider Sufism's relationship to *shari'a* or *fiqh* we find a much richer tradition of debate. The various classical perspectives on Sufism and the law prove useful in making sense of contemporary Sufi expressions, and can be summarized as juristic, supersessionist, and formless Sufi approaches to the *shari'a*.

Juristic Sufism was first outlined by figures, such as al-Sarraj, al-Qushayri, and al-Ghazali, and then embodied in the majority of Sufi orders, and perhaps best represented in the later period by prominent jurist Sufis, such as al-Hifni and al-Raniri. In short, juristic Sufism appears to have been the norm for many if not most Sufis historically. They would have largely understood the science of *tasawwuf* as being organically related to the *shari'a*, functioning within its moral and ritual boundaries. Within this conception, the law demarcated the boundaries of the spiritual life, and spirituality ensured that the embodied practice of the law included corresponding inward states, virtues, and understanding. The goal of the Sufi path was the realization of truth or *haqiqa* (what Shahab Ahmed translates as the "Real-Truth") (Ahmed 2016, p. 11). Within the juristic Sufi paradigm *haqiqa* is realized *within* and *through* the careful practice of the *shari'a*, both in terms of the prescribed ritual life (*'ibadat*) and proper actions (*mu'amalat*). The Indian Naqshbandi master popularly known as Islam's reviver in its second millennium (*mujaddid alf thani*), Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), expressed this understanding of Sufism as follows:

> The true realized one (muntahi-yi haqiqi) finds that inner experience corresponds
> to the outer shariat. The difference between the [superficial] jurists and the noble

Sufis is that jurists know [topics of shariat] by rational proof and the Sufis know by their inner disclosers and by tasting. (Ahmad Sirhindi, *Maktubat Imam Rabbani*, as translated by Arthur Buehler, and quoted in Faruque 2016, p. 41)

Here we find that the deeper reality or Real-Truth (*haqiqa*) is not somehow above or separate from the *shari'a*, but is simply knowing the *shari'a*'s deeper aspect, or realizing its truth existentially as opposed to conceptually. Sufism then is the fullest living of and understanding of *shari'a*. This longstanding and at times near ubiquitous conception of Sunni Islam, one in which Sufism is *shari'a*'s completion, has been revived in recent decades by what Jonathan A. C. Brown calls "late Sunni traditionalists", who invoke this vision of Islam to counter Salafi suggestions of Sufism's extra-Islamic origin and nature (Brown 2014).

However, while acknowledging this conception of Sufism and *shari'a*—what I am calling juristic Sufism—as normative for many Sufis historically, it is important to not then marginalize conceptions of Sufism and *shari'a* that tended to situate the law as significant, but not ultimate in its significance. Some of Sufism's most renowned luminaries and some of its most pervasive expressions understood *haqiqa* to, in a sense, supersede the law, rendering it redundant. This is not to say that within this conception the law is seen to be *comprehensively* superseded. Generally speaking, the law is understood to be necessary both for the generality of Muslims, and as a prerequisite for the spiritual path (*tariqa*). However, the law becomes radically decentered and even transcended by the Sufi's realization of *haqiqa*. It is important to highlight that this does not make this sort of Sufism somehow *less Islamic*: supersessionist Sufis would have conceived of their understanding as representing a higher or deeper Islam than that of the jurists, who remain trapped in the outward forms of things, too often missing their deeper meaning.

Recent works in the field of Islamic studies, most prominently Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam?* (Ahmed 2016) and Thomas Bauer's *A Culture of Ambiguity* (Bauer [2011] 2021), have engendered significant scholarly conversation on the diverse, ambiguous, and even contradictory nature of premodern Islam, particularly in terms of Muslim understandings of *shari'a*. As previously mentioned, in reaction to Orientalist and Salafi depictions of Sufism as totally separate from the Islamic *shari'a*, some late Sunni traditionalists and other scholars have portrayed Sufism as intrinsically aligned with or within *shari'a*. Ahmed's work in particular illustrates well how much Sufi discourse of the medieval period situated *tasawwuf* as distinctly *above* the *shari'a*, suggesting that a "real"/"genuine"/"deep" understanding of Islam largely transcended the law. He calls this "religion above religion", the "Sufi-philosophical amalgam", and highlights its dominant cultural influence in the "Balkan-to-Bengal" region in the medieval and early modern periods (Ahmed 2016). An excellent example of this supercessionist understanding of Sufism and *shari'a* is found in the discourse of Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), who writes on this subject as follows:

The Law [*sharī'at*] is like a candle that shows the way: Without the candle in hand, there is no setting forth on the road. And when you are on the road: that journey is the Way [*ṭarīqat*]; and when you have reached the destination, that is the Real-Truth [*ḥaqīqat*]. It is in this regard that they say 'If the Real-Truths are manifest, the laws are nullified [*law zaharat al-ḥaqā'iq baṭalat al-sharā'i'*]', as when copper becomes gold, or was gold originally, it does not need the alchemy that is the Law. (Ahmed 2016, p. 21; based on R. A. Nicholson's translation of Rumi's *Mathnawi*)

Quite unlike Sirhindi's explanation, here we find Rumi articulating the *shari'a* as initially essential, but ultimately expendable, once *haqiqa* has been realized. It is not so much that the law as such is rejected, but rather that it is decentered such that it becomes a *stage* or *step* that is ultimately transcended via spiritual realization of truth. It follows then that, "the highest and deepest truths are those which Sufis access from the Unseen by direct experience . . . while the lower truths are the truths of the law:" the law is not nullified *tout court*, but is relegated to a lower level in the hierarchy of truth (Ahmed 2016, p. 24). This is illustrated clearly in what some of Rumi's hagiographers mention about his

answer to those accusing his master Shams Tabrizi (d. ca. 1248) for wine-drinking. It is said that, when jurists approached Rumi about Shams's violation of the law in drinking wine, Rumi used an Islamic legal argument to counter. He noted that, with the *shar'i* laws regulating the purity of water, a drop of wine renders a basin of water impure, but an entire "wine-skin" can be poured into a river, not affecting its purity. He suggests to the questioning jurists that even barley bread is *haram* (forbidden) for them (as their selves are as small as a basin), whereas the "rule of the river" applies to Shams (in his spiritual vastness), and hence "everything is permitted" for him (Ahmed 2016, p. 100; from Shams al-Din Ahmad Aflaki's hagiography of Rumi). As Ahmed argues throughout his book, this approach too is "Islamic", as it takes its ultimate reference point to be the Qur'an, though understood in a manner that differs from that of exoteric authorities.

Finally, between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, there emerged various networks of Sufis in the Mediterranean and Central Asian regions that almost completely rejected the norms of Islamic respectability, practicing a spirituality that was more formless in nature, at least in respect to Islamic rituals and rules. Ahmet T. Karamustafa calls these Sufis "antinomian", for their, in some cases, outright rejection of the law. This sort of Sufism was recorded by Muslim observers relatively early in Islamic history, with Abu 'Asim al-Nasa'i (d. 867) describing the *fikriyya*—"meditationists" or "contemplatives"—those who believed they could reach God directly through meditation, and others for whom the love of God has consumed them entirely such that they held the law no longer applies to them (Karamustafa 2015, p. 102). In short, these Sufis radically prioritized the inward experience of God over outward acts of obedience. Later, the terms *darvish* (beggar) and *qalandar* (uncultured or wild) would be applied to mendicant non-conformist Sufis, who would flourish as a larger movement in the medieval period.

Some of these individuals and groups were merely unconcerned with following *shari'a* guidelines, whereas others sought to actively flout *shar'i* norms: going naked, wearing chains, or consuming intoxicants and hallucinogens. As Karamustafa notes, these iconoclastic Sufis were still very much within the Islamic paradigm, believing that they embodied the highest understanding of Islamic spiritual ideals, such as poverty (*faqr*), the annihilation of the self in God (*fana'*), and sainthood (*walaya*) (Karamustafa 2015, p. 118). For these Sufis, a full recognition of *haqiqa* meant that one had followed the Prophetic imperative of "dying before death". As those who had died to this world, their realization of *haqiqa* not only decentered the *shari'a,* but made it entirely redundant, which they celebrated through a life of Islamic unconventionality. Although formless Sufis saw themselves as followers of the Prophet, and perhaps the very best of followers embodying the deep reality of the *sunna*, other Sufis condemned them as nonbelievers. Early on, al-Sarraj, for example, compiled a list of such antinomian groups, most of whom he considered to be nonbelievers for leaving aspects of Islamic law or contravening Islamic theological precepts, and later al-Ghazali would similarly condemn antinomians as obviously misguided (Karamustafa 2015, pp. 103–4, 113). However, the antinomian Qalandariyya would themselves become a positive trope in Persian Sufi poetry. Traced back to the uncompromising ecstasy and metaphysical nakedness of expression represented most iconically by al-Hallaj, the Qalandariyya became poetically celebrated as "the epitome of true piety cleansed of all dissimulation and hypocrisy", standing in contrast to the compromised, conventional Sufis of the convent (*khanaqah*) (Karamustafa 2015, p. 109). Some elements of the formless Sufi approach would crystalize in the Bektashiyya, a Sufi order traced to Hajji Bektash Veli (d. 1271) that flourished for centuries in the Ottoman empire, and was associated quite closely with the Janissary corps. Though not juristic in approach, integrating elements of Christian religious practice, including celibacy and celebrating iconoclasts, such as al-Hallaj, the Bektashiyya were (and are) a deeply Islamic order, playing a historic role in spreading Islam among Christians within the Ottoman realm, for example (Trix 2009).

4. Contemporary Sufi Expressions

With an appreciation of the range of possible Sufism-*shari'a* conceptions, we can better contextualize contemporary Sufi movements in the West in terms of older tendencies within the Sufi tradition, whether juristic, supersessionist, or formless. This approach further avoids centering the law as the barometer of what counts as legitimately Islamic, as less-*shari'a* oriented groups are not then deemed to be outside of the boundaries of Islamic tradition. It is probably helpful to point out that I am not referring here to what we might call the Sufism of the spiritual marketplace which can be more directly traced to the post-1960s intersection of alternative spiritualities and modern commerce, having little connection with historic Islamic traditions. If we are considering a "Rumi moon yoga mat" for instance, we are not so much dealing with a formless expression of Sufism, but rather a contemporary spiritual commodity that may draw upon Sufi resources, but is not itself an expression of the historical Sufi tradition (Arjana 2020). I am hence limiting "Sufism" to the sustained engagement with Sufi practice based on relationship with a lineage-authorized *shaykh/shaykha*, however formal (or not) in nature.

In terms of contemporary expressions of juristic Sufism, we can point to Shadhili Sufi groups as representative. The Shadhiliyya itself has a long history of transmitting *tasawwuf* within a *fiqh*-oriented practice. Bazzano notes that the order is one of "the most influential Sufi orders in Islamic history", producing several leading Muslim authorities over the centuries (Bazzano 2020, pp. 86–87). Whether we think of the spiritual forerunner of Shadhili Sufism, Abu Madyan (d. 1198), or the luminaries of the Shadhiliyya including the founder Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258), Ibn 'Ata Allah (d. 1310) and later Muhammad al-Darqawi (d. 1823), we find a consistently juristic form of Sufism.[5] Reflecting this historical juristic orientation, contemporary Palestinian Shadhili leader Muhammad Sa'id al-Jamal, who began teaching in America in the 1990s, wrote in 2002, "There is no Sufism without jurisprudence. Both are inseparable and must be combined together" (Bazzano 2020, p. 92). Similarly, if we look to the Darqawi-Hashimi branch of the Shadhiliyya led by American convert Nuh Ha Mim Keller (based in Amman, Jordan), we find a deeply juristic approach to Sufism, with Keller publishing one of the first English translations of a classical manual Shafi'i *fiqh*, Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri's (d. 1368) *The Reliance of the Traveller* (Al-Misri 1994), and emphasizing the centrality of legal conformity to Islamic spirituality, such that other Western Sufis have categorized his approach as "ultraorthodox" (Hermansen 2005, p. 494). Khaled Bentounes leads the 'Alawiyya-Shadhiliyya, based in France, but with branches throughout Europe, and in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Similar to other Shadhili branches, Bentounes understands his order to represent "traditional Sunni-Sufi orthodoxy", and yet Piraino notes that this juristic form of Sufism takes a flexible approach to Islamic law and theology, with an "inclusive universalism" that suggests that the "nonbeliever" is not simply the non-Muslim, but rather a state of mind reflecting ingratitude and arrogance, for example (Piraino 2019, pp. 77–79). In all of the above cases however, we find contemporary Shadhili teachers perpetuating the *shari'a*-based Sufism of traditional Shadhili forerunners and luminaries, though with varying levels of adaptation to contemporary contexts.

The Maryamiyya are an American-based branch of the 'Alawiyya-Shadhiliyya, founded by Frithjof Schuon (d. 1998), and currently led by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. The order is intellectually associated with a school of thought known as Traditionalism, founded by René Guénon (d. 1951), with Schuon something of a successor to Guénon (Dickson 2020a). Alongside a trenchant critique of modernity, the works of Guénon and Schuon suggest that authentic esoteric paths are always contained within an "orthodox" or "traditional" religious form. Each traditional path and form reflect an authentic expression of a singular perennial truth, and hence Traditionalists are sometimes referred to as Perennialists. As Nasr is Schuon's foremost successor, both intellectually in terms of Traditionalism and practically in terms of leading the Maryamiyya, it is not surprising that he articulates a Traditionalist understanding of Sufism (one that we may characterize as juristic). In an interview with the author, he describes genuine Sufi orders as those in which their members "pray, they fast when they are not ill, they perform the Islamic rites, they do not drink, they

do not fornicate", avoiding "all that is forbidden in Islamic law" (Dickson 2015, p. 189). Interestingly however, Guénon and other Traditionalists criticized Schuon's Maryamiyya precisely for moving outside of the confines of the Islamic *shari'a*: Schuon undertook what may be called supercessionist adaptations of his branch of the Shadhiliyya, incorporating the veneration of the Virgin Mary (Maryam), Indigenous North American traditions, and sacred nudity. Schuon further allowed for *shar'i* norms to be compromised for the purpose of facilitating Sufism's practice in Western contexts (Sedgwick 2004). This was all done as a result of Schuon's more supercessionist approach to Sufism, which prioritized esoteric realization over outward form, and hence allowed for modifications to traditional Islamic *shari'a* norms, in regards to non-Islamic traditions and daily practice. Schuon held that Sufism, as an esoteric wisdom, was "not in any sense even a part, even an inner part" of Islam, but was rather a "quasi-independent phenomenon" (Schuon [1953] 1993, pp. 9–10). Nasr has notably downplayed the supercessionist elements of the Maryamiyya, reaffirming a more juristic understanding of Sufism (Dickson and Xavier 2019).

A more explicitly supersessionist approach to the *shari'a* can be found in the England-based Ni'matullahi order, which was established outside Iran by Javad Nurbakhsh (d. 2008) and is currently led by his son Alireza Nurbakhsh. Similar to the Shadhiliyya described above, contemporary Ni'matullahi orientations towards the *shari'a* reflect the order's pre-modern trajectory. The order's founder Shah Ni'matullah Wali (d. 1431) faced persecution in Samarqand initiated by a more juristic Sufi *shaykh* Amir Kulal (d. 1371), eventually settling in Kerman (Lewisohn 2006, pp. 49–50). Despite persecution, the Ni'matullahi order would become "by far the most widespread and significant Sufi Order in Iran" (Milani 2021, p. 544). Twentieth-century Ni'matullahi leader Javad Nurbakhsh became the leading master (*pir*) of the Ni'matullahi in 1956. He first visited the United States in 1974, establishing several Sufi centers thereafter, before setting in America in 1979. He then moved to England in 1983, where he would remain until his death in 2008 (Lewisohn 2006, p. 51). During his life he established Ni'matullahi centers globally (Africa, North America, Europe, Russia, and the Middle East), with thousands of current members. Although initiated members formally convert to Islam and learn the basics of daily prayer, "not much else in the way of external observance of the *shari'a* is required", with the term "*shari'a*" simply not found in Nurbakhsh's many published works, while the "significance of the inward requirements" of Islamic practice is emphasized in his books (Lewisohn 2006, p. 53). In this respect he tended to associate himself with the Malamatiyya, a historical Sufi movement that critiqued outward displays of piety (Green 2012, p. 46), and one that would, in various times and places, be associated with supercessionist and formless Sufi expressions.

With the contemporary Ni'matullahiyya we find a Sufi group that cannot be considered to be non-Islamic, and yet we see clearly that the realization of *haqiqa* through the Sufi path (*tariqa*) is pursued with very little reference to or practice of the *shari'a*. It is not as though *shari'a*-based practices, such as *salat,* are totally rejected, but in general are subsumed by other emphases, reflecting what Ahmed calls the classical Islamic "religion above religion" of the "Sufi-philosophical amalgam" (Ahmed 2016). We also see in this group what Leonard Lewisohn calls the "Persianization of Sufism", foregrounding Persian cultural elements, and even tracing Sufism's origin to Persian culture, as a sort of Persian infiltration of an Arabic religious scaffolding (Lewisohn 2006, pp. 57–61). For Milad Milani, this decoupling of Sufism from Arabic Islam amounts to a new sect, what he labels "Nurbakhshian Sufism" (Milani 2018, p. 124). However, I would suggest here that Nurbakhsh's "Irano-Islamic Sufism" (Milani 2021, p. 550) can also be situated in terms of historical supercessionist tendencies.

As I have written about previously (Dickson 2020b), too often scholars place form-less Sufi groups—ones that engage seriously with Sufi practice and lineage—into the same amorphous category of "New Age" or commercial spirituality, simply because they are not oriented towards the *shari'a.* For example, both the Inayatiyya and Golden Sufi Center, which I referred to in this paper's introduction, have been situated in this manner (Weismann 2015, pp. 277–79), and yet both, I would argue, can be contextualized within his-

torical patterns of Islamic spirituality. Interestingly, the Golden Sufi Center is self-described by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee as "non-Islamic", with an explicit integration of Hindu and Jungian terminology. However, the Center in fact has its roots in Sirhindi's Islamic-revivalist order, the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in India. Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi *shaykh* Fadl Ahmad Khan (d. 1907) did not require one of his successors, Radha Mohan Lal (d. 1966) to convert to Islam from Hinduism, and hence the order began to be taught outside of a strictly Islamic framework (Dickson 2020b, p. 31). Following his *shaykha* Irina Tweedie (d. 1999), who was a successor of Mohan Lal's, Vaughan-Lee has maintained several aspects of traditional Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Sufism, including the emphasis on the aspirant's surrender to and ultimate annihilation in the master (*fana' fi al-shaykh*), the particular form of *uwaysi* training (gaining spirituality from Sufi masters without physically meeting them) associated with this lineage, and the pedagogical use of early Sufi texts by figures, such as Junayd and al-Sarraj (Dickson 2020b). The Golden Sufi Center can be contextualized as a kind of formless Sufism, that, similar to premodern predecessors, does not engage with the *shari'a*, but maintains a focus on classical Islamic notions and practices, including "dying before death", surrender to the *shaykh*, and the intensive practice of *dhikr* (Sufi recollection of God), among others.

The Inayatiyya are rooted in Hazrat Inayat Khan's (d. 1927) early attempt to transmit his (primarily) Chishti Sufi lineage to the West, which began when he arrived in the United States in 1910. Although Khan "initially attempted to shape his teaching of Sufism to Westerners around basic Islamic practices like the daily prayer (*salat*)", he soon found that Westerners were largely averse to Islam, and reformulated Sufism in a more universal manner" (Dickson and Xavier 2019, pp. 140–41). In adapting Sufi teachings to suit the inclinations of his many Theosophically-inclined students, Inayat Khan certainly downplayed *shari'a* elements, and created a more universal container for Chishtiyya Sufism, known as the "Church of the All", which integrated a Theosophy-influenced notion of universal religion going beyond particular forms (Inayat-Khan 2006). However, akin to the Shadhiliyya and Ni'matullahiyya described above, Inayat Khan's form of Western Sufism reflected earlier Chishti orientations, as the order was known for its openness to non-Muslims, and in many cases supercessionist understandings of the *shari'a* (Genn 2007, p. 259). It is interesting to note that in recent years, the current leader of the Inayatiyya (and Inayat Khan's grandson) Zia Inayat-Khan has worked to re-orient the order away from Hazrat Inayat Khan's early twentieth century "universal Sufism" and more towards classical Islamic Sufi forms, though retaining a universalist orientation, perhaps better described as Islamic universalism (Mercier-Dalphond 2020). This too of course reflects a modern phenomenon, namely the post-1960s "rehabilitation of the significance of 'traditions'", what has been referred to as "reorthodoxized" Sufism (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019, p. 199), or "reordered" Sufism (Dickson and Xavier 2019).

The founders and leaders of both the Golden Sufi Center and the Inayatiyya have clearly engaged in a process of vernacularization, whereby local spiritual/philosophical traditions in Europe or North America (Theosophy, Jungian psychology) have been synthesized with classical Sufi lineage and practice, leading ultimately to expressions of what we can call formless Sufism. However, rather than simply label such groups as "New Age" (Weismann 2015; Smith 1999), we can point out that this vernacularization of Sufism has long precedent in Islamic history, as we saw in the Southeast Asian case, with what Aljunied calls "populist" Sufis, who engaged in a concerted program of synthesis of Sufism with local Malay traditions. Hence, more recent processes of Sufi adaptation and synthesis need not be framed as something entirely novel, or as a radical deviation from the historical Islamic norm. For example, Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell note that the Inayatiyya have "gone so far as to decouple Sufism from Islamic law", suggesting that the law was traditionally understood to be Sufism's "necessary grounding" (van Bruinessen and Howell 2007, p. 17). Yet, as we have seen, such a decoupling is not something found exclusively in Western contexts, but in fact can be encountered extensively in premodern Muslim ones, and hence this decoupling of Sufism and *shari'a* too reflects a traditional Islamic approach to

Sufism, just one not as universally recognized in contemporary Islamic/academic discourse as juristic forms have been.

5. Conclusions

Whereas earlier analyses of contemporary Sufism have tended to depict less-*shari'a* oriented or non-*shari'a* oriented kinds of Sufism as a distinctly modern phenomenon, contrasted with an almost completely *shari'a*-based Sufism of the past[6], in this article I suggest that a deeper appreciation of the range of approaches to the *shari'a* found among premodern Sufis allows us to better contextualize contemporary Sufism within the long history of plural Sufism-*shari'a* orientations. The classical models we have of the Sufism-*shari'a* relationship, including juristic, supersessionist, and formless, offer a rich precedent for the diversity of Sufism we find in the contemporary West. This is not to say that the variations of Sufi practice in Europe and North America can, in all cases, be *directly* traced back to these earlier Islamic precedents, or that they have not been adapted to modern conceptions and trajectories, but rather we can situate many of them within a broader historical pattern of diverse Sufi conceptions of "spirit" and "law" on the path of human transformation. In addition, contextualizing contemporary Sufism in this manner avoids the analytical pitfall of reducing the "Islamic" to *shari'a* adherence, allowing the category of Islam to include more of its historical and contemporary manifestations, many of which do not center the law, but rather focus more exclusively on the philosophical systems and spiritual techniques associated with the Sufi path.

Notes

1   Brinkley Messick helpfully outlines the complexity of the relationship between the terms *shari'a* and *fiqh*: whereas we might conceptually distinguish the *shari'a,* as divine guidance, from *fiqh,* as human interpretation of said guidance, colloquially *shari'a* is used for both the divine guidance found in the Qur'an and *sunna* and its human interpretation in terms of jurisprudence. Hence the *shari'a* comprises "a character both transcendent and immanent, a reality at once timeless and historical" (Messick 2018, p. 6).

2   See, for example, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj's articulation of Sufis as one of three categories of those who inherit the Prophetic *sunna*, the others being the jurists and scholars of hadith (Renard 2004, pp. 27–37; section "Tenth Century: Niffari, Sarraj, Kalabadhi, Makki").

3   Al-Hifni, also known as al-Hifnawi, was born in Hifna but moved to Cairo early in his life for religious study. He received *ijazas* (certifications) in *fiqh*, *kalam*, *tafsir*, *hadith,* and logic, and received the Naqshbandi *silsila* from Muhammad al-Budayri al-Dimyati (d. 1728). He later became a disciple of the Khalwati *shaykh* Mustafa al-Bakri (d. 1748) and succeeded him as his primary *khalifa* (successor). Al-Hifni is credited with reviving the Khalwatiyya in Egypt, with several important *khulafa* spreading the order widely. For more on his life, see Al-Jabarti (2013, pp. 334–52).

4   For an in-depth account of *walaya* (sainthood) in Islam, see Chodkiewicz (1993).

5   Abu Madyan says, in one of his aphorisms, that the most direct path to Truth (*al-Haqq*) is "following the rules established by the Messenger", or the *shari'a* (Cornell 1996, p. 146).

6   As just one example of this, Itzchak Weismann suggests that Western Sufis, such as the Inayatiyya, who do not "convert to orthodox Islam", but focus only on its esoteric tradition, reproduce "the early Orientalist divide between Sufism and Islam", clearly suggesting here that a lack of *shari'a*-adherence signifies a lack of Islam (Weismann 2015, p. 266).

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Abstract: Philosophers such as Charles Taylor have claimed that selfhood is a distinctly modern phenomenon, associated with inwardness, inner depths, and creativity. In this conception, selfhood is defined in terms of "radical reflexivity", which saw its emergence with the likes of Descartes. Thus, according to Taylor, it is only with modern people that we see the appearance of selfhood and subjectivity, whereas premoderns did not have a notion of the self, because they lacked the essential conceptions of inwardness and reflexivity. The purpose of this article is to challenge and overturn the above thesis by presenting how various historical Sufi–Islamic authors placed "inwardness and reflexivity" at the center of their conceptions of the self, while emphasizing its ambivalent nature.

Keywords: Charles Taylor; Sufism; radical reflexivity; inwardness; inner depths; self; bewilderment

1. Introduction

Charles Taylor (b. 1931) is a familiar name in contemporary philosophical thought. In a time of hyper-specialization, Taylor's philosophy provides a breath of fresh air because it covers a wide range of topics, including the philosophy of language, moral theory, selfhood, secularism, identity politics, democracy, nationalism, human rights, and cross-cultural understanding (Taylor 1964, 1985a, 1985b, 1989, 1992, 2003, 2007, 2016). For this reason, he is aptly described as an "untimely thinker" (Abbey 2004, p. 1). Although it is hard to pin down Taylor's thought to either analytic or continental philosophy, one cannot fail to observe the influence of such figures as Martin Heidegger (d. 1976), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (d. 1961), Michel Foucault (d. 1984), Hans-Georg Gadamer (d. 2002), Ludwig Wittgenstein (d. 1951), Elizabeth Anscombe (d. 2001), Iris Murdoch (d. 1999), and others, shaping his philosophical formation.[1] His work in social philosophy, and in particular, his communitarian critique of atomistic individualism, also parallels that of Michael Sandel (b. 1953), Michael Walzer (b. 1935), and Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929).[2]

Be that as it may, Taylor is arguably most famous for his groundbreaking analysis of the genealogy of the modern self. In his mammoth *Sources of the Self*, Taylor claims that selfhood is a distinctly modern phenomenon associated with inwardness, authenticity, inner depths, and creativity. In Taylor's telling, the modern self is defined at its core by "radical reflexivity", which saw its emergence with the likes of René Descartes (d. 1650). Moreover, the modern self is distinguished by its emphasis on justice, respect for others, dignity, a sense of right, freedom and self-control, autonomy, and individual difference. More importantly, Taylor argues that the very phenomenon of selfhood or subjectivity is coterminous with modernity, because premoderns or nonmoderns did not have a notion of the self as they lacked the resources to express inwardness and reflexivity. In addition, Taylor does two things while providing a genealogy of the modern self. First, he traces the evolution of the modern self from Plato and Augustine to Descartes, John Locke, and a host of early modern thinkers to the Romantics and the twentieth-century modern and postmodern authors. Secondly, Taylor also attempts to put forth his own particular conception of the self. For instance, Taylor's constructive views on the self become apparent when he argues how the question of selfhood is inextricably linked to morality (Taylor

1989, pp. 25–52). Additionally, in both *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* (and elsewhere), Taylor defends a version of the self which is bent on affirming the ordinary life of family, work, and production (as opposed to, say, Platonic/Aristotelian contemplative life) (Taylor 1989, 2007). In contrast, Taylor's interpretation of the modern self is based on the claim that it is unique in terms of its radical reflexivity, inner/outer distinction, inner depths, inwardness, disengagement, punctual and buffered nature, and self-creation. In fact, despite his occasional upbraiding, Taylor mostly privileges the modern self for all of the above characteristics.[3]

The burden of the present article is thus to challenge and overturn Taylor's thesis that selfhood is a modern phenomenon associated with inwardness, inner depths, and radical reflexivity by presenting how various authors from the nonmodern Islamic tradition place "inwardness and reflexivity" at the center of their conceptions of the self, while emphasizing its multidimensional nature. I intend to do so in several steps. First, I will delineate the context of the modern self by drawing attention to theories of disenchantment, subtraction schemes, exclusive humanism, reductionism, disengagement, immanent frame, and the affirmation of ordinary life. Next, I will reconstruct Taylor's modern self and highlight its radical reflexivity, inwardness, and inner depths. After that, I will offer extensive textual evidence of the self from the Islamic tradition, showing how it is characterized by elements of radical reflexivity, inwardness, and inner depths, which Taylor claims are the exclusive possessions of the modern self. The article concludes by reflecting on the implications of embracing proposals such as that of Taylor, which claim that selfhood or subjectivity is a modern phenomenon.[4]

2. Some Theoretical Quibbles

In the previous section, I alluded that in probing the genealogy of the modern self, Taylor also attempts to articulate a particular notion of the self. This should not be surprising because these two queries are intertwined, which Taylor himself explains in the *Sources of the Self* (Taylor 1989, p. 3). Taylor's interpretation of the modern self is influenced by his prior understanding of what constitutes the reality of the self; therefore, it is necessary to shed some light on it, although I must make it clear that my primary intention is to refute Taylor's claim that the self, as characterized by inwardness, is a modern invention. Thus, the following remarks will rather be sporadic.

Taylor's first insight concerning the self consists in suggesting that it is always entangled in a moral space. When we try to ask, "who we are", we are already oriented in a moral space, "a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for us and what is trivial and secondary" (Taylor 1989, p. 28). Taylor further explains this point by arguing that asking questions about our identity or selfhood requires us to acknowledge pre-existing frameworks that precede our social existence. This is because we cannot answer the question of who we are without delving into the frames that shape us. Taylor mentions the metaphor of "space" to illustrate the point. Thus, it would be impossible to investigate the nature of space from a vantage point where there is no space, because as physical beings, we are already and always immersed in space. In a similar way, frameworks provide us with a background for moral judgements, intuitions, and influence our sense of the good. They form the invisible ground when we grapple with questions of selfhood and identity. The reductionist is thus mistaken when they attempt to reduce frameworks to simply mental constructs or to an accident of neurobiology.[5]

Another way to perceive the relationship between "framework" and the self would be to make sense of the latter in relational terms. Basing himself on a long line of social constructionists, Taylor claims that one is a self only among other selves, and that it is not possible to describe a self without reference to those who surround it (Taylor 1989, p. 35). In other words, the self is dialogical by its very nature. Taylor states emphatically that we cannot attain our personhood except by being initiated into a language (Taylor 1989, p. 35). We become full human beings, capable of self-understanding and self-reflection,

through our acquisition of language that offers rich expressions for art, aesthetics, and intersubjective communication (Taylor 2003, pp. 32–33).

Although Taylor's observation about the inextricable relationship between selfhood and morality is sound, it overstates the role of "language" in one's self-formation. That one's initiation into a linguistic tradition in order to orient oneself rationally or in what is called the "space of reasons" is something rather undeniable. However, the question remains as to how to explain the unique status of the logical space of reasons without reducing it to naturalism (to which Taylor does not subscribe), especially because the appeal to linguistic traditions or their fusion reifies "language" and almost makes it a *self-conscious*, a superstructure underlying everything. Moreover, although the socio-cultural and philosophical theories on which Taylor relies explain how we come to develop an extended idea of the self by continually adjusting our identity in relation to the environment to which we belong, they fall short of accounting for more fundamental questions about the self: What enables the self to attribute social facts to itself? What is the basic structure of consciousness that the self must assume in order to construct a meaningful picture of the world of which it is a part? Notice, however, that to talk about the "socio-cultural self" is to already implicate the self in a self–other relationship, which already presupposes self-consciousness and reflexivity on its part. But the self–other relationship, which is indispensable for the socio-cultural self, does not explain how the self knows itself, because any reflective statements concerning the nature and structure of the self-presuppose the existence of a conscious self that is able to make all such statements. For this reason, a theory of the self is initially determined by the question of self-knowledge, as argued by a contemporary philosopher (see Faruque 2021).

Additionally, it is notable that Taylor refers to other cultures in his quest to explore and understand the self. When he claims that the modern self is constituted by a sense of inwardness, which is best captured through the distinction of "inner/outer" or inside/outside, he wonders if other cultures, including Islam, have similar resources to talk about the self. Relying on Clifford Geertz's problematic study of local cultures in Java, Taylor mentions the "*batin/lair*" distinction (i.e., the *batin/zahir* distinction in Sufism) that the Javanese locals make use of in order to refer to both the flow of subjective feeling and the more outward behavioral manifestations.[6] Thus, even though the *batin/lair* distinction, ultimately emanating from Sufism, goes some way toward explaining some form of inwardness, it is still "quite strange and unfamiliar" to our modern sense of inwardness (Taylor 1989, p. 113). Similarly, Taylor grants that other cultures might have had some resources to express a rudimentary notion of the self, but they all fall short of expressing the modern sense of agency, inwardness, and self-determination (Taylor 1989, p. 113).[7] Additionally, Taylor does not hesitate to relegate the Indian theories of "*anatta*" and "*atman*" to this category by describing them as "ethnocentric and baffling" (Taylor 1989, pp. 535–36), while also arguing that even the theories of Plato and Augustine could not reach the height of the modern sense of inwardness, although they had some traces of it.[8]

Nonetheless, Taylor, to his credit, does wonder if we can conceive of a "universal framework" that would enable us to study selfhood objectively in various contexts and cultures, and he seems to be pessimistic about finding such a general formula.

The above theoretical considerations provide some clues as to why Taylor fails to see the rich phenomenon of selfhood in different cultures, including Islam, and why he comes to ascribe "inwardness" to the modern self only. It is worth mentioning here that my recent book on selfhood proposes a multidimensional model of the self that addresses the desideratum of a universal framework that Taylor thinks is missing when it comes to a global study of the self. In my view, the self is a multidimensional entity, which is best captured through the notion of a "spectrum". By drawing a distinction between descriptive and normative dimensions within this spectrum, I provide a global framework for analyzing the self in terms of its bio-physiological, socio-cultural, cognito-experiential, ethical, and spiritual aspects (Faruque 2021). Thus, in light of my spectrum model, Taylor's theoretical framing of the self would be something that is mostly confined to its "socio-

cultural" dimension. More importantly, in the absence of a multidimensional model, Taylor's ruminations on selfhood fail to capture the variety of ways Islamic thinkers reflect on the self, in which talk of inwardness, reflexivity, agency, creativity, etc. (in its own way) is very much present. At any rate, let us proceed to reconstruct Taylor's notion of the modern self at this stage.

3. The Context of the Modern Self

Although Taylor's story of "modern inwardness" begins with Plato, its more immediate context is shaped by the transformative events of the last five hundred years. In his more recent work, *A Secular Age*, Taylor narrates how our ancestors inhabited a world in the year, say, 1500 AD, which can be called the "enchanted world", in contrast to Max Weber's (d. 1920) famous expression "*Entzauberung*" (generally translated as "disenchantment") as a description of the modern world.[9] The enchanted world is the world of demons, spirits, and moral forces in which people lived. More explicitly, people in the enchanted world believed in all kinds of spirits, including Satan. They thought their everyday life is affected by the machinations of the spirits that resided in forests and wilderness (Taylor 2007, p. 32). It was also a world in which people believed in the "magic power" of certain objects. Thus, sacred objects, such as relics of saints, the Host, and candles, were full of magic power, which can bring about beneficial things such as healing diseases and fighting off disasters. Correspondingly, those objects that emitted evil power can wreak malevolent ends, make us sick, weaken our cattle, blight our crops, and the like (Taylor 2007, p. 35). People would visit holy shrines and pray to the saints in addition to God in hopes of a cure, or to express gratitude for a cure already prayed for and granted, or for rescue from extreme danger, e.g., at sea (Taylor 2007, p. 32). Above all, in the enchanted world, humans were not the only beings endowed with minds. The myriad extra-human agencies described above also contained "minds", hence "meaning", in contrast to the modern outlook that only grants meaning to the human mind (i.e., based on the assumption that only human beings are minded creatures with feelings, desires, aversions, etc.) (Taylor 2007, p. 31).

Now, in contrast to what Taylor calls "subtraction" stories, modernity is not a straightforward outcome of a process of disenchantment. For Taylor, such subtraction stories generally attribute disenchantment to the rise of mechanistic science, with its naturalistic explanation of the world. However, according to him, the new scientific paradigm rather threatened the enchanted world, but it did not necessarily destroy the source of ethics and morality in sacred sources (Taylor 2007, p. 26). In other words, disenchantment was only part of the story in the gradual fading of sacred presence in the natural world, as well as in society. In Taylor's view, this gradual fading of sacred presence made people look for possible alternative reference points for fullness and meaning in human life; and eventually, "exclusive or secular humanism" came to fulfil this role (Taylor 2007, p. 27). Thus, it would be more appropriate to argue that science paved the way to secular humanism as an alternative to the existing God-centric view by helping to disenchant the universe. In this process, Taylor also notes the importance of the development of a new sense of the self and its place in the cosmos, which he calls the "buffered self". The buffered self is a self-contained entity which is capable of disengaging itself from everything outside the mind. Its ultimate purposes are those that arise within itself, and the crucial meanings of things are those defined in its responses to them. Taylor contrasts the modern, buffered self with the "porous" self of the enchanted world, which grounds the source of its most powerful and important emotions outside the "mind". The buffered self is invulnerable and master of its meaning–making activities, whereas the porous self is vulnerable to various "outside" forces such as spirits and demons (Taylor 2007, pp. 27, 38).

Taylor sees the development of the buffered self as a condition for the rise of secular humanism. A full understanding of the modern sense of inwardness would be incomplete without some account of secular humanism and how it gave birth to what Taylor calls the "immanent frame". With the rise of mechanistic science and deism, the need to formulate one's highest moral and spiritual goals in reference to God became less and less obvious, as
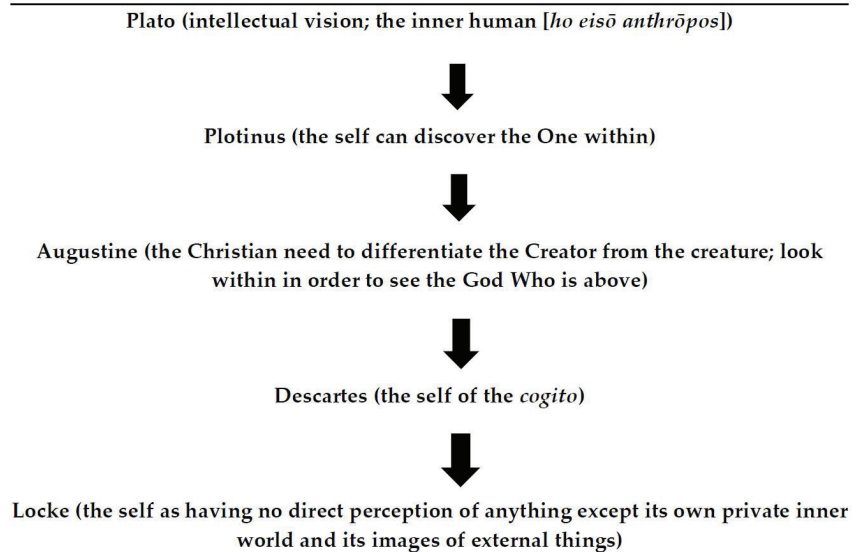
people came to define their moral order in terms of humanistic motives such as an ethic of freedom, impartial benevolence, and purely human sympathy (Taylor 2007, pp. 260–1). The good life was increasingly defined in light of ordinary human enjoyments and productivity, and anything that seemed to evoke an otherworldly flavor was condemned under the names of "fanaticism" or "enthusiasm".[10] For instance, David Hume (d. 1776) castigates what he calls "monkish virtues" such as celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, etc., while glorifying "genuine" virtues that are useful to oneself and others (Taylor 2007, p. 263). For Hume, the monkish virtues neither advance one's fortune nor render one more valuable to society, neither entertain others nor bring self-enjoyment. In a word, they serve no useful purpose in life, as he famously says: "The gloomy, hare-brained enthusiast, after his death, may have a place in a calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself" (Hume 1902, pp. 269–70). One can thus see the secularization of the moral order that leaves little room to incorporate and contemplate the divine in human life. Secular humanism is also characterized by the dominance of instrumental rationality (i.e., calculating the most economical application of means to a given end) and secular time in a constructed social space, which together comprise the "immanent frame".[11] Moreover, the immanent frame is constituted by a natural order, which is purely "immanent", because it leaves no room to incorporate the transcendent realm (Taylor 2007, p. 542). In such a transformed world, monastic rules disappear, and the ascetic withdrawal reflects only spiritual pride, and the pretension that one can save oneself through one's own effort. In place of monasticism, all valid Christian vocations affirm "ordinary life" (Taylor 2007, p. 266). This is the life that celebrates the satisfactions of love, of work, the enjoyment of the natural world, the riches of music, literature, and art. According to Taylor, one of the constitutive elements of modern culture is the sense of how valuable ordinary living can be (Taylor 2007, p. 711). The affirmation of ordinary life goes hand in hand with a generalized culture of "authenticity", or expressive individualism, in which people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their own fulfillment, and "do their own thing" (Taylor 2007, p. 299). Interestingly, Taylor also claims that the foundation for this new radical revaluation of ordinary life comes from the fountainhead of the Jewish–Christian–Islamic religious tradition, where God as Creator affirms the good found in life and being (Taylor 1989, p. 218).

4. Inwardness: A Modern Invention

In his work, Taylor is emphatic in his claim that the modern self is characterized by a particular sense of "inwardness", which is unique to it. He grants that earlier thinkers such as Plato (d. 347 BC) and Augustine (d. 430) had some rudimentary notion of inwardness, but it was not enough to account for modern inwardness, which is intertwined with "radical reflexivity" and first-person subjectivity. Plato provides us with the initial trace of inwardness with his characteristic distinctions of spirit and matter (bodily and non-bodily), higher and lower, eternal and temporal, and immutable and changing. Plato speaks of an intellectual vision in which the vision of the cosmic order is the vision of reason, and human flourishing involves seeing, loving, and imitating this order. The vision of reason is identified with the concept of the inner human (*ho eisō anthrōpos*), whose proper functioning is key to human happiness. However, what often prevents the self from identifying itself with the inner human is the human propensity to be lost in the sensible, which is merely an appearance of the higher reality. Thus, the self must turn around and change the direction of its desires so that it would be able to see the truth (Taylor 1989, chp. 6).[12]

As for Augustine, who was decidedly an anti-Platonist, his philosophical and spiritual outlook was nevertheless deeply influenced by Platonism via Plotinus (d. 270 CE). More importantly, although René Descartes was the ultimate starting point of modern inwardness for Taylor, it is Augustine who was the originator of what he calls "radical reflexivity" (see below). In Taylor's view, Augustine initiated the language of inwardness by calling us to look within. Augustine distinguished between the inner and outer human even

more pronouncedly than Plato, and explicitly suggested that by going inward we can hope to find God Who dwells therein. In other words, one can think of the self as a private inner space where one can enter and find God. More philosophically, our self-knowledge through self-presence ultimately proves God, even though Augustine granted that we can fail to know ourselves and be mistaken about our own nature (Taylor 1989, pp. 129–34). Regardless, Augustine made use of the first-person pronoun in many of his arguments concerning the self and God; thus, Taylor credits him with providing us with the first-person understanding of the self, even if it falls short, in the end, of the criterion of radical reflexivity that appears in the writings of Descartes (see Figure 1).

Plato (intellectual vision; the inner human [*ho eisō anthrōpos*])

⬇

Plotinus (the self can discover the One within)

⬇

Augustine (the Christian need to differentiate the Creator from the creature; look within in order to see the God Who is above)

⬇

Descartes (the self of the *cogito*)

⬇

Locke (the self as having no direct perception of anything except its own private inner world and its images of external things)

Figure 1. Tracing the notion of inwardness in Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (Taylor 1989).

Thus, the decisive criterion of modern inwardness for Taylor consists in "radical reflexivity", which is a form of introspective awareness that one is able to adopt toward one's own consciousness. As Taylor puts it:

> The world as I know it is there for me, is experienced by me, or thought about by me, or has meaning for me. Knowledge, awareness is always that of an agent. What would be left out of an inventory of the world in one of our most 'objective' languages, e.g., that of our advanced natural sciences, which try to offer a 'view from nowhere', would be just this fact of the world's being experienced, of its being for agents, or alternatively, of there being something that it is like to be an experiencing agent of a certain kind. In our normal dealings with things, we disregard this dimension of experience and focus on the things experienced. But we can turn and make this our object of attention, become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is for us. This is what I call taking a stance of radical reflexivity or adopting the first-person standpoint . . . . The turn . . . to oneself in the first-person perspective—a turn to the self as a self. (Taylor 1989, pp. 130, 176)[13]

Here, we come to the focal point of Taylor's argument, which is crucial for our purpose as well. Taylor claims that although Augustine takes a step in the direction of radical reflexivity, it is really Descartes who gives Augustinian inwardness a radical twist and provides resources for "inner depths"—the power of inexhaustible, expressive self-articulation—which is a further development of modern inwardness. The notion of radical

reflexivity, as described by Taylor in the above passage, can be best analyzed in terms of the first-person and third-person standpoints. For instance, when we pinch our skin, we feel pain. Now, from the third-person standpoint (i.e., in terms of the objective language science), we can analyze a given phenomenon of pain and observe its corresponding brain-states, e.g., a neuron firing at the time and its causal effect on other parts of the brain and the behavior to which it gives rise. Subsequently, scientists provided the world with all the scientific details and results. But scientific observation, which inevitably takes place from the third-person view and which may exhaust all the physical descriptions of the phenomenon under scrutiny, still leaves out the question, "what-it-is-like-to-experience" or "what-it-is-like-to-feel" such a mental state, i.e., pain. In other words, the subjective feeling of pain, or any mental states for that matter, can only be "experienced" from the first-person stance, or what we might call the "domain of the 'I'" (Faruque 2021, pp. 29–30). Notice, however, that a physical system (e.g., the brain, no matter how complex it is) is, after all, a physical system, which, like all other such systems, is constituted primarily of atomic and subatomic particles which obey the laws of physics. Even though its behavior could be analyzable and predictable, it cannot encompass the first-person stance by the very definition of subjectivity that restricts the "I" to its "experiencing agent". Taylor then points out that although in everyday life we disregard the first-person stance and focus on the things experienced instead, we can, nevertheless, turn our experience to an object of introspection and become aware of our awareness. In a nutshell, radical reflexivity or adopting the first-person standpoint consists in turning to the self as a self.

Taylor acknowledges that we cannot objectify or bring into the open every object of experience, because some things "in the mind" can be deeply hidden and repressed such that introspective awareness cannot reach them. But these hidden or repressed thoughts belong to the inner space and help shape the things we can grasp introspectively. Thus, the inner or inward in this sense, in Taylor's view, is constituted by "radical reflexivity" (Taylor 2007, p. 30).

Being aware of Foucault's study of the concept of "care of the self" (*epimeleia heautou*) in Hellenistic thought, Taylor charges that "care of oneself", either originating from an ancient sage, or as addressed to a modern executive, is other than radical reflexivity. In Taylor's interpretation, "care of the self" is an important concept, because it is a call to concern ourselves with the health of our soul (for the ancient Greeks) or body (for the moderns) as against being completely absorbed in the quest for power or wealth. However, in either case, this concept does not bear any special relation to the first-person standpoint, because "care of the self" leads us to concentrate on the causes and constituents of health (Taylor 1989, pp. 131–32). In short, premodern concepts such as "care of the self" lack the ingredient of inwardness in the sense of radical reflexivity and first-person subjectivity.

In the next two sections, I will show why Charles Taylor is deeply mistaken about these ideas of inwardness, which he invents for and attributes to the modern self. However, to flesh out the yet fuller extent of modern inwardness, let me offer a few brief comments about the Cartesian–Lockean practices of disengaged self-making and the "inner depths" associated with modern notions of nature and their roots in the affirmation of ordinary life.

By the time we come to Locke via Descartes's *cogito*-related self-talks, we find a self, which is defined in neutral terms, outside of any essential framework of questions. Thus, the Cartesian–Lockean "thinking self" ignores our desires, instincts, and beliefs because of its conviction that the essence of the self is defined by our capacity to turn on ourselves by careful examination. Taylor describes such a self as the "punctual self", which disengages itself from everything else while trying to relate to objects, situations, and ideals based on its self-awareness only (Taylor 1989, pp. 49–51). Although such conceptions of the self, associated with radical reflexivity, form the basis of a certain conception of inwardness, they still do not explain the full stretch of the modern idea of "inner depths" (Taylor 1989, p. 211). With the rise of the buffered self, as noted earlier, there has been a corresponding rise in the self's interiorization, which goes deeper than the inner/outer or the mind/world distinction. In the inner/outer, distinction thoughts, etc., occur only in minds which are

bounded or buffered as opposed to porous (as in the enchanted world), although thanks now to the Cartesian–Lockean disengaged self, one is able to experience the growth of a rich vocabulary of interiority and create an inner realm of inexhaustible thought and feeling. We are thus able to conceive of ourselves as having inner depths (Taylor 2007, pp. 539–40). The idea of "inner depths" is also associated with an ethics of authenticity, which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late eighteenth century. The ethics of authenticity ask of us to find our own way of realizing our humanity, and not succumb to a framework imposed on us from outside, by society, the previous generation, or religious or political authority (Taylor 2007, p. 475).[14]

5. Selfhood in Sufi–Islamic Thought: Interiority and Reflexivity

With what transpired in the preceding sections, we are now in a position to look for evidence of "inwardness" in Sufi–Islamic thought. Of course, one may simply question Taylor's idiosyncratic criterion of inwardness, i.e., radical reflexivity, when it comes to selfhood in other, nonmodern cultures.[15] But let us play by Taylor's rules for now. The "radical reflexivity criterion" that Taylor suggests can be explained at the simplest level in the form of reflexive statements such as "I am aware that I am aware of myself". Alternatively, it can be explained in terms of "turning one's gaze upon oneself", or using introspective awareness to talk about the experiences of the self and its inner states, or objectifying one's mental and spiritual states or simply the content of one's consciousness. However, it must be noted that all of these different forms of radical reflexivity are different from simply using the first-person pronoun to make narrative statements about the world. In other words, the reflexive statements must explicitly be about the self and its inner states. This does not, however, mean that the primary authors of these statements themselves must use expressions such as "radical reflexivity" or "what-it-is-likeness" when they talk about inwardness, because these are terminologies used in second-order explanations. One would not find Descartes or Locke using terms such as radical reflexivity, although by Taylor's light, the writings of these authors initiate this very concept.

In any event, we will use Taylor's criterion of radical reflexivity to investigate whether or not historical Muslim authors had a concept of inwardness. But first, some general comments about the word "self" are in order. In contemporary scholarly discourse, the term "self" evokes all sorts of connotations; therefore, the questions of "how one should use the word in the context of Islam" and "what are the ambiguities one must void while discussing self" must be addressed first.[16] In Islamic thought, there is no single term that renders the self, but a few have overlap, such as *nafs*, *dhat*, *huwiyya*, *ana'iyya*, and *ananiyya*. In general, these terms refer to the relationship between human consciousness (or, the human self), God, and the cosmos. The lexical meanings of *nafs* in Arabic include soul, self, spirit, mind, desire, and appetite, among others. But it also denotes reflexivity, as in *nafsi* (myself) and *bi-nafsihi* (by himself). What is important to note, however, is that in mystical and philosophical texts (unless it is used as a compound word), the word normally connotes either self or soul. Additionally, when it comes to Sufism, selfhood is seen as a phenomenon which is ultimately indefinable and unknowable (i.e., ultimately it involves an apophatic discourse).[17] Nevertheless, the basic of sense of the self involves an ethical "split" within itself in terms of its higher and lower nature—the higher nature being the state of perfect peace, with the lower nature being the site of negative thoughts and emotions. It is also helpful to view selfhood as both received and achieved, i.e., a self is not something that we automatically are; rather, a self (i.e., an aspirational self) is something we must become. Thus, it is possible to describe the self (the received aspect of the self) in terms of scientific and social facts, but at the same time, it is equally possible to articulate it in terms of aspirational ideals that are yet to be realized (i.e., the achieved aspect).[18]

In what follows, I will produce sporadic (I say "sporadic" because it is simply impossible to cite all the texts from such a vast tradition spanning several centuries and across an immense geographic expanse) evidence of radical reflexivity cum inwardness from the Sufi–Islamic tradition. I will also try to refrain from explaining these texts much due to

limitation of space, but the discerning reader can easily decide for themselves if these texts indeed speak of reflexivity and inwardness.

Let me begin with Avicenna (d. 1037). Although Avicenna is read in some circles as being a forerunner of Cartesianism and a proponent of "substance-dualism" because of his sharp distinction between the body and the soul as being two different substances, in reality, Avicenna's philosophy of self is much more nuanced in that it begins with a concept of the self that must be reflexively discerned by turning to the self as a self. Below is a representative passage from the *Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* ("Remarks and Admonitions") that fleshes out this idea:

> Return to your self (*nafsika*) and reflect (*ta'ammal*). If you are healthy, or rather in some states of yours other than health such that you discern a thing accurately, do you ignore the existence of yourself and not affirm it? To me this [ignoring and not affirming] does not befit one who has intellectual vision. One's self does not escape even the one asleep in his sleep and the intoxicated in his intoxication, even though its representation to oneself is not fixed in memory. (Avicenna 1957, vol. 2, p. 343, trans. in Inati 2014, p. 94, modified)

The injunctions "return to your self" (*irji' ila nafsika*) and "reflect" make plain Avicenna's affirmation of radical reflexivity cum inwardness. He further argues that one never ceases to be aware of oneself, even during sleep or in a state of drunkenness, a theme which Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (d. 1191) elaborates further, as we shall see shortly, because any human action, conscious or subconscious, presupposes the existence of a background self or subject that must be there to experience it (e.g., to experience the state of intoxication).

Suhrawardi, the founder of Illuminationist philosophy, like Avicenna, emphasizes the significance of a reflexive, phenomenological approach when it comes to investigating the basic nature of the human self:

> Know that when you know yourself, you do not do so because of a form of thou-in-thou, because knowing your thou-ness by a representation can be in only of two ways: either you know that the representation of your thou-ness is equal to thou or you do not. If you do not know that the representation is the same as your thou-ness, then you would not know your self, while we are here assuming that you do know it. If you do know that representation of your thou-ness is equal to thou, then you would have known yourself with the representation of your thou-ness so as to know that it is equal to your thou. Therefore, your knowledge of yourself is not by the representation. It can only be that your self is a self-subsistent entity, free from corporeality and always self-conscious. (Suhrawardi, *Partow Nama*, modified trans. Ziai in Suhrawardi 1998, p. 39)

This highly dense and dialectical (also reflexive) argument concerning the self states that knowledge of the self cannot be through a mental representation, because one either *knows* that the representation is identical to one's self, or one does not. However, if one says that one does not know oneself, it implies a contradiction because it is still a form of cognition, and hence, implies knowledge. Thus, this is ruled out. If, on the other hand, one knows that one's representation is "identical" to oneself, then one knows that it is "identical" to oneself. But the twist in the argument, according to Suhrawardi, lies in the second-order awareness, because "I come to know that my 'I' is identical with its representation", i.e., I know that the "'I' is equal to its representation", which is enough to show that the "I" is other than "its representation". This argument shows again how "by turning our self upon itself", we can come to a measure of self-knowledge.

Suhrawardi also argues that we know ourselves directly through our consciousness that is the very nature of the self. This means I cannot be absent from my self because my reality is ever-present to myself through the uninterrupted self-awareness that is indistinguishable from my "mineness". Suhrawardi writes:

> Know that you are never absent from your self and never unaware of it. Even though you may be in a state of wild intoxication, and forget yourself and become

unaware of your limbs, yet you know that you exist and your self too exists . . . . [E]very now and then your flesh and skin changes but your 'thou-ness' does not. In like manner, the knowledge of your parts, limbs, heart, brain and whatever is inside can only be obtained through dissection, without which you are hardly aware of their states. However, you become aware of yourself through self-perception. This shows that your reality lies beyond your bodily organs and your thou-ness cannot be found in your body. Your self cannot be found in something of which you are sometimes aware and sometimes forgetful. Know that what is indicated by your 'self' is called 'I', and whatever lies in the material world belongs to the realm of 'it'. (Suhrawardi, *Bustan al-Qulub*, in Suhrawardi 1976–1977, vol. 3, pp. 363–64)[19]

Although much more can be said about the above passage, for our purposes, it is sufficient to point out that Suhrawardi's insights about self-knowledge and consciousness directly emanate from attending to the self's inner and mental states through introspective awareness. The Safavid philosopher Mulla Sadra (d. 1640) expands on the nature of the self and consciousness, based on the earlier thinking of Avicenna, Suhrawardi, and others:

When a human comes back to his self and feels his inner reality, he sometimes become unaware of all universal concepts, including even the notion of being a substance, or a person, or the one governing the body. When I attend to my self (*dhati*), I only perceive the being which perceives itself in a particular way (*yudriku nafsiha 'ala wajh al-juz'iyya*). Whatever is other than that particular identity to which I refer by 'I' is outside of myself, including even the very concept of 'I' (*mafhum ana*), the concept of existence, the concept of the perceiver itself, the concept of the one governing the body or the self, and so forth. All of these consist of types of universal knowledge, and each one of them is indicated by an 'it', whereas I refer to myself as an 'I'. (Mulla Sadra, *Asfar*, in Mulla Sadra 2001–2005, vol. 8, pp. 50–51, vol. 3, p. 315. Cf. Avicenna 1957, vol. 2, pp. 343–45; and Suhrawardi 1999, pp. 85–86)

One cannot find a clearer statement on radical reflexivity and first-person subjectivity than this. In this crucial passage, Sadra puts forward the first-personal character of the self's subjectivity, which can only be experienced by a particular "I" by turning inward and attending to itself. Thus, when the self turns its gaze inward and attends to itself, it has a subjective experience of what-it-is-like-to-be-me, which is non-representational and non-universal, and which excludes all other Is. It would be possible to fill out pages with such reflexive statements, but these passages should be sufficient to show that Islamic philosophers' conceptions of the self incorporate a very rich notion of the inward. In fact, the following passage from Baba Afdal al-Din al-Kashani (d. 1213–14) summarizes Islamic philosophy's emphasis on the self's interiority and reflexivity:

Philosophy is valuable because people who meditate upon its truths will look within themselves and come to understand that they already possess everything they seek: a human has no need of anything but himself. (Baba Afdal, *Musannafat*, trans. in Chittick 2011)

Let us turn our attention now to Sufi authors, who have plenty of things of to say about the self and how it confounds us about the nature of reality. The following passages from Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbar b. al-Hasan al-Niffari (d. 965) and Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi (d. 1289) graphically depict how the self veils the nature of Ultimate Reality, conceived subjectively. In one of his dialogues with God, al-Niffari narrates:

He said to me: Your veil is yourself, and it is the veil of veils.
If you come out from it, you will come out from the veils, and
if you remain veiled by it, the veils will veil you.
He said to me: You will not come out from your veil except
through My light. So, My light will pierce the veil, and you

will see how it veils and by what it veils. (cited in Chittick 2001, p. 189; cf. Al-Ghazali 1998, p. 18)

In his *Diwan*, 'Iraqi writes:

Deliver me from the selfness of my self

for from my self is the wound, and there is no balm;

Since my being is a veil for my self,

if it were not to exist, all the better: there is no grief. ('Iraqi, *Diwan*, p. 105, cited in Zargar 2011, p. 55)

As mentioned earlier, I will not attempt an interpretation of these dense, metaphysical texts, which, in any case, is secondary to my purpose here. However, let me point out that the dialectical and reflexive stance toward the self in these texts is unmissable. To wit, whatever uncertainty one might have regarding the nature of the self or self–God relationship, one cannot fail to miss how these Sufi authors are using introspective awareness to talk about their inner experiences of the self. The reflexive nature of the self, which can only be gleaned by turning inward and objectifying one's inner experiences, is brought into the open even more clearly in the following couplet from the *Diwan* of the great Sufi poet Shams al-Din Hafez Shirazi (d. ca. 1390):

I do not know who is there within my exhausted soul.

For while I am silent, it makes all sorts of commotion. (Hafez, *Diwan*, no. 26, trans. Saberi in Hafez 2002, modified)

One possible reading of the verse suggests a dual identity about the referent "I". It expresses a reflexive stance through which the "I" ponders over its true identity. Thus, the "I" itself is split into two different Is, one of which is silent, while the other is making noise outside. The silent "I" symbolizes the inner self, while the noisy "I" signifies the outer self. In any event, what is important to note for our purposes is that the referent of the "I" in this verse could not have been something other than the self, even though we do not know what the nature of this self is. Nonetheless, such a verse does not fail to ask the question "who or what is the 'I'", the answer to which determines the nature of the self. Sufi poems by 'Attar, Rumi, Sa'di, 'Iraqi, Hafez, and countless others are replete with such verses that express a reflexive and inward stance toward the self. For instance, one can further cite the following verses from 'Iraqi and Hafez: "Inebriate me in such a way that I do not know that I am who I am" (*nadanam ka man manam*),[20] and "Inebriate me in such a way that I cannot distinguish my selflessness" (*nadanam zi bikhudi*) (Hafez, *Diwan*, no. 84, trans. Saberi in Hafez 2002). Perhaps the supreme example of the dialectical nature of the self (i.e., two selves within a single "I") can be gleaned from the following poem by Hafez:

For years I sought the goblet of Jamshid (*jam-i jam*) from myself

That which it already possessed (*ancha khud dasht*) it sought from others.

[This self is] the pearl that is outside of the shell of time and space

It searched its true reality from those who were lost on the seashore.

Last night, I took my problem to the Magian Pir (*pir-i mughan*)[21]

Who could solve problems by his powerful [spiritual] insight.

I saw him joyful and happy with a goblet of wine in his hand

And while he looked at the mirror in hundred different ways,

I asked, 'O sage, When was this cup world-viewing goblet (*jam-i jahanbin*) given
    to you?'

He said, 'On that day, when He created the azure dome [of heaven]'.

He said, 'That friend [i.e., Hallaj] who honored the top of the gallows',

His fault was that he laid bare the secrets [of the self] . . . .

I said to him, 'What is the tress of idols for?'

He replied, 'Hafez complains of his frenzied heart (*dil-i shayda*)'. (Hafez, *Diwan*,
    no. 136, trans. Saberi in Hafez 2002, modified)

It is hard not to see a "radical inward turn" in such a poem, which consists in a self-dialogue (i.e., the poet is conversing with himself by reflecting on his inner states). I will quote one last poem about reflexivity and interiority that also brings out the self's unique existential situation:

> Who am I? Tell me what my selfhood means?
> What is the meaning of 'travel inside yourself' (*andar khud safar kun*)?
> Again you question me, saying, 'What am I?' (*man chist*)
> Inform me about 'I' as to what 'I' means. (Shabistari 2002, pp. 50–51)

6. Selfhood in Sufi–Islamic Thought: Love, Bewilderment, and the Inward Journey

The evidence presented in the previous section shows the variety of ways Muslim authors discuss radical reflexivity cum inwardness. The call to take an "inward turn" begins with several verses in the Qur'an that later inspired Sufi authors to elaborate on the inner world of the self. For instance, Q 41:53 states that God's manifestations can be found both in the cosmos and the inner realm of the self: "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves (*fi anfusihim*) until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth". Similarly, Q 30:8 asks pointedly: "Do they not reflect upon their own selves?"[22] Drawing on these verses, Sufi authors such as 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani (d. 1131) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) ask us to take an inward turn and to look within:

> The very path of the seeker is inside of him. He must take the path in his self:
> and within your selves—do you not see? (Q 51:21). All existing things are the
> heart-traveling seeker: there is no path to God better than the path of the heart.
> ('Ayn al-Qudat, *Tamhidat*, trans. in Rustom 2023)
>
> O you who're going on pilgrimage—
> where are you, where, oh where?
> Here, here is the Beloved!
> Oh come now, come, oh come!
> Your beloved, he is your wall-to-wall neighbor,
> You, erring in the desert—
> what are you seeking? (Rumi 2000, vol. 2, p. 648)

However, Sufi ruminations on the inner self are not simply about "finding God within", *à la* Augustine, although God as an object of love and beauty is often part of the equation. One can perhaps reach a similar conclusion about much of Romantic expressivism and American transcendentalism, where the divine is not negated in musings on the self.[23] But there is something about Sufi inwardness or inner depths that is hard to find elsewhere, with its depictions of love, bewilderment, and paradoxes of self-identity. Such expressions of inner depths far outstrip the "bleached", punctual self of Descartes, Locke, and others, which from this Sufi perspective is but a fiction. Indeed, one tends to find indeterminate musings on the self more meaningful than simple, conclusive facts about it, such as the claim that it is a "thinking thing". Let me then proceed to produce a plethora of textual evidence from Sufism that situates the inner world of the self in terms of love, bewilderment, and the paradoxes of self-identity.

Speaking of the difficulty of self-understanding, the eighteenth-century Indian Sufi writer Mir Dard (d. 1785) says the following: "I wish that the truth should be discovered by me so that my heart may find consolation, for I do absolutely not understand the depth of my own reality—who I am and why have I been born and why do I live and whence, and where . . . " (Mir Dard, *'Ilm al-Kitab*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 40). In other places, Mir Dard appears even more frustrated and bewildered as he seeks to resolve the dilemmas of personal identity (i.e., "who am I"):

> [I could never find] the answer to the question 'Who am I? and how and where
> shall I die and how and why did I live till now?' And I see the gnosis and interior
> knowledge of all the human beings beneath this greatest amazement of mine—for

they have woven the warp and woof of imagination for themselves; and I find the peace and quietude of the individualities of my race beneath this highest bewilderment of mine . . . . (Mir Dard, *Nala-yi Dard*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 97)

Though a world sings the fame of me, the lost one, and people and look at me according to their thoughts, but . . . the door of self-knowledge does absolutely not yet open, and it was not yet found who I am and for what all this longing of mine is. And still stranger is, that in spite of not knowing myself I always remain in the torture of my self. Then it was understood that the figure of my existence sits like a bezel with the name of somebody else, and the dream of my selfhood sees, like velvet, the thought of others, and I am just like a seal with my mind dug up from my side, and like velvet, my whole body is standing hair, top to bottom wounded by existence. (Mir Dard, *Sham'-i Mahfil*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 98)

These remarkable expressions of "inner depths" are encapsulated by Dard's following couplet:

The states of the two worlds are clear to my heart—
Except that I have not understood what I am . . . . (Mir Dard, *Urdu Diwan*, cited in Schimmel 1976, p. 98, modified)

As with Mir Dard, one can mention numerous other Sufi writers whose writings showcase the centrality of inwardness and inner depths in their reflections on the self. Space will not allow me to draw on all of this literature from across the Islamic world; however, let me at least mention a few notable names. The nineteenth-century Bengali Sufi-Baul Lalan Faqir (d. 1890) has composed some of the most penetrating poems on the inner self and the paradoxes of self-identity.[24] Lalan says:

I'm out of touch with myself.
If only I could know myself,
I would know the one who is unknown.
Sai is near, yet seems far away.
Don't you see, he's hidden from us
like a mountain by the strands of hair
in front of our eyes.

I grope my way around Dhaka and Delhi.
The darkness before me never lifts.
Lord Hari has the form of the self.
If you have faith, you'll find out his address.
But the more Veda and Vedanta you read,
the more false impressions you'll get.[25]

The mind asks, 'Who am I?'
Take refuge at the feet
of someone who knows.
Lalan is under the spell of scriptures.
He's blind despite his eyes. (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 93)

Lalan's Baul-inflected Sufi philosophy is well-known for its theory of the self (*amittatva*). Much like Hafez, Rumi, and others, Lalan talks about the difficulty of knowing who he really is. The more he tries to catch his "self" inside of him, the more elusive it appears:

Will I ever be able to recognize her?[26]
Night and day, blinders of delusion
cover my eyes.
Someone keeps stirring
in the northeast corner of my room.
Am I moving or is he?

Groping, I search myself.
I just can't see.
The two of us,
this stranger and I,
live in the same place.
But when I try to catch him,
he's a hundred thousand miles away.
I got tired of searching.
Now I just sit and shoo flies.
Lalan says, What's the trick
of being dead while alive? (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 569)

Lalan often talks about a state of bewilderment, as he ponders the identity of the inner self (*maner manush*; lit. "mind's human"), which is also referred to as the unknown bird (*achin pakhi*):

What a pity!
I spent my whole life
raising an unknown bird (*achin pakhi*).
Yet I never learned the secret
of his identity.
The anguish of it
brings tears to my eyes.
I can hear the bird's chatter, brother,
but I can't see how he looks.
I see only this thick darkness.
If I could find someone
to reveal his identity,
I'd get to know him.
Then my heart would stop throbbing.
But I don't know my pet bird.
There's no end to the shame I feel.
What am I to do now? Any day
that bird's going to throw dust in my eyes
and fly away. (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 583, modified)

According to Lalan, finding the true nature of the self is like constantly walking in circles—a never-ending quest:

That self is in this self.
Yet for four ages,
countless seers and sages
have roamed in search of it.
The unseen self
always sits in an unseen place
beyond their grasp.
How deluded I am!
I search outside
for the treasure
that's in my house.
Siraj Sai says, Lalan,
you'll keep walking in circles
until you understand
the truth of the self (*atma*). (Lalan, *Songs of Lalan*, trans. in Salomon 2017, p. 149)

Other Sufis talk about the nature of the self in relation to the inward journey, love, and bewilderment. 'Attar (d. 1221), for instance, states in his famous *The Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-Tayr*):

After this the Valley of Bewilderment (*hayrat*) appears,
Your continuous occupation becomes suffering and regret . . . .
There are sighs, combined with pain, accompanied by burning,
Though night and day come, neither have their place here . . . .
If they should inquire of him, 'Are you sober or drunk?
Do you say you are nothing, do you exist or not . . . ?'
He will say, 'I know not, not even a thing',
And this 'I know not, I don't know it at all'.
I am in love, but I know not with whom I'm in love.
I'm neither Muslim nor infidel, so what am I? ('Attar, *Mantiq al-Tayr*, trans. in Boylston 2017, p. 365)

One finds similar themes in Rumi, although in a slightly different manner:

No joy have I found in the two worlds apart from thee, Beloved.
Many wonders I have seen: I have not seen a wonder like thee.
They say that blazing fire is the infidel's portion:
I have seen none, save Abu Lahab, excluded from thy fire.
Often have I laid the spiritual ear at the window of the heart:
I heard much discourse, but the lips I did not see . . . .
Pour out wine till I become a wanderer from myself;
For in selfhood and existence I have felt only fatigue. (Rumi, *Diwan-i Shams*, ed. Badi' al-Zaman Furuzanfar, no. 1690, trans. in Nicholson 1952, p. 129)

Concerning the trials of being trapped in the snares of existence, Rumi says:

Hundreds of thousands of years
I was flying involuntarily,
Like the motes in the air.
If I have forgotten that time and state,
The migration in sleep recalls it to my memory.
Every night I escape from this four-branched cross and
Flee from this halting-place into the pasture of the spirit.
From the nurse, Sleep, I suck the milk of
those bygone days of mine, O Lord.
All the people in the world are fleeing
From their power of choice and
Their self-existence to their drunken side.
In order that for a while they may be delivered from sobriety,
they lay upon themselves the drinking of wine and listening to music.
All know that this existence is a snare,
that volitional thought and memory are a hell.
They are fleeing from selfhood into selflessness
Either by means of intoxication or
By means of engrossing work. (Rumi, *Masnavi*, Book VI, lines 220–27, trans. Nicholson in Rumi 1934, p. 270, modified)

What is perhaps intriguing when it comes to Sufi ruminations on the self is that not only are they rigorous in making a distinction between the outer and the inner self, but also how they connect the quest for selfhood to the grand themes of existence, namely, love, beauty, and meaning. Similar to 'Attar and Rumi, one can mention Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235), whose *Ta'iyya* provides an extraordinarily detailed commentary on the self's inner depths in terms of first-person subjectivity. The poem begins by alluding to the "eye of the heart" (the organ of spiritual perception), which becomes a conduit through which the self experiences the wine-fever of ecstatic love. The wine-fever of such love, however, is caused by a human beloved whose beauty intoxicates the poet's soul. The intelligibility of the above verses becomes clear once it is understood that for Ibn al-Farid, the lover and the beloved are one in the mystery of mystical union, i.e., it is the Divine Self—self-loving

and self-beloved—which is the underlying subject of every form of love hidden behind the veils of manifestation.[27] Seen from this angle, all tales of love are simultaneously both divine and human, contained and being manifested within an undivided consciousness denoted by the first-person pronoun "I":

> I sought her from myself (*wa atlubuha minni*),
> Though she was all the while beside me; I
> Marveled how she was hid from me by me.
> And I ceased not from a state of turmoil
> With her within me; for my senses were
> Intoxicated, and the wine they drank
> Her beauties; still I travelled on and on. (Ibn al-Farid, *Ta'iyyat al-Kubra*, lines 511–13, modified trans. in Arberry 1952, p. 54)

> I sought myself from myself, that I might guide myself (*li-arshadani*) . . .
> By lifting up the veil (*al-hijab*), for I myself
> Found in myself my only means to come
> Unto myself (*wa bi kanat ilayya wasilati*). (Ibn al-Farid, *Ta'iyyat al-Kubra*, lines 514–15, modified trans. in Arberry 1952, p. 54)

Likewise, Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) says in his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*:

> O moringa of the flood-bed
> at the Tigris's banks
> The cry of a dove on a swaying bough
> saddens my heart
> Her song's like the song
> of the assembly's queen
> At the sound of her oud, you'll
> forget the music of al-Rashīd
> And when she sings, the chants
> of Ánjash fade
> In Khadimāt, Sálma's direction,
> and in Sindād, I swear,
> I'm love-stricken
> in Ajyâdī
> No, she dwells within
> my liver's black bile
> In a rush of saffron and musk
> beauty falls bewildered. (Ibn 'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, modified trans. Sells in Ibn 'Arabi 2021, p. 243)

Describing the immanence of love in the depth of the self, Ibn 'Arabi further says:

> How strange that I yearn for them and longing
> ask about them while they're with me
> My eyes weep for them but they're there
> in their blackness. I sigh and they line my ribs. (Ibn 'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, trans. Sells in Ibn 'Arabi 2021, p. 279)

Here, the lover looks without, but the beloved lies hidden the depth of his consciousness. Moreover, as Ibn 'Arabi explains, if he or other Sufi poets make use of various imageries, metaphors, and symbols to talk about love, it is to draw the soul from the outward appearance to the inward reality of love, while acknowledging that the Beloved can never be fully possessed due to Her infinitude (Ibn 'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, trans. Sells in Ibn 'Arabi 2021, p. 286).

Another Sufi poet whose poems express the inscrutable dilemma of being a self is 'Abd al-Qadir Bedil (d. 1720). In his metaphysical poems, Bedil often expresses the bewilderment of being a self:

How different, how far apart the road paved by heavy human footsteps
and the Sufi path to death of self.
Bedil: you must clear this path: cut it with the knife of breath.
Passion is a light, swift rider—but I am stone, paralyzed, earthbound;
I vacate my place of self, I leave it empty—in a spark of color.
In the chaos of tracelessness, Bedil left a mark, became a traceless trace—
As getting lost from getting lost produced a phoenix.
The volume of the phoenix is not composed from any early draft of 'we-and-I:'
How long will imagined non-existents collect you, bookbind you, mad with
existence?
May no one be like me, held captive—trapped in the illusion of this-and-that;
So long as breath has wings and flies, it must fall in with shame.
The phoenix's wingless flight of madness is an ambitious aim;
Generous Lord, please forgive this nothing's nothing's nothing. (Bedil, *Kulliyat,
passim*, trans. in Mikkelson 2020, pp. 58, 59, 63, 64)

Let me end this round of analysis by citing a poem that captures the apophatic, indefinable nature of the self at the pinnacle its spiritual realization:

When I had drained that pure drink to the last drop
I fell on the ground lost in intoxication.
Now I neither exist in myself, nor not exist (*kunun na nistam dar khud na hastam*),
Nor am I sober, nor intoxicated, nor drunken. (Shabistari 2002, p. 95)

7. Concluding Thoughts

At the very least, the sheer amount of evidence in the preceding sections proves that contra Taylor, the modern self is not as radical or unique as it might appear.[28] This is because Muslim thinkers also put radical reflexivity cum inwardness at the center of their conceptions of the self. Thus, "inwardness" is far from being a modern phenomenon, because it is found in a variety of forms in Islamic literature on the self. However, I am not claiming that modern inwardness is exactly the same thing as that found in Sufi literature. Nor am I claiming that the modern self is the same as the Sufi–Islamic self.[29] Rather, I argue that by applying Taylor's own criterion for inwardness, we can affirm its presence in Sufi–Islamic literature. In fact, one has reason to argue that theories of selfhood in Islam are more robust in a certain sense, because in contrast to the Cartesian self, they do not eliminate inner depths or expressivism. Rather, they put things in their proper perspective by highlighting the role of the imagination in one's self-conception. Moreover, Sufi authors such as Hafez, Ibn 'Arabi, Mir Dard, Bedil, Lalan, etc., do not seem to moralize about religion or God as they reflect on the nature of the self. Rather, they seek to describe the complex phenomenology of human experience as it relates to love, beauty, and meaning. It is possible that in their poems and writings, there may be an underlying, *higher* telos, but then one must have a telos—higher, lower, or something in between—in any discussions on the self. For instance, postmodernists such as Derrida aim for liberation, whereas existentialists such as Camus accept meaninglessness in their respective conceptions of the self.

Be that as it may, by inventing the so-called modern self which is inward-looking, Taylor creates an image of the modern self vis à vis the nonmodern self that does not hold historically. Taylor also argues for an authentic self based on the celebration of ordinary life, which can circumvent the "slide to subjectivism", which he rightly criticizes (Taylor 2003, pp. 55–70). However, in the process, he closes off doors to self-transformation and realizations of the higher attributes of the self that are crucial to human flourishing. I personally have no qualms about the worth of ordinary life for a large swath of people, but what makes Taylor so confident that this is going to work for every single person on the planet? We thus need different frameworks for different people. Taylor seems to think that "contemplative life" has totally lost its appeal today. But he fails to see that there are aspects

of contemplative life that need not be otherworldly, and that can, in fact, lead to much peace and flourishing in this world, e.g., realizing that on a higher plane all selves are one. One can come to such a conclusion by taking an inward turn accompanied by deep meditative practices. However, because Taylor unwittingly essentializes and generalizes the modern self—as if it is one thing across the board—he ends up portraying it as a one-dimensional behemoth, albeit with horizontal variations. Taylor seems not to pay attention to thinkers such as Max Scheler, Foucault, and Wael Hallaq, who emphasize self-transformation, and argue that the subject needs to change who they are and must question their place in the world. For Scheler, the problem with modern humans is that they have lost touch with their inner self, and its sentiments of love and sympathy. This is because we have turned ourselves into *homo capitalicus* (Hallaq 2018).

In contrast to Taylor's modern self, Muslim thinkers recognize the multidimensionality of the self, and the fact that it is ultimately apophatic and indefinable. What this means is that the self or human nature is created on the form of the divine self. But the "form" of the divine self ultimately implies formlessness of the infinite reality of God, which is to say that human nature is anything but deterministic (contra Taylor's assumption), i.e., the possibilities of being a self are indefinite because it is the form of the formless. Although one should acknowledge certain religious views within Islam that seek to pigeonhole the self into a fixed definition, this is hardly the case with the bulk of Sufi writers. Moreover, in Sufi metaphysics, the form of the divine self is the perfect human (*al-insan al-kamil*), which implies indefinite forms of self-creation and modes of perfection that can lead to such desiderata as peace, love, beauty, and compassion (Faruque 2021). This is because the form of the "formless" means that there are limitless possibilities of normative self-conceptions, although all geared toward axiological ends. However, this also means that things such as "imagination" and "creativity" are highly regarded in Muslim culture, as attested by the incredible richness of Islamic art and architecture, music, and Sufi poetry.

Also, it is often asked whether nonmodern conceptions of the self still have any modern-day relevance. But this is an ill-conceived question. For example, recent studies show how Muslims in Morocco make sense of their selfhood which incorporates elements of the classical Muslim self (Pandolfo 2018). As argued above, selfhood in Sufi thought can be understood in terms of the infinite possibilities of divine manifestation. Thus, our possibilities are indefinite when it comes to our becoming, which also allows for the possibility that new cultural norms can bring about a previously non-existent feature of the self. All this is to say that selfhood in Islam is far from being a mere given, as it is made in the form of the formless.

Notes

[1] This can be seen even in Taylor's first book *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964), in which he attacks behaviorism using insights from the phenomenological tradition of Merleau-Ponty and others.

[2] For works on Taylor's philosophy, see Tully (1994), Smith (2002), Abbey (2004), and Hämäläinen (2016).

[3] It should, however, be noted that Taylor does at times chastise the modern self for its individualism, lack of a higher purpose in life (or, loss of meaning), focus on "*petits et vulgaires plaisirs*" (vulgar and low-quality pleasures), self-centeredness, and narcissism (see Taylor 2003, pp. 1–12).

[4] Additionally, I thought it would be more appropriate to use the word "Sufi" in the title, because the bulk of my evidence comes from various Sufi or Sufi-inspired sources. However, the reader will notice that I also draw on other strands of Islamic thought.

5   One can also argue that the self is entangled in a "metaphysical space", despite the naturalist assumption of a causal closure of the physical world, because it is hard to investigate the nature of the self without assuming some prior ontology or a notion of "being".

6   If one is looking for an anthropological investigation of the self in Islam, a much better study is Pandolfo (2018). On the *zahir/batin* distinction in early Islamic law, see Johansen (1990).

7   On "agency" in nonmodern Islamic thought, see Faruque (2021).

8   It is baffling how Taylor can reach such a straightforward conclusion about the Indian self (or, for that matter, self in other cultures)! The Indian self is defined in many stages, phases, layers, or *tattvas*—pure transcendent being, consciousness, ego, intellect, and mind—all represented by important technical terms and arranged in complex hierarchies. However, despite their varieties, Indian theories all share in the highly introspective focus on the analysis of the self (*atman*). One can cite a wealth of literature on this, but I will just mention a few: Ganeri (2007, 2012, 2017, 2021) and Kuznetsova et al. (2012), for example.

9   For a critique of the "disenchantment" theory, see Storm (2017). For an illuminating account on the relationship between disenchantment, modernity, and the category of "mysticism", see Zarrabi-Zadeh (2020).

10   As Taylor notes, this sentiment is widespread in our own time as well: "Running through modern culture is the sense of the wrong we do, in pursuing our highest ideals, when we sacrifice the body, or ordinary desire, or the fulfillments of everyday life" (Taylor 2007, p. 640). Hume would perhaps be surprised to see how the modern West values "Eastern Spirituality", along with its emphasis on meditation, solitude, and silence.

11   Taylor criticizes the malaise of immanence because it leads to a situation where all our answers in relation to "meaning" become fragile. We may encounter a moment where we no longer feel that our chosen path is compelling, or where we cannot justify it to ourselves or others (Taylor 2007, p. 308).

12   Although Taylor's reading of Plato is sound, it is incomplete in many ways. A better study of the self in Plato is that of Gerson (2003).

13   In formulating this criterion, Taylor draws on Thomas Nagel's famous article "What Is It Like to be a Bat?". For some contrasting views on "what-it-is-like-ness", see Nagel (1974) and Hacker (2002).

14   This was expressed well in the words of a speaker at a New Age festival: "Only accept what rings true to your own inner Self" (Taylor 2007, p. 489).

15   One may argue that "self-knowledge" is a better criterion (see Faruque 2021).

16   For an in-depth analysis of all these theoretical issues, see Faruque (2021), which is the first book-length treatment of selfhood in nonmodern and modern Islam.

17   This is because, for the Sufis, selfhood is an on-going and ever-changing manifestation of the divine names (*al-asma' al-ilahi*), which are infinite.

18   There are also philological difficulties when it comes to discussing selfhood in Sufism, although it is beyond the scope of the present endeavor to deal with them here. However, at the very least, one has to realize that there is a cluster of terms such as *nafs*, *dhat*, *khud*, *ruh*, *sirr*, *khafi*, *akhfa*, etc., which various Sufi authors employ to talk about the self, and without discerning whether the connotations of these terms point to a common reference, one would not be able to discuss the self in Sufism. For a detailed discussion, see Faruque (2021, pp. 24–26, 49–58).

19   When not indicated, all translations are mine.

20   'Iraqi, *Diwan*, no. 2, available on https://ganjoor.net/eraghi/divane/tarkibate/sh2 (accessed on 3 June 2022).

21   "Magian Pir" symbolizes the person of the Sufi master.

22   Pickthall (1996). All the translations of the Qur'an are from Pickthall, with my modifications.

23   Taylor fails to account for the influence of Persian Sufism on such figures as Goethe, Emerson, and others. See Goethe (2010), Einboden (2014), and Aminrazavi (2014).

24   This is not the place to debate Lalan's Muslim or Sufi identity. Although information about his life is scarce, the reader will find plenty of explicit references to various Sufi doctrines in his poetry. It is also true that his Sufi philosophy is influenced by Tantric (*sahaja*) and Vaishnava teachings. For more information on these issues, see various essays in Choudhury (2009).

25   Lalan is not against scripture per se, but like many Sufis, he is against a literalist understanding of the text; see Salomon (2017).

26   The pronoun in Bengali is neuter and can refer to both "him" and "her".

27   Cf. "Between the lover and beloved there is no barrier./You are your own veil, Hafez! Lift yourself out of the way". (Hafez, *Diwan*, no. 260, trans. mine).

28   Although Taylor seems to be a friend of different cultures, his work is still marred by Eurocentrism. Referring to Western culture, he claims how "civilized" people are capable of taking an objective stance toward ethics, ontology, etc. (Taylor 1989, pp. 576–77).

29   As one can imagine, there are many versions of the "modern self", just as there are many versions of the "Sufi–Islamic self".

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Article

Yoga and the "Pure Muhammadi Path" of Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib

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Abstract: This article addresses the question of how early modern Sufis dealt with yoga. Some scholars have argued that a movement of Sufi reform occurred in South Asia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, representing a shift towards legal Islam, which would call for the rejection of non-Islamic practices. This explanation overlooks the rhetorical construction of Sufi claims of spiritual status and *shari'a* legitimacy, and it fails to distinguish eighteenth-century examples from the very different reform movements created in the nineteenth century in response to European colonialism. This article considers as a case study *Nala-yi 'Andalib* ("The Nightingale's Lament"), the central text produced by the pre-colonial founder of the "pure Muhammadi path", Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib (d. 1758), with the help of intertextual references to the masterpiece of his son, Khwaja Mir Dard (d. 1785), *'Ilm al-Kitab* ("Knowledge of the Book"). The consequence of their evaluation of yoga was not the systematic rejection of non-Islamic practices, but a guarded acknowledgement of their efficacy within a framework that used Indic references as a straw man for intra-Islamic debates.

Keywords: Sufism; yoga; Mujaddidiyya; pure Muhammadi path; India; Indo-Muslim culture

1. Introduction: Muslim Interest in Yoga

One of the most distinctive features of religion in the modern world has been the attempt to unfold the essential nature of one's religion and to draw clear boundaries separating religions from one another. This may be considered a successful export of the dominant European concept of religion to the rest of the world. No more challenging laboratory for such projects of identity politics exists than South Asia, where religious nationalism has led to the formation of Islamic states and the ongoing effort to make India a Hindu nation. Yet the premodern history of this region is full of counterexamples, in which members of one faith community take unexpected interest in beliefs and practices associated with other religions. One particularly striking instance of such porous boundaries is the appropriation of yogic practices in Sufism.[1]

The most productive and significant encounters of Muslim Sufis with yogis happened in the Indian environment. Islamic mysticism arrived in India during the period of the eleventh to twelfth centuries, at the same time when a version of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* was translated into Arabic by the well-known Muslim scholar and scientist, Al-Biruni (d. 1048; Pines and Gelblum 1966, 1977, 1983, 1989; Al-Biruni 2022). While that philosophical yoga text had a limited impact on Muslim thinkers, the practices of yoga were far more visible. At that time the highly specialized tradition of hatha yoga (literally, "the yoga of force"), associated with charismatic figures of the tenth to twelfth centuries, especially Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath, assumed importance on the scene of Indian religions (Ernst 2016, p. 272; White 1996; Burley 2000). From this time onwards, Muslim Sufis adapted an extensive repertoire of yogic practices and ideas into an Islamic framework and continuously produced a considerable number of texts with yoga themes. An example of such texts is the sixteenth-century Arabic version of the *Amrtakunda* ("The Pool of Nectar"),

often known as *Hawd al-Hayat* or *The Pool of Life*, which became the most widely known treatment of hatha yoga. It was translated into Persian, under the title of *Bahr al-Hayat* ("The Ocean of Life"), by an eminent leader of the Shattariyya Sufi order, Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliyari (d. 1563; Khodamoradi and Ernst 2019). Another significant Shattari treatise in this connection is *Risala-yi Shattariyya* by the Qadiri-Shattari Sufi, Baha' al-Din al-Ansari (d. 1515–16). He very explicitly appropriated yoga teachings, including those related to chakras, yoga postures, pranayama (breath control), and mantras, presenting them in a highly organized way in chapter four of this treatise (Ernst and Khodamoradi 2018). In this work, Ansari suggested a practice of visualization that should be carried out along with a certain posture that, in his point of view, has the benefit and quality of all of the eighty-four postures of yoga. In addition, an earlier Persian treatise known as *Wujudiyya* or the *Treatise on the Human Body*, which is ascribed to the founder of the Chishti order, Mu'in al-Din Chishti (d. 1236), utilizes the standard Hindi terms of yogic physiology and tackles the yogic idea of subtle nerves and the practice of breath exercises. This text also used the strategy of attributing these yogic teachings to the Prophet Muhammad to make them acceptable in a Muslim milieu (Ernst and Kugle 2012).

There are also other Sufi sources related to different orders, such as the Suhrawardiyya, that contain yoga themes. An intriguing example is *Risala-yi Haft Ahbab* ("The Treatise on the Seven Friends"), attributed to the celebrated representative of the Suhrawardiyya in India, Hamid al-Din Nagawri (d. 1244). The third chapter of this treatise, entitled "The Seven Stars", is ascribed to Sulayman Mandawi (d. 1538–39), a Sufi disciple who studied the *Amrtakunda* with the Chishti Sabiri, 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (Quddusi 1894, p. 41; Ernst 2013, pp. 64–65; Ernst 2005, p. 35). Gangohi himself produced the Persian Sufi treatise *Rushd Nama* in 1480,[2] in which, besides many other yoga themes, he attempted to adapt the yogic idea of physical immortality into Islam (Khodamoradi 2019, pp. 64–70). The *Rushd Nama*'s Hindi poetry complements Sufi ideas and techniques with the philosophy and practices of Gorakhnath, one of the most important figures of hatha yoga.[3] The *Rushd Nama* contains verses that refer to personalities and terminology associated with hatha yoga, such as the poet's pen name Alakhdas ("servant of the Absolute"), Gorakhnath, jogi ("yogi"), *muladwara* ("crown of the head"), Shiva and Shakti, and Brahma (Khodamoradi and Ernst 2019).

A variety of strategies characterized the interpretation of yoga among Sufis, ranging from enthusiastic adoption to caution and suspicion. To avoid overly broad generalizations, studies of particular texts and interpreters are required. The following remarks examine the writings of an Indian Sufi, Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib (d. 1758), on the cusp of the transition from the late Mughal empire to colonial rule. His attempt to articulate a revision of Sufi teachings and institutions under the banner of the "pure Muhammadi path" led him to adopt a guarded attitude toward yoga, which he regarded as physically and spiritually beneficial, even as he attempted to create a Sufi pedagogy that would be authentically connected to the Prophet Muhammad. While the resulting presentation of yoga may appear inconsistent, it reflects the complexities and ambiguities faced by South Asian Muslims in the early modern era.

2. Sufism and Reform

South Asian Sufism has often been depicted as participating in a hybrid culture and shared tradition, through interaction with and adaptation of Indian culture and religious traditions, including yoga. Some scholars have argued that Indian Sufism went through a rejection of that hybridity, through a kind of revival (*ihya'*) and rejuvenation (*tajdid*) that is observable from the seventeenth century onwards. This historical shift has been reflected in contemporary academic discussions under the rubric of Sufi reform or the concept of "Neo-Sufism",[4] thought to be a sober and pietist Sufi movement that was searching for a more *shari'a*-based and ethically oriented Sufism. It is said to have placed a special emphasis on the character of the Prophet and his tradition as a pillar that gives Islam an independent and distinct identity. Sufi reformists, in this view, aimed to make major

changes in Sufism, by focusing on the Prophet and his tradition as well as conforming Sufism to the *shari'a*, which meant struggling to emancipate Muslims from beliefs and practices that they considered objectionable. As one scholar asserts, "The opposition between the open text of the *shari'a* and hidden mystical knowledge was posited by the eponymous Sufi reformist of South Asia, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhind" (Werbner 2013, p. 53). Yet the concept of a coherent movement of Sufi reform over the centuries is problematic. The use of the term "reform" is one more example of a term from the history of Christianity being applied to Islam uncritically as if it were natural and inevitable to expect Muslims to go through something such as the Protestant Reformation (Browers and Kurzman 2004). Orientalist depictions of Islam as defined by classical legal texts replicated the new ideological versions of Muslim fundamentalism, which drew upon Salafi and Wahhabi currents of thought that were violently opposed to a variety of opponents, including Sufism, and adopted new concepts of religious identity that owed much to colonial and Orientalist models. Misapplied notions of "orthodoxy", which failed to acknowledge the ambiguities characteristic of Islamic thought, created a misleading picture of a rigid and authoritarian Islam in opposition to Sufis who could only survive by eliminating all questionable practices and accepting the hegemony of the jurists (Bauer 2021).

One could draw up a nineteenth-century Muslim reformist charge sheet listing the offenses of Sufis. The targets of this critique are often said to include the belief in divine immanence in the world, summarized by the slogan *wahdat al-wujud* ("existential unity") or *hama ust* ("everything is He"); extreme behaviors connected to the master-disciple relationship, such as the prostration of disciples and devotees before Sufi masters (Dard 1890, pp. 98, 120, 151–52, 183); adopting a language other than the language of Qur'an and hadith for communicating Sufi and Islamic ideas; being influenced by the language of Greek philosophy and its expressions (Dard 1890, pp. 90, 223, 333, 410); practicing magic and astrology (Bahraichi 1858–1859, pp. 37–44); superstition (*khurafa*) and religious innovation (*bid'a*); and being dominated by loose and irregular ecstasy, intoxication, and *sama'* (listening to spiritual music and dancing). All of these, according to this view of Sufi reform, had been leading to ease, laziness, and irresponsibility among Muslims (Zelkina 2000, p. 87), adaptation of non-Islamic practices and beliefs,[5] and many other features that were blamed as being examples of deviation from the *shari'a* and sunna of the Prophet (Dard 1890, pp. 72–75; Schimmel 1985, p. 218).

A more nuanced view of Sufism and Islamic reform in the eighteenth century has been proposed by Ahmad Dallal. In a study of five major Muslim scholars of that period, he has offered an analysis of the application of independent juristic reasoning (*ijtihad*) for sociopolitical projects as the defining feature of these thinkers, though they had different goals and different attitudes toward Sufism. Nonetheless, these reformists shared a critical attitude toward the concept of saintly intercession and an intermediary authority within the Islamic religious framework. Unlike nineteenth-century reformers, however, Muslim scholars in the precolonial period did not reject Sufi practices out of hand or oppose Sufism as incompatible with the *shari'a*. But the debates that arose over Sufism in the colonial era were formulated in a very different context. "There is a fundamental rupture between the legacies of the long eighteenth century and those of the twentieth century.... The problems that informed the reform ideas of the eighteenth century bear no resemblance whatsoever to those that inspired and drove later reforms" (Dallal 2018, pp. 6, 15).

From the earliest phases of Sufism in the eighth century, there was a tension between the annihilation of the individual ego and the proclamation of experiences of union with God. If the ego is annihilated, it is difficult to tell who is talking. Ecstatic utterances might appear to claim status as a prophet or even as God, but they could also be seen as proofs of proximity to God. Ahmad Sirhindi's claims pushed some to say he had gone too far; the Mughal emperor Jahangir had him imprisoned for claiming to be superior to the caliph 'Uthman. His title as Mujaddid (renewer) was based on his claim of a spiritual status that was perilously close to claiming to be a Prophet himself (Friedmann 1971, pp. 13–21). A Sufi of the Qadiri order, 'Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith, sharply criticized the

astonishing claims of Ahmad Sirhindi as an attempt to fashion himself as the source or religious authenticity (Kugle 2022, pp. 224–37). Sirhindi's four successors were given the title of *qayyum*, or sustainers of the universe, a concept that modern fundamentalists would abhor. The inflation of cosmic titles applied to eminent Sufi saints ironically devalued their significance. If more than one saint is known as the "pole" or "axis" (*qutb*) around whom the universe revolves, inevitably hyperbole makes the term plural, as a favorite saint is called "the pole of poles" (*qutb al-aqtab*). When these writers described others with terms such as polytheism (*shirk*), deviation (*zalal*), innovation (*bid'a*), infidelity of the path (*kufr-i tariqa*), or heresy (*ilhad*), this was not a straightforward definition of borders between Islam and non-Islam or Muslim and non-Muslim, or even between true Islam or Muslim and false ones. It was part of a rhetoric of transcendental hyperbole, in which the authority of the speaker was made unchallengeable by ever increasing claims of spiritual status. So the use of the language of exclusion and denunciation needs to be understood, at least in part, in terms of the claim to authority that it presumes.

The role of the Sufi orders as social institutions was closely tied to the construction of lineages of masters and disciples that could be traced in ostensibly historical chains of transmission going all of the way back to the Prophet Muhammad. These chains (*silsila*), or trees (*shajara*), were initially constructed in the eleventh century and proliferated, through communities focused on the physical locations of tombs of eminent early Sufi masters. Those institutions overlapped with the path or method (*tariqa*) practiced within each order. This was an essentially mediatory form of spiritual connection expressed diachronically over generations. But there were always internal tensions within this temporal model. As the chain becomes longer, there is a consequent sense of distance from the crucial mediation by the Prophet. One way to overcome this was through Uwaysi initiation, modeled on the intimate relationship of discipleship attained by Uways al-Qarani, a contemporary of Muhammad who never met him in person. Thus Sufis could be initiated by a master who had died centuries earlier, as in the case of Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani (d. 1034) as a disciple of Bayazid Bistami (d. 874; Schimmel 2011, pp. 23, 105). In other cases, Sufis claimed initiation by the deathless prophet Khizr, or by the Prophet Muhammad himself. Another way of overcoming the inevitable decline from the golden age of the Prophet was by claiming the messianic role of the Mahdi and inaugurating an apocalyptic renewal of the faith; as the period of one thousand years after the Prophet Muhammad drew near (in the late sixteenth century), this option gained popularity. That was essentially the claim made by Ahmad Sirhindi to be the renewer of the second millennium. It was also possible to claim to replicate the status of the Prophet by accomplishing an ascension into the presence of God, as in the case of Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliyari, who was put on trial for making such claims in Gujarat in the mid sixteenth century. Meanwhile, mediatory piety expanded to cover all possibilities, as many Sufis collected multiple initiations in different Sufi orders, to maximize the possibilities of connecting to the Prophet. At the same time, the widespread use of the occult sciences, divination, and the summoning of jinn and other spiritual beings provided access to other forms of mediation to approach the transcendent presence of God.

Polytheism is the greatest sin in Islam and the only sin that would not be forgiven by God. Invoking this powerful symbol, Sufi polemicists went so far as to categorize the beliefs and behaviors of other Sufis, and also non-Sufi Muslims, under the title of polytheism. To save Muslims from descending into polytheism, they initiated discourses regarding the process of the perversion of Indians from monotheism to polytheism over the course of time and warned Muslims not to succumb to the same pitfall of becoming polytheistic such as the Hindus. In this way, Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762) set forth an elaborate discussion of the subject of idolatry (Wali Allah 1996, pp. 185–89, 361–62). Opposing the Hindu-Muslim shared tradition, he criticized compromises with non-Islamic practices and accused Sufi masters of encouraging idolatry among Muslims (Wali Allah 1973, p. 145). Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (d. 1781), another significant Mujaddidi of early modern Delhi, asserted that some behaviors of Sufis in relation to saints lead to idolatry, and that Sufi meditation which involves "visualizing the form of shaykh" (*rabita*) resembles certain polytheistic Hindu

practices (Ghulam 'Ali 1892, p. 99). The founders of the Deoband seminary attacked the practice of pilgrimage to Sufi shrines on the grounds that to their eyes it looked like a Hindu ritual, despite their recognition that spiritual grace was available at those sites. The characterization of traditional Muslim practices as effectively polytheistic was a devastating attack. It was also the case that denunciation of Hindu idolatry could be an effective straw man for carrying out intra-Islamic polemics.

3. The Pure Muhammadi Path

Another result of the internal tensions within the mediatory role of the Sufi orders was the formulation of the "Muhammadi path", in the place of the traditional Sufi orders. From a purely rhetorical point of view, it might appear superfluous to describe a Sufi path as Muhammadi, since each order was designed to connect an unbroken chain of masters and disciples to the Prophet. The addition of the name of Muhammad to the path signaled a sense of something missing, as the name "Muhammadi path" asserted that all other paths were insufficiently connected to the Prophet. The many different applications of the phrase "Muhammadi path" show widely varying approaches to Sufi thought and practice. The term "Tariqa Muhammadiyya" was developed from the earlier thought of such Sufis as Ahmad 'Imad al-Din al-Wasiti (d. 1311), an Iraqi living in Damascus who was a Shadhili Sufi as well as a student of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), renowned for his attacks on Sufi thought and practice. It was also later used by the Moroccan Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad Jazuli (d. 1465) (Buehler 1998, p. 72), a highly influential organizer of Sufi groups. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, various Islamic movements claiming the name Tariqa Muhammadiyya emerged not only in India, but also in Africa and across the Arab world, such as the Idrisiyya, Samm'aniyya, and Tijaniyya. Popular manuals such as *Al-Ibriz* ("The Extrication of Gold", ca. 1717) by Ahmad ibn Mubarak al-Lam'ati (d. 1743), on the life and teachings of the Moroccan Sufi 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dabbagh (d. 1720), and *Al-Tariqa al-Muhammadiyya* (1572) of the anti-Sufi campaigner Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Birgawi (d. 1573), were important in disseminating the notion of a Muhammadi path. Al-Dabbagh's thought was later spread by such Sufis as Ahmad ibn Idris (d. 1837; Sedgwick 2005, pp. 27, 33–39; Böwering et al. 2013, p. 292). Some of these figures were embedded in powerful Sufi networks, while others were militantly hostile to the concept of saints as intercessors with God and rejected the rituals of sainthood as idolatry. So it would be a mistake to assume that the presence of this phrase invariably denotes an outlook that is hostile to Sufism.

The particular concept of the "pure Muhammadi path" that we are concerned with here was introduced by Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib,[6] a disciple of Muhammad Zubair (d. 1774), the fourth spiritual successor of Ahmad Sirhindi to be given the title of *qayyum*,[7] and the grandson of Ahmad Sirhindi as well. While this might be assumed to be simply another branch of the Mujaddidi order, the pure Muhammadi path raised the stakes of authenticity, by claiming to be the "pure" Muhammadi path. It dropped its identification with the Mujaddidiyya, relegating its Mujaddidi predecessors to the secondary position of the people of the book (*ahl al-kitab*, i.e., Jews and Christians) in comparison with Islam. The use of this phrase "pure Muhammadi path" implies a claim to be the most authentic transmission of the teachings of Muhammad, in contrast to the many paths or Sufi orders that have arisen over the centuries. All of those are judged to be deficient in comparison, although 'Andalib was free to draw on the practices of different traditional orders as needed. The widespread and independent use of such phrases in many later contexts of Muslim societies does not indicate a single monolithic concept or doctrine. Rather, it points to the inherent limitations of the mediatory institutions of the Sufi orders, and a desire to establish an authentic teaching that is identified with the Prophet Muhammad rather than any local historical tradition.

This rhetoric of discrediting rival schools of thought was also effectively employed by 'Andalib's son, Mir Dard, as the theoretician of this new kind of Sufi order, the Pure Muhammadi Path. This was a formulation of unique authority, decreeing that all other Muslims, except the pure followers of Muhammad, suffer from "hidden idolatry" (*shirk-i khafi*),

while non-Muslims suffer from "obvious idolatry" (*shirk-i jali*). The first type is equivalent to his notion of the "infidelity of the path" (*kufr-i tariqa*), which refers to the mingling of one's ego with faith and religion, while the second one denotes the real infidelity of the belief in other gods and the association of partners with God. In his *Sham'-i Mahfil*, Dard stated that the meaning which is erroneously given to the concept of unity (*tawhid*) by some people leads to heresy and fruitless controversy (Dard 1892, p. 283).

The new version of the Pure Muhammadi Path according to 'Andalib and Dard was notable for its strong intra-religious inclusivism and a mild inter-religious exclusivism. Dard concentrated largely and extensively on uniting a variety of teachings, ideologies, Islamic sciences and *tariqa*s within Islam, and attempted to propound a solution for such divisions through the concept of a "Comprehensive Way" (*tariqa jami'a*). Dard, the theoretician of this *tariqa*, dealt with the subject of non-Muslims only marginally. According to him, in approaching the followers of obvious idolatry—which refers to non-Muslim polytheists—there is no way for Muslims except fighting and killing (*jidal wa qital*) (Dard 1890, p. 88), yet such fighting requires several conditions (Dard 1890, p. 204). Dard asserts that humiliation of infidels is only a matter of formality and for the sake of making the differentiation between salvation and deviation (*hidaya wa zalala*) clear. Such an act is also conditioned to the extent that it must be beneficial for society. According to him, Muhammadis are not allowed to be excessive in humiliation of non-Muslims or behave in a way that damages and hurts society (Dard 1890, p. 204). They are not allowed to mix egoism in this act, and it should be carried out only and purely for God's sake. Dard warns Muhammadis and ordinary Muslims against being cruel and lacking compassion in fighting against the infidels. He emphasizes that for a Muslim, killing an infidel should be as painful as severing one's own limbs, and a real Muhammadi is reluctant to do so, except when it is for the greater good. He reminds his followers that the fighting and opposition of prophets originates in their compassion, not in any sort of antagonism, and Muhammadis should follow the Prophet, embody great character (*khulq-i 'azim*), consider all animate existents as their own selves, not harm anything, and be especially sensitive and concerned about the hearts of their fellow human beings (Dard 1890, pp. 205, 223–25). Dard shows his compassion toward non-Muslims and even enemies with assertions such as the following: "O my God, I, who think good, have never cast the arrow of evil prayer [i.e., curse] towards an enemy and I do not open my lips except for well-wishing for the creatures of God. And the bird of the arrow of my prayer does not fly in the air to shed anybody's blood" (Dard 1892, p. 99).

The pressing problem remained of how to deal with vulgar simplifications of mystical thought, which allowed any fool to claim that he was filled with God. The solution that Dard proposed for avoiding the deification of the world and returning to real Qur'anic and Prophetic monotheism was also expressed in brief pedagogical formulas, such as the idea of "absolute unity" (*tawhid-i mutlaq*), or unity in multiplicity. This aimed to resolve the conflict between Wujudis, those who believed in "everything is He" (*hama ust*), that is, the proponents of the existential unity of God and creatures, and Shuhudis, who believed in "everything comes from Him" (*hama az ust*), that is, the advocates of testimonial unity. "He is He" means that existence (*wujud*) is one and nothing associates with it. The one reality has been manifested into multiple manifestations (*tajalliyat*) that constitute the created world. These things are in themselves non-real, non-existent, and distinct from existence. Neither does the contingent non-existent step out of its non-existent modality nor does the one existence unite with contingent reality, even though it manifests in every existent (Dard 1890, p. 185; 1892, p. 19). In this way, though he was well aware of the complexity of considering the idea of unity through manifestation, Dard used simple slogans to accentuate the separation of the cosmos from God, and he considered the extreme utterances of Sufis as blasphemy. In his *'Ilm al-Kitab*, he writes: "They [Sufis] are not reluctant to utter words of infidelity" (Dard 1890, pp. 411–12).

4. The Description of Yoga in *The Nightingale's Lament*

In this context, a question arises regarding the place of yoga in this eighteenth-century Indian Sufi teaching. Does the pure Muhammadi path consider adaptation of yoga a non-Islamic innovation from which Muslims and Islam must be purified? Or due to its mild approach to the ethic of Muslims' encounter with non-Muslims, does it show any compromises regarding yoga? To answer this question, we have consulted the first volume of *The Nightingale's Lament* (*Nala-yi 'Andalib*), a voluminous eighteenth-century Persian Sufi romance of approximately two thousand pages, which is, besides *'Ilm al-Kitab*, one of the two main literary expressions of the pure Muhammadi path. The *Lament* was written by the founder of the *tariqa*, Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib, who illustrated his Sufi ideology in the form of stories and parables in this highly informative and valuable literary text. It is an interpretation of a story that was originally narrated by 'Andalib in Hindi over a period of three nights in memory of his master, Pir Muhammad Zubair, who had just died. 'Andalib expanded upon this story, adding a number of subplots within the framework of the main narrative, and used the now massive tale as a way to elaborate his Muhammadi Path (Dard 1890, p. 85; Schimmel 1976, p. 44; Saghaeearaj 2018). Written in elegant Persian prose and often interspersed with poetry, the *Lament*'s main plot revolves around the allegorical story of two lovers who are transformed by a curse into a rose and a nightingale, representing beauty and love. However, every allegory in the book is meant to explain a certain aspect of the pure Muhammadi path and the behavior of its followers. The stories are interspersed with detailed theological discussions and debates about various schools of Sufism. In some instances, 'Andalib inserts Hindi *doha*s (a genre of Hindi poetry) into the story, refers to Hindu philosophy and customs, and meticulously discusses yoga practices ('Andalib 1890, pp. 789–805).

Yoga in the *Lament* is discussed in the course of a story in which 'Andalib provides a kind of categorization of Muslim sciences, including those adapted by Muslims, such as Greek philosophy. The story is in the form of a dialogue that occurs in a series of private retreats (*khalwa*) between a king named High Ambitions (*shah-i buland-himam*), a Muhammadi aspirant who abandoned his throne in search of the truth, and a perfect mystic (*'arif*, "knower") who plays the role of the former's guide or Muhammadi master. These are, however, not static representations. Sometimes, 'Andalib seems to play the role of both the King and the Mystic. Through that conversation, trying to evaluate different types of Islamic sciences in detail, 'Andalib clarifies the approach of the pure Muhammadi path to each of these sciences, as well as to religious, Sufi, and philosophical teachings.

The story begins with the King's longing for truth and perfection. One day, the hero of the story, King High Ambitions addresses his ministers: "Be sure that there are some [types] of knowledge and perfection that cannot be achieved with ruling and sovereignty....Therefore, my high ambition dictates that I leave all property and kingdom for the purpose of the acquisition of knowledge and perfection" ('Andalib 1890, p. 759). He thus leaves the monarchy to learn various sciences including rational, traditional, and spiritual ones ('Andalib 1890, pp. 759–805). Through the discussion of the King with his ministers, 'Andalib clarifies what he means by Islamic sciences. According to him, Islamic sciences include traditional sciences such as hadith and *shari'a*; rational sciences comprising divine wisdom or Muslim philosophy, mathematics, natural science, geometry, divination, astronomy, medicine, and the occult sciences, as well as spiritual knowledge. The latter category comprises the knowledge of Sufis and yogis (*jugiyya*), which in 'Andalib's viewpoint belongs to the external and internal voyages of Sufism (*sayr-i afaqi wa anfusi*)[8] and spiritual wayfaring ('Andalib 1890, p. 759).

In the story, 'Andalib relates that the King took off his royal clothes and set out on a journey ('Andalib 1890, p. 764). As he arrived in Mecca, it came to his attention that a perfect mystic with such and such name and emblem was resident in Mecca. With full enthusiasm, he rushed towards the Mystic ('Andalib 1890, p. 770). After many adventures that took place in relation to the King's meeting with the mystic, the two hold a series of private retreats, each of which reflects the standpoint of the pure Muhammadi path

towards a certain field of Islamic sciences. Here we briefly point to the subject of the first four retreats, reserving the fifth session for a more detailed discussion.

The first retreat features a discussion of Greek philosophy. The King explains to the Mystic that as he left his homeland in search of knowledge and perfection, he first arrived in Greece where he studied all of the sciences of the philosophers and understood their basics and methods. In reaction to the King's elaborations, the Mystic starts criticizing Greek philosophy in detail for several pages in the *Lament* ('Andalib 1890, pp. 777–87).[9] 'Andalib avoids giving priority to Greek philosophy as a knowledge that can give the initiate absolute salvation and spiritual perfection. In this dialogue between the King and the Mystic, it seems that the main target of 'Andalib is a certain subset of the rational sciences, i.e., the metaphysics of Greek philosophy, and not rational sciences in general.

The second retreat is about the knowledge of alchemy and the way the King learned it. Elsewhere in the *Lament*, the Mystic criticizes alchemy as well ('Andalib 1890, pp. 777–87). By that sharp critique, 'Andalib reminds the reader that rational and *shari'a*-based Sufism of the pure Muhammadi path considers the knowledge of alchemy as an obstacle to the way of purifying Islam.

The third retreat includes details on traditional sciences ('*ilm-i manqulat*). The King explains to the mystic that he encountered a variety of different Islamic teachings (*madhhab*s) and attitudes (*mashrab*s), got acquainted with various leading scholars, and became familiar with polemics between Sunnis and Shi'is. He adds that although he searched a lot, he could not finally find out where the truth is. The Mystic advises the King to leave imitation and stop constantly speaking about or following this or that scholar or school, and start instead his own research and his personal understanding. Criticizing imitation is a significant characteristic of the pure Muhammadi path, on which both Dard and 'Andalib focus throughout their works. After describing various Islamic groups such as Sufis, Sunnis, Mujassima (corporealists), Mu'tazila (rationalists), and Rafizis (heretics), each with negative features, the mystic describes the followers of the pure Muhammadi path with a variety of excellent attributes ('Andalib 1890, p. 787). In a poem he maintains: "O King, the world is not limited to one religion, here there are thousands of religions and infidelities" ('Andalib 1890, p. 787). Here again in relation to criticizing imitation, in a poem the mystic states, "everybody searches for his religion and way from others, except mystics, who learn their way from themselves" ('Andalib 1890, p. 789).

The fourth retreat is on Sufism. In this session the King explains to the Mystic that after learning the knowledge related to the external ('*ulum-i zahiri*), he referred to Sufism (*tasawwuf*), and the devotions, techniques, and practices related to the realm of the internal (*ashghal-i batini*). Surprised, he mentions that he found that even in Sufism there were a lot of different and contrasting sects and attitudes (*masharib*)[10] with many different and contradicting methods and paths ('Andalib 1890, p. 789). The Mystic comments to the King, "Oh High Ambitions! if you are interested in asking about the way and the method, there is no end of roads....The initiate must arrive at the goal through whatever way that he finds, either through desert or sea, by whatever way that includes refinement of the body and purification of the heart (*tazkiya-yi badani, tasfiya-yi qalbi*). I find both ways to be correct". Then the Mystic in detail describes the reasons for, and judges between, all of the different ideas, practices, and methods among Sufis mentioned by the King from the viewpoint of the pure Muhammadi path ('Andalib 1890, p. 791).

The fifth retreat is on yoga. It contains, in 'Andalib's parlance, a description of the "reality of the yogis' attainments or powers" (*haqiqat-i aksab-i jugiyan*), and an evaluation of yoga and a description of its advantages and disadvantages. In this meeting, the Mystic asks the King about other sciences that the latter has acquired in his first step after achieving Sufi knowledge. The King replies politely that he, in the course of his journey, finally arrived in Hindustan, and there he became busy with the forms of devotion of yogis and their attainments ('Andalib 1890, p. 798). This narration of the King is interspersed with a line of poetry by 'Andalib: "The place of that face that became the subject of the angels'

prostration is not the Ka'ba. I made an effort; maybe it will be found in an idol temple" ('Andalib 1890, p. 798).

The King maintains that just as in Sufism and in the traditional and rational sciences of Islam, there are many differences and various teachings and schools among yogis. He adds some information related to the sources of the yogis' knowledge, and mentions that they have adopted the knowledge of metaphysics and natural sciences (*'ilm-i hikmat-i ilahiyyat wa tabi'iyyat*) from the Greek philosophers. In making that assertion, he follows a widely held opinion, maintained by scholars such as Al-Biruni and Shahrastani, that the Indians had learned much from the philosopher Pythagoras. He also compares yogis with Sufi practices in relation to the Sufis' "external and internal voyages" and asserts that yogis have worked with much more detail and in a more comprehensive way than Sufis in the "journey to the interior" (*sayr-i batin*) and the "purification of the body" (*tasfiya-yi badan*). To justify his viewpoint, High Ambitions, representing a pure Muhammadi initiate (much in the same way as Baha' al-Din Ansari in his *Risala-i Shattariyya*),[11] mentions a variety of yogic powers ('Andalib 1890, p. 798).

According to High Ambitions, yogis can perform the following feats: control all of their limbs, and their external and internal faculties; hold their breath as long as they want; avoid looking at anything, even though they keep their eyes open; are so affected by the power of their "unstruck" (*anahada*, Sanskrit *anahita*) "sound" that they do not hear anything despite their open ears;[12] produce semen, urine and feces at their own discretion; control their sleep and wakefulness; are able to produce heat and cold in their body and expel mucus from the lung (*akhlat-i riya*) without medication, through yoga postures (*jalsa*), or devotions (*ashghal*); make their bodies so smooth and subtle that they do not sink in water, and due to the subtlety of their body, they are close to a state of rising into the air. Some of yogis, the King adds, even relate that their leaders fly into the air. However, since the King has not seen this conduct with his own eyes and has not personally acquired such power, he does not dare to give his opinion in this regard. They also are able to live as long as they wish, when they convey the breath to the highest point of the brain (*umm al-dimagh*),[13] and lock their windpipe with their tongue. The King adds that this last power is very strange, and he has heard many other strange things that are not in accord with reason ('Andalib 1890, p. 798).

It is not only the yogis' great powers that have been mentioned in the story of High Ambitions. Unlike *Risala-yi Shattariyya* and *Rushd Nama*, which were composed some centuries before the *Lament* and concentrated on yoga almost exclusively in terms of powers, practices, and the functions of exercises on the body and soul of practitioner, the *Lament* pays attention to the yogis' thought and philosophy as well. In general, an emphasis on theology, theosophy, and thought is characteristic of both the *Lament* and *'Ilm al-Kitab*. In the story, High Ambitions maintains that just as in Islam there exist theologians (*mutakalliman*) and theology, one can find different schools of thought among yogis.

Here a cursory account of three schools of Indian philosophy is provided. First is Nyaya, a group that considers God and the cosmos as separate from each other. They use the example of jar and potter; unlike monistic thinkers, they maintain that, just as a potter who creates a jar is separate and totally other than his or her art, so God is totally separate from his creatures. Nyaya philosophers therefore believe in difference (Sanskrit *bheda*) ('Andalib 1890, p. 798). Second is Vedanta. Contrary to Nyaya, this group believes that God and the cosmos are one ('Andalib 1890, p. 798). Third is the Bhedabheda school, which he identifies with the followers of Patanjali yoga. This community holds that God is one with the cosmos from one aspect and separate from it from another aspect. These brief comments are not very accurate; Bhedabada is not a separate school among the six philosophies based on the Vedas, but is rather an argument found in several branches of Vedanta, while the non-dual approach assigned to Vedanta is only the specialty of Advaita Vedanta. The Patanjali teaching is normally associated with the Yoga darshana or school. The text does not mention the remaining philosophical schools of Mimamsa, Samkhya, and Vaishesika, or the non-Vedic schools of the Buddhists and materialistic Carvakas. The

Islamic emphasis is also evident in presenting the argument as the relation between God and the creation, whereas the Indian thinkers pose it as the relation between the impersonal Brahman and the self (*atman*).

High Ambitions proceeds by describing the view that the creation is an illusion or a dream, the well-known theory of maya. He considers the holders of this theory as similar to certain theologians and Sufis in Islam, and he also compares them to the Sophists. He also mentions the Seora or Jain philosophy;[14] those who belong to this group, whose religion he calls Jainism or Jaina *math*, do not believe in any creator. They think that all creatures, such as plants, appear each season by the vapors of heat, water, stars, and planets, and as a result of the eternal rotation of the planets, and disappear again at other times. High Ambitions asserts that the belief of the Jains is exactly like that of materialists (*tabi'iyan*) and atheists (*dahriyya*) in Islamic heresiography ('Andalib 1890, p. 799). Returning briefly to the Nyaya school, he comments that they narrate fantastic stories and myths about the origin and end (*mabda' wa ma'ad*) of the universe ('Andalib 1890, p. 799). Through the ideas of avatar and revelation (*nuzul*), Vedantists define the qualities of the unique God who is without quality and without equivalent in his essence. As a summary of Indian philosophy, this account is so meagre as to be misleading. It seems that the four positions that have been briefly mentioned (God is different from creation, the same as creation, both the same and different; there is no God) are designed as a pedagogical tool that sets out a symmetrical list of the main possible positions, but they are mainly used to illustrate the errors found among Muslims. The Islamic framing of of these arguments is obvious in the use of the Arabic term *haqq* ("the Truth") as the preferred name of God among the Sufis.

If 'Andalib had wished to provide a more complete view of Indian religious thought, he could have drawn upon Abu al-Fazl's detailed account in Persian of the nine Indian philosophical schools in the *A'in-i Akbari*, which summarized the views of the six Hindu schools claiming inspiration from the Vedas as sacred texts (Nyaya, Vaishesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta) and the three schools that reject the Vedas (Buddhist, Jain, and Carvaka).[15] His omission of several of these major schools, and his sketchy descriptions of the ones that he mentions, indicate that he has no intention of providing a thorough inquiry. Instead, these fragmentary references serve only as a background for considering the relationship between yogic practice and Sufism.

At this point, by way of summary, High Ambitions outlines the belief of the Hindus that the whole creation is a large human or macroanthropos (*insan-i kabir*) and the human being a small world or microcosm (*'alam-i saghir*). That means that in the human being there exists a counterpart for everything that is found in the cosmos. So the navel is like the center (*markaz*) [of the world]; the skin is like the throne [of God] (*'arsh*); the brain is like the footstool (*kursi*) of God; the heart is like the universal intellect (*'aql-i kull*) or universal soul (*nafs-i kull*) or universal nature (*tabi'at-i kull*) or universal form (*shakl-i kull*) or the substance of matter (*jawhar-i hayula*), among other equivalents; the seven limbs are like the seven climes (*iqlim*); the seven curtains of the brain (*haft parda-yi dimagh*) are like the seven heavens; the seven attributes (*sifat*) are like the seven planets (*kawakib*); the bones are like mountains; flesh is like earth; blood is like the sea; the veins are like streams; hairs are like trees; the forehead is like prosperity; the back is like ruin; hunger is like fire and steam; thirst is like air; death and life are like the interior and exterior; the two nostrils are like the sun and moon; the two eyes are like Saturn and Jupiter; the two ears are like Mars and Venus; the mouth is like Mercury; wakefulness is day; sleep is like night; happiness is like spring; sorrow is like fall; heat is like summer; cold is like winter; humidity is like the rainy season; crying is like rain; laughing is like lightning; the heart is like a king; the intellect related to affairs of hereafter (*'aql-i ma'ad*) is like a messenger and prophet; the intellect related to the affairs of the world (*'aql-i ma'ash*) is like a minister; delusion (*wahm*) is like Satan; thought is like a book; imagination is like a tablet (*lawh*); anger is like the watchman; the external and internal senses are reporters, informers, and spies; the retentive faculty is like a treasurer; the digestive faculty is like a cook; the attractive faculty is like a tax man; the expulsive faculty is like a sweeper; and the other faculties have similar equivalents.

High Ambitions concludes that in Vedanta thought, the human being is a microcosm, and the universe is a macroanthropos ('Andalib 1890, p. 799).

We must pause here to point out several surprising features of the account just mentioned of the microcosm and macrocosm. This is presented as a doctrine of Indian philosophy, but most of the details of this passage, which are rich in Islamic references, are actually to be found in the comprehensive cosmology of the Brothers of Purity, who flourished in Basra in the tenth century. Their Arabic epistles contain a cosmology developed from Neoplatonic philosophers. In addition to the list of correspondences between the human body and the cosmos, the end of this passage also includes allegorical depictions of the internal and external senses, based on the philosophical writings of Ibn Sina as interpreted by the Persian philosopher Suhrawardi. Moreover, the wording of this account makes it clear that it is quoted, not directly from those sources, but from the preface and first chapter of the Arabic translation of the *Amrtakunda* or *The Pool of Nectar*, the important account of yoga mentioned above (Ernst 2003). By lifting this summary of the microcosm-macrocosm out of that yoga treatise, 'Andalib demonstrates that he did not recognize it as a product of the Muslim intellectual encounter with Greek philosophies.[16] This also indicates that 'Andalib is addressing the Muslim interest in yoga insofar as it was made possible by translations into Arabic and Persian; there is no indication that he had any independent access to Sanskrit texts on philosophy or yoga. 'Andalib expresses his sympathy with yogic ideas of the comparability of world and human being in a poem with tender sentiments: "In the eyes of those who know the eternal world, the world is a person with its own fears and hopes, its blood is the sea, its bones are mountains. The skin of its body is heaven, and the sun is its intellect" ('Andalib 1890, pp. 799–800). High Ambitions closes his account by adding that yogis have interesting postures (*jalsa*), wonderful devotions (*ashghal*), and rare practices that have many physical benefits that require lengthy explanation ('Andalib 1890, p. 800).

In response to this disquisition, the Mystic smiles and declares that under the guidance of the true guide that is the Prophet Muhammad, he has also gone through the route of yoga exercises. The Mystic mentions that these practices include eighty-four postures (*asana*), sixteen of which, according to him, are particularly beneficial. Providing the names of the postures without descriptions, he lists them as *swastika, gomukh, virasana, kurmasana, kukut, uttanakarma, dhangagarkhana, machhindarpith, paschimottana, mayurasana, shivasana, kapaliasana, siddhasana, padmasana, singhasana,* and *bhadrasana*. Again, the Mystic adds that the most essential of these postures are four: *siddhasana, padmasana, singhasan,* and *bhadrasana* ('Andalib 1890, p. 800). Selecting certain yoga postures as the most important postures has had its own tradition. Before 'Andalib, the Qadiri-Shattari Sufi Baha' al-Din Ansari in his *Risala-yi Shattariyya* suggested a certain posture that, in his point of view, has the benefit and quality of all of the eighty-four postures of yoga (Ansari, 149a). Like 'Andalib and Ansari, the hatha yoga text called *Goraksa Sataka* highlights the two postures of *padmasana* and *siddhasana* as the most important among the eighty-four asanas.[17]

Then the Mystic goes on to mention more yoga exercises that he claims to have performed. There are six purifications (known as *satkriya*) that are used to cleanse different parts of the body (*dhauti, neti, basti, nuli, bhanti,* and *tratak*); the eight kinds of breath control (*pranayama*) that are achieved through inhalation, retention, and exhalation (*suryabhedana, ujjayi sitkari, sitali, bhastrika, bhramari/bhramumi, murchhana, purakha,* and *recaka*); and the eight key seals (*mudra*) (*mahamudra, mahabandha, mahabedha, khechari, uddiyanabandha, mulabandha, jalandhara bandha,* and *viparitakarani*), plus three additional *mudra*s, which are gestures for manipulating the breath and other energies (*vajroli, amaroli* and *sahajoli*). The Sanskrit names for all of these practices are simply listed with no further explanation.

Here the Mystic pauses and invites High Ambitions to express his doubts and questions about each of those practices just mentioned. so that he can understand the truth and knowledge in that subject. He recites this line of poetry: "His love took me to the door of each mosque and monastery. He made me wander so that I become aware of all doors". High Ambitions becomes silent and waits for the mystic's grace and guidance ('Andalib 1890, p. 800).

5. Evaluation of Yoga from the Viewpoint of the Pure Muhammadi Path

As the story continues, the Mystic presents an account of the spiritual path that permits him to provide an overall interpretation of yoga in terms of its benefits and shortcomings. The Mystic begins his response by articulating a theory of revelation in which the teachings of earlier religious leaders become abrogated by the most current revelation. This allows him to extend a qualified recognition to the founding teachers of yoga while at the same time asserting the superiority of Muhammad as the spiritual authority of this age. In this way, he acknowledges that, in all times, mystics and knowers of God have appeared, to whom God has given the knowledge of the divine, based on their aspiration and capacity, and he has made them the leaders and guides of the world. When their era came to an end, however, he brought forth new leaders and showed them how to present metaphysical and ethical truths to humanity. But now it is the turn of the Prophet Muhammad, who is the rightful guide (*hadi-yi bar-haqq*) and absolute vicegerent (*na'ib-i mutlaq*), so all ways and doors that were previously open have become blocked. Therefore those who seek the truth, seek to ascend to the subtle world, and long to understand their origin, must bow at the only door that remains open. If people bow before closed doors, they will get no benefit from them. In the same way, the yogis of our time, even if they practice the same exercises and do the same devotions as their early masters did, will never reach the results achieved by their guides ('Andalib 1890, pp. 800–1). Thus, the followers of previous prophets, mystics, or knowers of God, no matter how much they worship and what austerities they undertake, will never attain the rank of nearness (*qurb*) or intimacy (*ma'iyyat*) with God.

But yoga is ultimately characterized by serious limitations. The Mystic confirms from his own experience that yoga produces physical benefits as well as cosmic unveilings and illumination. His perceptions were enhanced, and he beheld the transcendent God. But then, by the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad, he was freed from those theological limitations, he reached the stage of devotion to the God who is beyond vision and intellect, and went from the faith of vision to the station of "those who have faith in the hidden" (Qur'an 2:3). He realized that the God of others (i.e., the yogis), whom he had thought was transcendent according to their claims and teachings, he now saw and understood and witnessed; so he rejected that and turned to the transcendent God who is beyond all quality eand attained real faith, reciting from the Qur'an: "I have turned my face to the one who created the heavens and the earth as a true believer, and I am not one of the idolaters" (Qur'an 6:79). He counsels High Ambitions to take great care, due to the many dangers of the path.

The Mystic then shifts to consider the physical benefits of yoga, which he concedes are real, but he points out that the basis for these practices is breath control, fasting, vigil, and seclusion, which are all quite difficult. This means that very few seekers will have any success by these methods. Moreover, such efforts presuppose a focus on oneself, but the act of renunciation begins with forgetfulness of self, so quick results cannot be expected from it. But ultimately the basis of yoga is flawed. "The state of emptiness (Hindi *sun* = Sanskrit *sunya*), which is the goal of their efforts, is meaningless and useless. The experiences that they call annihilation (*fana'*) and liberation (*mukti*) don't work, and we do not recognize them. That is something in which the practitioner imagines and thinks so well of himself that he believes he is the essence of God. When he conceives this, it becomes powerful, and he makes the claim that he has attained liberation, which is pure fancy, imagination, and a dream" ('Andalib 1890, p. 801). The intrusion of the Arabic word *fana'* or annihilation into this diatribe, alongside the Indic concept of *mukti* or liberation, betrays again that the true opponents of 'Andalib's argument are misguided Sufis.

The Mystic then explicitly connects yoga to the views of heretical Sufis. "By this explanation you will understand the nearness and unity with God of the *wujudi* Sufis, for they also are satisfied with the approach of these Vedantists and their own dream and imagination" ('Andalib 1890, p. 802). Those Sufis think that perfection lies in the correction of imagination, but the mystic proclaims that it consists rather in the increase of

certainty. So while those deluded Sufis are in the state of fancied identity with God, the pure Muhammadi path is intimacy with God in the station of affirming duality. This duality is vastly superior to that union, and while it is easy to imagine the latter, the former is only possible by divine favor. In this argument, the critique of yoga has been subsumed into the slogans summarizing the intra-Sufi debate between the advocates of "existential unity" (*wahdat al-wujud*) associated with Ibn 'Arabi and the "testimonial unity" (*wahdat al-shuhud*) supported by Ahmad Sirhindi and the Naqshbandi order. Sirhindi had claimed to travel beyond the apparent manifestation of God to achieve the higher stages of adumbration (*zilliyya*) of God and the station of servanthood (*'abdiyya*) (Sirhindi 1964, pp. 31, 102). This is metaphysics based on attaining a higher spiritual experience, not theory.

The Mystic now addresses the proper way to deal with the body's needs from the perspective of the pure Muhammadi path.

> O Friend, know that for the traveler on the spiritual path (*salik*), physical health is necessary, because without it neither the affairs of this world nor the next will come to fulfilment. So, it was for this purpose that some [Muslim] leaders and guides, seeing the physical and other benefits of most of the practices of yogis, have introduced them into their path. But since this faqir [i.e., the Mystic] has renounced all paths and adopted only the path of Muhammad (*tariqa-yi Muhammadi*), he does not like any speech and practice except that of his prophet. So he has extracted useful and beneficial things related to both this world and next from the Prophet's noble hadiths, which are the comprehensive texts, and he acts upon those. ('Andalib 1890, p. 802)

This announcement appears to acknowledge that yogic practices have indeed been incorporated into Sufism in the past. But he explains that the pure Muhammadi path requires the renunciation of all of the traditional Sufi orders and an exclusive focus on the sayings of the Prophet in all matters.

Therefore if a Sufi is to practice breath control, he will do so by command of his guide (i.e., Muhammad), not due to the nature of the actions of others. Now the Prophet has declared that the belly has three parts: one third for food, one third for drink, and one third for breath. This is a clear statement about breath control. The many places where the Prophet commands the use of a wooden toothbrush (*miswak*) provide Muslims with a pure practice that obviates the impure cleansing methods of the yogis (*dhuti*, *neti*). But at the same time that one comprehends the method and manner of the Muhammadi dentifrice, by that he also accomplishes the useful and beneficial actions of others.

The Mystic then provides an example of a hadith narrated by Aisha, which is found in the *Mishkat*, an important collection of prophetic sayings. There it is said that he overused the toothbrush to such an extent that his voice sounded like that of a magpie, expelling much phlegm in the process and cleansing his chest and head. So the Muhammadis should persevere in this effort and clean the teeth thoroughly. When internal impurities are removed, the mouth and teeth are clean and pure. This is an esoteric truth that has not previously been revealed publicly. "To know and comprehend the reality and quality of this Muhammadi practice, all of this is useful and profitable. Despite the fact that all of this is public, until this time the essence of this has been veiled and concealed, but that [secrecy] has been ended by this Muhammadi faqir's publicizing it. That which is found in reports in other places, namely, that the toothbrush is the cure of seventy destructive diseases, is on account of the same wisdom" ('Andalib 1890, p. 802). The Mystic says that he calls this purification, and that the Prophet ordained reducing one's food and drink, which is a Muhammadi practice that achieves all of the results of yogic activity. He also forbade excessive speech and idle talk, which necessarily implies restraint of breath. When the Muhammadi wayfarer performs ritual prayer with lengthened recitation and limbs adjusted, the benefits and results of all of the (yogic) postures of others are produced together by this very action. If the practicing wayfarer persists in a single Muhammadi posture which is Adamic and very measured, he attains the benefits of all of the postures of the others, which are totally noncompulsory and wholly ill-mannered, or rather, animalistic.

That is the kneeling posture, on the condition that he holds the *sukhumna* nerve and sits alternately on one foot or the other, or that he holds the shin on the thigh and keeps the spinal column straight and unbent, so it is not weakened or injured.

> To keep the Muhammadi disciple awake, at the time of prayer and Qur'an recitation, rosary prayers, and litanies, he should draw the breath within, and not release it out until necessary, for this produces many physical and spiritual benefits, leaving no weakness or laxity in the body. Internal monologue and random thoughts will not confuse his state of mind. This practice is much superior to the jogis' act of pranayama, and from this practice extended health is produced. ('Andalib 1890, p. 803)

The argument just presented has the appearance of wanting both to have a cake and eat it too, as the pure Muhammadi disciple is advised only to follow the practice of the Prophet, while at the same time he is assured that the goals of yoga practice should be achieved. Whether in breath control, dental hygiene, or postures for prayer, these practices are seen as fulfilling the demands of both Islam and yoga. The casual ease with which a seated posture is described as holding the *sukhumna* nerve (the Hindi form of Sanskrit *susumna*) scarcely permits the reader to notice that a key term from hatha yoga has been normalized.

The next practices described in the text, relating to athletics and bathroom hygiene, are presented without any indication of their origin, leaving their acceptance in the pure Muhammadi path as an unspoken assumption. According to the mystic, both spiritual wayfarers and soldiers have to commit to do athletics and physical exercise, such as archery, riding horses, swordsmanship, and military activities. Like yoga postures, these practices remove the problem of fatigue and laziness and lead to bodily health and strength. They cause the breath to move through the practitioner's muscles and veins. So, the result of holding the breath and postures of yoga is the same as the results of these athletic exercises ('Andalib 1890, p. 804). Regarding personal hygiene, the conversation briefly covers defecation, urination, sex, and flatulence. Recommended practices are described as preserving health, but no particulars are supplied concerning their origins.

At this point, attention shifts to a practice of unmistakably Indic character, divination by monitoring the sun and moon breaths, which are the breaths originating in the left and right nostrils. The mystic recommends that aspirants observe the flow of the breath of the sun and moon, by day and night. With this practice, one will overcome temperature imbalance. If one finds hotness in his nature, he must grind the teeth together and draw the breath inside through mouth. This practice produces cold in the body. So from the breath of sun comes warmth and from the breath of moon comes balance. At the time of eating food or washing (*ghusl*) and while doing noble acts, a voyager must use the sun breath. The same is true when one encounters an enemy. Also, if one observes this practice during sexual intercourse, one may hope that God, the cause of all causes, will allow a male child to be born. If one observes the breath (*muhafizat-i dam*) properly, strange things, which cannot be expressed, will happen to him. These results include a concentrated mind, a heart without obsession, a breath with effect, persuasive speech, a luminous face, black hair, a praiseworthy temperament, and fragrant sweat and body ('Andalib 1890, p. 804). All of these procedures are found in the practice of breath control called *svarodaya* in Sanskrit. This "science of breath", which was widely known in yoga teachings, received prominent treatment in works like *The Pool of Life*, as 'Andalib knew (Ernst and d'Silva 2024).

In the closing section of this dialog, the Mystic advises aspirants to perform a practice of twelve beneficial exercises that he calls the choice of Muhammadis. By doing these exercises, he adds, one can dispense with not only all of the exercises and postures of yogis, but also with all of the philosophy of the Greeks. These twelve practices, which are neither described nor explained, are all given Persian designations and listed in pairs, as follows: "opening and closing" (*gushudan wa bastan*), "getting up and sitting down" (*bar-khastan wa nishistan*), "accumulating and removing" (*bar-awardan wa dar-awardan*), "taking and putting down" (*giriftan va guzashtan*), "measuring and distributing" (*sanjidan va paymudan*), and "digging up and joining" (*kandan va payvastan*). Evidently this list of terms is meant to be

supplemented by oral commentary, as 'Andalib asks readers to learn the meaning of these words and the way to employ them from "my old friends", who have already traveled the inner path step by step. He ends by confidently proclaiming that High Ambitions will succeed in "seeing" and "hearing", which is based on the vision (*mushahada*) of the Sufis, apart from the "unstruck sound" of the jogis ('Andalib 1890, p. 804). Presumably these old friends will be thoroughly familiar with both sets of teachings. The subject of yoga having been closed, the text proceeds to the next retreat, which is devoted to a discussion of free will and destiny.

6. Conclusions

Looking over 'Andalib's presentation of this overview of yoga, it is hard to avoid concluding that it is ambiguous. From his insistence that the pure Muhammadi path requires basing all action on the practices and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, one might assume that approved practices must be connected to accepted hadith collections in order to be acceptable. While he does give examples of that procedure, as in the case of the toothbrush, there are plenty of other cases where he does not. So what is his actual procedure?

'Andalib does not make any attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of Hindu thought and yoga practice. His brief remarks on Hindu theology are only used to demonstrate the errors of deviant Sufis. But the Mystic proclaims that the Prophet Muhammad guided him to the practices of yoga in the first place. Furthermore, the teachings and practices of the yogis are implicitly recognized as a revelation provided by God to earlier ages of humanity. To be sure, it is considered to be out of date or abrogated by the appearance of the prophet Muhammad. The path of yoga is difficult, and its goal is surpassed by the pure Muhammadi path. But Muslim teachers have clearly introduced yoga practice into their teaching. Yet the Mystic maintains that practices such breath control can only be performed if ordered by the Prophet. This logically implies that the continuing practice of yoga has been authorized by Muhammad. This, in a sense, is the argument that is put forward. The Prophet's use of the toothbrush and recommendations regarding air in the belly are considered to accomplish the same results as yoga. Likewise, restriction of diet and conversation, and kneeling in ritual prayer, achieve the results of yogic breath control and divination by breath. Redefining the exercises of the pure Muhammadi path make yoga postures and Greek philosophy superfluous. In other words, yoga supplies the criteria by which Sufi practices are judged to be successful or not.

For modern readers who are used to evaluating cultural traditions in terms of their origins, it may seem paradoxical for a Sufi to declare that yogic practice is authorized by the Prophet Muhammad. But as noted previously, that is precisely what occurred in the *Treatise on the Human Body* attributed to the Sufi saint Mu'in al-Din Chishti. We have already discussed the passage where 'Andalib quoted a lengthy text on the microcosm and the macrocosm as a typical example of Hindu thought, although in fact it was adapted from Islamicate sources in an earlier Arabic treatise on yoga. The argument of 'Andalib simply reverses that interpretive move. From the time of Al-Biruni onward, aside from Abu al-Fazl it is almost impossible to find a Muslim commentator on Indian thought who regards it as an autonomous cosmopolis unconnected to the Greeks; hence the belief that Pythagoras was the source of Indian philosophy. The long history of Persian translations of Sanskrit texts and original Persian writings on India familiarized generations of readers (Hindus, Muslims, and others) with Islamicate terminologies that were considered appropriate for the description of Indian culture. So there was considerable leeway, from this perspective, for extending Islamic credentials to the practice of yoga. The teacher who was initiated into the pure Muhammadi path had the authority to reveal previously esoteric teachings, just as the Mystic does in this dialogue. So performing yoga under these conditions, while avoiding the errors of wayward Sufis, offered the prospect of improvement over yoga itself. In short, the pure Muhammadi path of Muhammad Nasir 'Andalib, far from rejecting yoga

as un-Islamic, offered compelling reasons for seeking the benefits of yoga in a suitably disciplined Sufi practice.

Notes

1. *In memoriam* Soraya Khodamoradi (1978–2023). The late Dr. Khodamoradi began writing this article but was ultimately unable to complete it, due to an untimely and fatal illness. Realizing this, before her passing she requested Carl W. Ernst to edit and revise the article for publication.

2. Ernst (2003, pp. 199–226; 2013, pp. 64–65; 2005, p. 35). For the manuscripts of *Rushd Nama*, see Munzawi (1984, vol. 3: pp. 1520–21); Gilmartin and Lawrence (2000, p. 195). For a lithograph edition, see Gangohi (1896–1897).

3. Francesca Orsini provides an analysis of some parts of the Hindi poetry of the *Rushd Nama* (Orsini 2014, pp. 403–37).

4. Fazlur Rahman (1979, pp. 194–95 and 206). For the debate regarding "Neo-Sufism", see Lawrence (2010); Voll (2008, p. 318); Radtke (1994, 1996, 2000).

5. Bahraichi (1858–1859, pp. 37–44), cited in Umar (1993, pp. 72–74). About the adaptation of Hindu life and worship styles by Muslims see Bahraichi (1858–1859, p. 38), quoted in Singh (1996, p. 96).

6. 'Andalib, who had served in the army before turning toward sufism, was of sayyid ancestry and a descendant of Baha' al-Din Naqshband (d. 1390), the founder of the Naqshbandiyya. His forefathers had emigrated from Bukhara to India during the seventeenth century and had become affiliated with the Mughal court (Schimmel 1976, p. 33).

7. The *qayyum* (or *qutb al-aqtab*) is the successor of Sirhindi that is considered to have the highest spiritual rank of all Sufis on earth. Through the mediation of the *qayyum*, God grants existence to all people, thus the *qayyum* supports creation (Buehler 1998, pp. 68–69; Ter Haar 1992, pp. 153–55).

8. This phrase derives from Qur'an 41:53, "We shall show them our signs on the horizons (*afaq*) and in their souls (*anfus*)". The external or cosmic journey consists of the obhservation of the lights of manifestations outside, and the inner or psychic journey is the wayfarer's internal observation of the lights of manifestations in one's own self.

9. Critique of the rational sciences and philosophy was a legacy of al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the author of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, whose approach influenced Sufi tradition for centuries.

10. *Mashrab* literally means a place for drinking, and by extension came to mean a wellspring. In Sufi context, it refers to the individual's spiritual inclination or his theosophical doctrine.

11. Ansari promises that those who succeed in attaining the imagination of *hansa* will gain eight powers that evidently refer to the eight major *siddhi*s or occult powers of the yoga tradition: (i) The aspirant will achieve the ability to transform himself into sun or air and can appear and disappear whenever he likes; (ii) he can enlarge himself so that the whole world becomes like a pearl in his eyes; (iii) for him, far and near, hidden and apparent become the same; (iv) whatever he wishes be it water, food, or fruit of different seasons will be instantly provided for him; (v) whatever he asks from people they will provide it for him, and if someone tries to disobey him they will perish; (vi) whoever sees him confirms that he is unique in the entire world; (vii) he never experiences sexual ejaculation; and (viii) he achieves long life, becomes aware of the signs of death and knows at what time and in which hour he will die (Gangohi n.d., ff. 151a–151b).

12. 'Abd al-Quddus used to express his experiences such as hearing the supernatural voices from the invisible world (*'alam-i ghayb*) and the powerful dhikr (*sultan-i dhikr*). See Gangohi (1878, pp. 107–9); Gangohi (2010, pp. 29–30, 442); and Quddusi (1894, pp. 16–18, 64–65). These references seem to be connected with the Nath yogic experience of "unstruck sound" (*anahada sabda*), to which 'Abd al-Quddus refers by mentioning flashes of lightning (Sprenger, 18b), which suggests the presence of the thunder that describes the yogic mystical experience. See Digby (1975, p. 45).

13. Moreover, 'Abd al-Quddus' reference to a particular mystical experience of "the state of the brain (*maghz*) or purity (*safa*)" (Gangohi n.d., ff. 24a–24b) suggests his concern about certain mystical experiences that are consistent with and corresponding to his perception of Sufi states such as eternity (*baqa'*) and "the perfect man" (*insan-i kamil*). According to the glosses, the stage of *khwab* happens in the brain or at the top of the head (*tark-i sar*) in which there exists prosperity (*abadani*), much darkness is dominant, flashes of lightning come and go, and the five senses stop (Gangohi n.d., f. 13a).

14. In the writings of Muslim writers and historians, Jains are also mentioned by the name of Seora (see 'Allami 1994, 1:88).

15 'Allami (1978, pp. 139–228). For an overview of these Indian philosophical schools, see Ranganathan (2022).

16 The failure of 'Andalib to recognize the text of Suhrawadi makes it highly unlikely that he was trained in the Ishraqi school of Illuminationism (Ziad 2008).

17 Gorakṣanatha, no. 11 and 12 in Briggs (1973, pp. 286–87).

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Article

Nationalism, Post-Secular and Sufism: The Making of Neo-Bektashism by Moikom Zeqo in Post-Socialist Albania

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Abstract: This article focuses on Moikom Zeqo's (1949–2020) work *Syri i Tretë* ("The Third Eye", 2001) as a New Age reworking of Albanian Bektashism. The success of this book, and the recognition that Bektashi authorities themselves accorded it, make it highly representative of Bektashi neo-intellectualism and beyond: it is a cross-section that enables us to investigate the complex reworking of Sufi knowledge in a post-secular environment, such as Albania. This article examines this specific work while outlining a history of the Bektashiyya from the Ottoman era to the post-socialist Albanian period and highlighting its doctrinal and practical developments. *Syri i Tretë* is the expression of a secularist engulfment of post-socialist or even post-secular religion, which Bektashism embodies. Thus, Zeqo's work expresses a common trend in Albanian society that is beyond the members of the Bektashi community.

Keywords: Bektashism; Albania; Sufism; Balkans; nationalism

1. Introduction

Sufism and modernity is a somewhat debated binomial about which various scholars have written, pointing to the capacity of Sufism to both adapt and find new spaces of legitimisation and reproduction within modern societies (van Bruinessen and Howell 2007; Silverstein 2011; Weismann 2015).[1] In this paper, the focus will be on a particular *tariqa*, namely the Bektashiyya, one of the most widespread brotherhoods in the Ottoman Empire, which then gained popularity in the Balkans, especially in Albania. This popularity was mainly due to the conjunction with the nationalist movement that later led to the formation of modern Albania. This association then led, due to various circumstances that we will consider later, to the transformation from a *tariqa* to a religious community or autonomous religious sect, namely Bektashism. This development constitutes a rather interesting aspect of the present enquiry, which aims to analyse the ways in which Sufism is reasserted in modern environments. The case of Albanian Bektashism is even more singular when considering that from 1945 to 1991, the country was ruled by a Communist regime that pursued a harsh anti-religious campaign, the effects of which have been evident in the post-socialist era until the present day. Nationalism and Communism—in Albania, the latter being the sublimation of the former—are among the main driving factors of the modernisation processes, encompassing the dynamics associated with state formation. In Albania, nationalist and Communist undertones can be directly detected in Islamic practices as well as in the Islamic knowledge that has been shaped by them. This study focuses on this latter aspect and aims to analyse the evolution of Bektashi doctrines in the post-modern era as a means of investigating the modernisation of Sufism.

Specifically analysed will be the work *Syri i Tretë* ("The Third Eye") by Moikom Zeqo (1949–2020), which, in many ways, represents a New Age reworking of Albanian Bektashism. In this work, nationalist ideology is mixed with Islamic tradition and scientific knowledge in a writing style that is somewhere between the positivist and the esoteric. The latter section of this article will especially emphasise the transformations within the Albanian nation-state and society, as well as the complex impact of socialist policies and

the multifaceted post-socialist reconstruction. This article adopts a qualitative method in the critical analysis of Zeqo's text, like his other related publications. The analysis of these texts—considered primary sources—is supported by the study of Bektashi history, along with a deep knowledge of Albanian culture and society, which I have had the opportunity to study in various field research since 2014, including my doctoral research on the post-socialist Sufi revival.

2. Bektashi Heritage

Treated administratively as a *tariqa*, the Bektashiyya was one of the most powerful and influential Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire (Karakaya-Stump 2022), owing to its connection with the Janissaries,[2] who had its eponymous saint, Hajji Bektash Veli (d. 1271), as their protector (Birge 1937; Faroqhi 1992; Mélikoff 1998; Yildirim 2020). The Bektashiyya acted as an accommodation room for dervish movements that were antonymous or considered disruptive to the Empire's socio-political balance, like Abdals, the forerunners of the Rumelia conquests, but also antinomian movements—such as the Melâmis-Bayrâmis and Qalandars (Antov 2017; Boykov 2021; Terzioğlu 2012). This incorporation determined the order's doctrinal and ritual corpus—influenced, moreover, by Safavid Shi'i propaganda—which has often been discussed and reflected upon, including by those who often define the Bektashiyya as a heterodox or *shari'a*-inattentive *tariqa*.[3]

The symbiotic bond with the Janissaries and Sultanic patronage allowed the Bektashi to basically bypass censure movements towards orders considered heterodox, as happened in the 17th century with the Kadizadelis.[4] In 1826, Sultan Mahmud II dissolved the order of the Janissaries and banished the Bektashis from the Empire, as blamed for being among the main factors behind the Empire's cultural, political and material backwardness (İmren Öztürk 2012; Karabulut 2017). Anyhow, the Bektashiyya experienced a particular revival among the Albanians, and various Bektashis participated in Albania's emancipation movement in different ways (Clayer 1995). Authors of Bektashi origin and background, such as the brothers Abdyl (d. 1892), Naim (d. 1900) and Sami (d. 1904) Frashëri, participated directly in the intellectual movements that laid the cultural foundations for Albanian empowerment.

Among the Frashëri brothers, Naim was certainly the most prominent in the history of the Bektashiyya. He produced intellectual works that mixed nationalism with Bektashi doctrines, many of which turned out to influence the subsequent development of the order among the Albanians. Combining pantheism, metempsychosis, nationalism and the Bektashi epic, Naim reshaped the Bektashi doctrinal framework in his *Fletore e Bektashinjët* ("Bektashi Notebook") in Bucharest in 1889. A few years later, he published the epic poem *Qerbelaja* in which he reinterpreted Husayn ibn 'Ali's martyrdom of Karbala' (see below) from a nationalist perspective. Both works represent the cornerstones of the further development of the Bektashiyya. Apart from the Frashëri brothers, several other Bektashis participated directly in the nationalist struggle, by supporting the *çeta* (the resistance bands) or by advocating the diffusion of Albanian writing within the Bektashi *tekke*,[5] the development of which constituted a driving force in the cultural and identity building of Albanian nationalism.

In the newly founded Albanian state in 1913, the Bektashiyya was recognised as an independent religious community. The Bektashi sought to gain this status on their own, establishing their independence from the Hacibektash mother-*tekke* in Turkey, which in the meantime had been closed down by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's banishment decree. In 1929, as King Zog sought to rationalise the administrative apparatus and institutionalise relations between politics and religion, the Bektashiyya officially became de facto an autonomously structured religious community, namely "Bektashism". Various congresses[6] and subsequent statutes formalised both the nationalist vocation and the essential independence of the Bektashiyya, which now became Bektashism (Clayer 1995). Accreditation in the Albanian nation-state, however, did not prevent the Bektashis themselves from being hit hard by the Communist regime of Enver Hoxha (d. 1985) that took power after World War

II. The Communist regime planned and implemented a gradual atheistic and secularising campaign that aimed to reduce, if not eliminate, the scope of religion in society (Tönnes 1982; Karataş 2020). Several Bektashi *tekke* were destroyed, just as many Bektashis were forced to emigrate elsewhere. One of these was Baba Rexhepi (d. 1995), who led the Bektashi *tekke* in Taylor, Michigan, in the United States, which until the end of Communism was the most representative Albanian Bektashi centre of the time (Trix 2011).

3. Bektashi Revival

In 1990, shortly before the collapse of the Communist regime in 1991, religious freedom was restored in an attempt to mark a democratic opening, a freedom that was then seen as a symbol of a break from the past regime, which was considered totalitarian and unjustly atheistic. Nearly half a century of Communist rule nevertheless profoundly transformed Albanian society: the reforms of industrialisation, urbanisation, and mass schooling, while remaining incomplete, had changed the habits of Albanians (Dalakoglou 2012; Lelaj 2012). This period marked the violent transition from a totalitarian, autarkic and statist system to a democratic and open system. Various economically recessive phases followed one another, as did deep political and institutional crises. Occasional social tensions surfaced, exacerbating clan and territorial views that the regime had failed to reset, resulting in a near civil war in the late 1990s. Openness to foreign countries allowed confrontation with new cultural models and led to large-scale emigration as Albanians went to work or study abroad.

Within this landscape, religious freedom was reintroduced to enshrine a break with the Communist past, perceived as pagan and oppressive. Freedom became synonymous with change, and change itself was seen as a source of legitimacy. Yet, anti-religious propaganda and positivism in school teaching, in addition to harsh securitarian measures, had de-educated Albanians about religion, while the new generations had essentially grown up in an atheistic environment, knowing almost nothing about religion. In such new conditions, a complex religious revival ensued (Clayer 2003). In the aftermath of Communism, the population had awakened yearning for religiosity, although few still knew what a ritual or prayer really was. This did not prevent masses of the faithful from rediscovering places of pilgrimage and places of worship where they could express and fulfil, albeit rudimentarily, their religious needs. However, this revival was somewhat de-institutionalised and extemporaneous, i.e., without the religious authorities being able to co-opt it: places of worship were reopened and rebuilt independently, while holy people resurfaced among the population dispensing blessings and prayers toward Albanians in need of reassurance and support for themselves or for their sons emigrating abroad (Bria 2019a, 2019b).

This rebirth from below was matched by a reorganisation from above by the traditional Islamic authorities, who sought to rebuild the religious cult. The Sunni Islamic community has gradually tried to present itself as the bearer of a moderate, nationalist and tolerant Islam (Endresen 2015)—an Islam that is national and state-oriented, capable of dialogue with the government and with other religions without questioning the secularity of the state. This, therefore, requires that such Islam be organised in institutions that are monitored and controlled by the state. It is the so-called "churchification" of Islam, or rather the organisation of organised clerical institutions under state control, that proposes an acceptable religious narrative. According to Račius (2020), the term "churchification" means that the organisation of Islamic communities is domesticated in order to be easily managed and controlled by governments.

Foreign actors have also been involved in religious reconstruction, such as Saudi Arabia, which since the early 1990s has exported its version of Islam by supporting the reconstruction of mosques and offering scholarships to young Albanians to study in Middle Eastern Islamic institutions. Various Turkish foundations have also been active since the 2000s in the field of education: Albanian madrasas are run by Gülen foundations, as is the Beder University in Tirana, where they also teach Islamic studies.

The Bektashi reconstruction followed the same pattern, although it took on its own characteristics that make it a particularly significant case. First, Bektashism reorganised itself around the memory of those of its leaders who were still alive. Many of them returned from abroad to Albania, committing themselves to the front line of the reconstruction of the traditional cult. Bektashi places of worship were reopened as *tekke* and *türbe* ("Islamic tombs"). The latter were often reopened by the descendant families of the Bektashi who had previously run them, although the Bektashi community later took them back under its own management. The great Bektashi pilgrimages were also re-established, first and foremost to Mount Tomor or to Krüja in central Albania, where thousands of believers go to pray to 'Ali 'Abbas[7] or Sarı Saltık[8] (Mentor 2015; Clayer 2017). This reconstruction also involved the revival of the charisma of the Bektashis, whom groups of the Albanian faithful would visit to ask for blessings and healing (Clayer 2007). The *baba* (Bektashi spiritual leaders) resumed performing practices of blessing and healing, making amulets to answer the requests for holiness and blessings by Albanian women seeking support and assistance for their children. Bektashi iconography was reintroduced in a new fashion related to the industrial production and proselytising policies of Iran and Turkish Alevites who imported Shi'i or Alevi icons to Albania (Bria and Mayerà 2017). These icons depicting the first Shi'i imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), Hajji Bektash and various members of the Prophet's Family, including the Shi'i twelve imams, soon spread to all Bektashi and other Sufi places of worship. The Bektashi sold these icons in their cloisters or gave them as gifts to worshippers; these thus ended up entering the homes of Albanians. Both Muslims and Christians still venerate these icons, which thus became one of the main means of expression of post-socialist religiosity.

Alongside this traditional religiosity, the Bektashi proposed a progressive, nationalist and vaguely New Age religiosity (Clayer 2006). This doctrinal refashioning stemmed mainly from the pursuit of legitimacy in Albania's post-Communist society. From the collapse of the Communist regime until the late 1990s, the Bektashi reorganised their community, partly following in the mould of the pre-Communist period, partly underscoring its self-sufficient and autocephalous tendencies. This reorganisation aimed to grasp community legitimacy in Albania's post-socialist society, in which critical and/or episodic relationships with religion emerged. Influenced by Communist secularisation and the multi-religious discourse of nationalism, Albanians perceived Islam as a domestic but potentially dangerous religion. The aftermath of 9/11 and the de-Islamisation of Albanian politics in the late 1990s and early 2000s shaped a new Albanian Islamic identity in search of a moderate and democratic dimension, which is compatible with Euro-Atlantic values and EU membership. The Bektashi thus roughly followed this trend, reorganising their community in a clerical manner and seeking state recognition, which they then obtained in 2009. On the other hand, they have also tended to present themselves as something different from Islam, as well as from Christianity, thus as a religious third way, that is, an independent and autonomous religious community. This ambition was supported by various Bektashi congresses, which sanctioned the Bektashi doctrinal refashioning.

The statute published in 2000, following the seventh congress of the community, outlined a progressive, humanist, ecumenical and nationalist Bektashism, which would represent a third way between Christianity and Islam, dedicated to the application of the *shari'a* and the spread of tolerant Islamic mysticism. The leaders emphasised the tolerant character of Bektashism, putting local-national Islam above foreign Islam, which was considered fundamentalist. In this sense, Bektashism was labelled as a suitable alternative to Islam, closer to the "occidental" way of life, and featuring democracy, freedom and liberalism. On the other hand, this doctrinal updating corresponded to an organisational rationalisation of the communities, which in this way sought to assume a stable hierarchical structure. Traditional Bektashi doctrinal elements were reaffirmed, such as the worship of 'Ali, the veneration of the Family of the Prophet, and the celebrations of *nevruz* and '*ashura*' (see note 3 below), albeit prevalently reinterpreted in a rather nationalist and progressive key. Bektashism was labelled as a true nationalist cult, thus strengthening the bond that

had existed since the birth of the Albanian state. Albanian flags and banners were often placed inside the Bektashi *tekke* and also displayed during the most important festivities of the year, during which the Bektashi leaders often emphasised their love for the nation. Eminent patriots were sanctified, or rather "Bektashised", such as Naim Frashëri, named "Baba of Honour" and father of the Albanian nation, whilst Bektashi leaders, such as Baba Ali Tomor (d. 1948), were labelled as ardent patriots, or others, such as Baba Martanesh (d. 1947), were regarded as martyrs of the nation.

This also entailed a shift in writing style to one closer to a political record than anything else: messages such as the ecumenism of the nation, peaceful coexistence and interfaith brotherhood in the name of common national belonging became an official Bektashi speech pattern. To the nationalist and ecumenical writing has been added another rather rationalist and scientific one that is often evoked during festivities such as *nevruz* (Bria 2020) or even during the academic symposia that the community organises. *Nevruz*, for instance, which traditionally commemorates the anniversary of 'Ali's birth, is also seen as the advent of spring, of the biological rebirth of nature. National and even international academics are invited to congresses at which topics related to Bektashism are discussed in order to sublimate official discourses, such as the historical origins of Bektashism or interfaith tolerance and the Bektashi. These are events where religious writing is mixed with scientific writing, attended by university professors, intellectuals and Bektashi *baba*s. At some of these events, spiritual rituals are also organised to close the event. The aim is to legitimise the community in the eyes of Albanian society, using a scientific writing style to which they may be more receptive. The reason for this is mainly the socialist heritage and the enduring existence of educational curricula in which a secular, if not positivist, outlook prevails.

This narrative, however, also aimed to emphasise certain traits of the Bektashi tradition, such as pantheism, metempsychosis and the rhetoric of martyrdom, which seemed to be of interest to the Albanians. These discourses also aimed to evoke a kind of primordial, almost pagan religiosity that all Albanians would share, and of which the Bektashi would be the expression. This kind of discourse, however, which would seem counter-intuitively intellectual, is quite common among Albanians due to the Bektashis' ability to disseminate it through various media. Internet and virtual social media are often used to present the image of Bektashism as a nationalist, progressive and ecumenical cult. *Urtësia* ("Wisdom"), the bi-monthly newsletter published by the community, communicates the main activities of the Bektashis, as well as their various anniversaries. However, the Bektashis also organise publications to spread awareness of their history, doctrines and practices between the scientific and the popular. Some of these works are actual translations into Albanian scientific works by foreign scholars, such as Birge's book *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* or the works of Nathalie Clayer or Robert Elsie on the Bektashiyya. They organised the publication of texts attributed to Hajji Bektash, such as the *Makalat*.

4. Neo-Bektashism

The Bektashi community has also promoted works that aimed to be highly representative of Bektashism in the post-socialist era. Among these, the most famous one is *Syri i Tretë* ("The Third Eye") by Moikom Zeqo. The author proposes a singular apologia for Bektashism, describing it as universal ecumenism: a global equilibrium between Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Bektashi Pantheism, Shi'ism and Sunni Islam.

Zeqo was born in 1949 in the city of Durrës in Albania into a Libohova family. After completing his primary and secondary education in that city, he started attending the Faculty of History and Philology in 1967 and graduated from the Faculty of Philology and Albanian Writing in the branch of Writing and Literature in 1971. In the years between 1971 and 1974, he worked as a journalist and as literary editor of the newspaper *Drita*. In the 1970s, he wrote a collection of poems entitled *Meduza*, which broke with the aesthetics prescribed by the Albanian League of Writers and Artists (*Lidhja e Shkrimtarëve dhe e Artistëve*)[9] and criticised Albania's bureaucracy and cultural isolation. When Zeqo attempted to publish poetry from *Meduza*, his work was denounced, and he was stripped of his leadership

of *Drita* and forced to work as a teacher in a small mountain village, Rrogozhina, from 1974–1976. It demonstrated how Zeqo was not really aligned with regime positions. During the years 1979–1987, after four years of "exile" in the mountains, Zeqo was employed by the Durrës Archaeological Museum. Having been a competitive swimmer in his youth, Zeqo turned into a specialist in underwater archaeology, which features prominently in the poem "Zodiac: 2". During this period, he also started publishing "safer" poems and numerous monographs and children's books.

In June 1991, Zeqo was part of the organising group of the 10th Congress of the Socialist Party. In the same year, he was appointed chairman of the Culture Commission and then was appointed Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. In 1991 he also ran for Socialist Party and again in 1992, when he was elected and served until 1996 as a parliamentarian. Zeqo's active engagement in politics ended with his parliamentary experience, although he did not stop dealing with the affairs of the "nation" indirectly through his publications, in which he let his patriotism be expressed. In 1997, his wife Lida Miraj—also an archaeologist—held a fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC, which is what brought the Zeqo family to the United States. After returning to Albania, he was the director of the National Museum from 1998 to 2005. From 2005 onwards, Zeqo devoted himself completely to intellectual production, resulting in one of Albania's most prolific and active writers. He was the author of 62 books of poetry, archaeological studies, art history, and numerous screenplays for film and television films of an archaeological and cultural nature.

Zeqo's literary output was eclectic, ranging from non-fiction to fiction and from poetry to more science-based works. One of the common traits of these works, however, was Albanian culture, various aspects of which he addressed, many of them quite sensitive for Albanian scholars. He dealt with the history of Albania, whether in his work on the famous Albanian leader Skanderbeg or the Albanian flag or the culture of the Arbëreshë (Italo-Albanians). He was a profound advocate of the Albanian brotherhood, called Albanianism, which united all Albanian peoples under a single, ethno-linguistic membership that was independent of religion. His publications also included various poems of him, often assembled in collections. Some of his works, however, were related to Hellenic, Babylonian or Egyptian culture, which he considered ancestral, but which were united with Albanian culture. The treatment of these cultures was permeated by a scientific but also popular approach in which Greek or Egyptian myths were mixed with astrology, which he dabbled in. This approach could be called typically New Age or, to some extent, traditionalist, traceable to the Western esoteric tradition, of which Zeqo, however, makes no mention.

Syri i Tretë, in some ways, represents a unicum within Zeqo's literary production, as it is the only one that deals directly with a religious tradition, i.e., Bektashism. In other ways, the same New Age approach he uses in other works emerges from this book, as well as the patriotic and nationalist outlook that characterises his various works. He probably decided to deal with Bektashism for two reasons. The first is personal, since his family was Bektashi, as he himself states in the book. Secondly, the Bektashi community involved Zeqo in this work, who was one of the most famous and in vogue writers at the time, in order to enhance Bektashi popularity. Although it is unique in Zeqo's literary production, this book is not the only one to propose a New Age treatment of Bektashi, nor is it the only expression of literary neo-Bektashism or the New Age strand *tout court* in Albania. In fact, there are several authors dealing with occultism, ufology, Greek Egyptian and Albanian myths, many of which have produced works similar to Zeqo's.

One of these authors, Xhevahir Dedej, draws inspiration from Bektashism in his book *Sekretet e Shpirtit* ("The Secrets of the Spirit"), stating that its purpose is to initiate readers into the mysteries of the universe. A pillar of his worldview is that the human soul consists of energy, and his mysterious insights include the revelation that humanity has failed because it has divided religion into different categories (Dedej 2014, p. 45). He states that "Albania is a country where angels have always lived" (Dedej 2014, p. 245) and believes that the Albanians are the chosen people and that he himself is an elected prophet who has inherited his prophecy through a chain of imams.

Another example is Përparim Zaimi's book *Zgjidhja e një misteri* ("The Solution of a Mystery"). For Zaimi, Bektashism in its Albanian form is the ancient religion itself, primordial and universal, and a sign of the existence of other dimensions (Zaimi 2011, pp. 15–17). True Islam is thus pure mysticism (Bektashi), compatible with ufology, paganism and pantheism. Zaimi's desire is to reveal the hidden truth about how humanity and science evolved. He sees the universe as a mysterious and magical whole, in which everything is connected to other dimensions through energy transfers (Zaimi 2011, p. 19). Dedej's and Zaimi's works share with Zeqo's the same New Age, typically post-secular approach, as well as the idea of considering Albanian culture and people as elected ones. On the other hand, Zeqo's work differs in his knowledge of Bektashism and in his ability to deal with other spiritual and religious traditions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Greek and Egyptian myth, with the same degree of insight. Zeqo's book can be placed within this strand, although it was probably the most successful and famous one.

Published in 2001, *Syri i Tretë* consists of over 350 pages of essays and poems. Zeqo's writing is very sophisticated and polished, attempting in some sections to demonstrate his mastery of Albanian writing through linguistic virtuosity. He seeks to prove his erudition by making extensive references to scientific texts. In a manner that is not always consistent, he often quotes works by Western scholars, such as anthropologists, Islamologists and historians, for example, Henry Corbin, Annemarie Schimmel, and Alexandre Popovic. He does not always draw inspiration from these books but rather uses them as a tool to demonstrate his erudition as a scholar of international calibre. The book, however, mixes a kind of academic writing with an esoteric and mystical one. The last part of the book contains Vedic texts, Avesta, Buddhist poems (attributed to Siddhartha), Biblical passages, poems by Firdeusi (Abu al-Qasim Ferdowsi), Rumi and Yunus Emre, but also Chinese texts by Lao Tsu and poems composed by Albanian Sufis, including Naim Frashëri. These elements prefigure the approach of Zeqo's book, in which the third eye is that of hidden wisdom, hence esoteric knowledge. This third eye is an esoteric eye that sees beyond the exteriority of the world. An eye that belongs to elected humans, such as the ancient Egyptians, the Hindus, and Shiva, but also to Bektashism, which represents the third eye between Christianity and Islam. Bektashism is, hence, the starting point and source of inspiration for Zeqo, who reworks its doctrines to bridge with other mystical traditions—Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian—and also psychology, alchemy and the hard sciences.

5. New Age and Bektashism

The centrepieces of Zeqo's discourse, however, are both Bektashism and Naim Frashëri, who would be the exemplary man, obviously endowed with the third eye of knowledge, who would instil Bektashism, and through it all Albanians, with the ability to possess the "chosen knowledge". Through *Syri i Tretë*, which stands between the scientific and the esoteric, Zeqo attempts to argue for the idea that Albanians grasp the esoteric (hidden) third eye of human knowledge, using various narrative levels or registers to which correspond recurring discourses of Bektashism or of more typically New Age and occultist religions. Zeqo's writing is also political due to its marked nationalistic traits, which the author emphasises at various stages in order to name the Albanians as a chosen people, thus ontologically superior to all others, and the origin of this superiority would be precisely in writing, as the chosen method of transmission of knowledge to all Albanians. It is no coincidence that Zeqo devotes special attention to the semantics of Albanian words and proposes an analysis of every single letter of the Albanian alphabet from which a branch of wisdom would originate (Zeqo 2001, p. 45).

Zeqo's book starts with Naim Frashëri, who is described as a "miracle of the Albanian intelligentsia of all times", and a "master of modern Albanian literature" (Zeqo 2001, p. 14).[10] His life is regarded as an apostolic work, or rather "as a Christianity without Christ" (Zeqo 2001, p. 16). Zeqo considers him a great patriot, equating him to the Albanian leader Skanderbeg, but at the same time, alludes to his almost divine nature in his apostolic

work. Zeqo also writes that "he was a poet who built the prophecy of the future" (Zeqo 2001, p. 15) and believes that no one would understand both the national and universal awareness of humanity like him.

According to Zeqo, Naim Frashëri was an outstanding missionary of both national and world Bektashism, but he was first and foremost an initiator of religious ecumenism, which would result from the "fusion of all religions into a single anthropological, monotheistic, philosophical and mystical model". Frashëri redrew the boundaries of conventional global politics, disregarding any ethnic individualism. He was thus not only a very important intellectual of the so-called Albanian renaissance (*Rilindja*) but a global and modern intellectual, a bearer of the Socratic teachings, for which he belonged to all mankind. His books, written in Greek, Turkish and Persian, attest to his polyglot and global outlook. He was, therefore, an expression of the global enlightenment, which connected all enlightened people like him (Zeqo 2001, p. 23).

The book incenses the figure of Naim Frashëri, a true universal role model, a learned, cultured and at the same time divinely inspired man. This model is quite like that of Ibn 'Arabi's perfect man, a doctrine quite widespread and rooted in Bektashism, as well as in other Islamic mystical traditions (Morrissey 2020). The figure of Frashëri, as outlined in the book, seems to trace these overall qualities of his both in his human and mystical works. Indeed, his belonging transcends Islamic boundaries to be something more global and all-encompassing, belonging to the whole of humanity. However, the author does not totally universalise Frashëri, as he always claims a national and religious affiliation with Bektashism.

These traits are then elucidated in the rest of the book, where the author focuses on rather scattered references to Bektashism and its connection to history, philosophy, science, Islam and other religious traditions. Zeqo mentions in the book that his father was a Bektashi. In fact, he shows that he is well acquainted with the Bektashi doctrines and the history of the order. Zeqo identifies various sources of Bektashism, including the Qur'an, which is said to have left an indelible mark on Bektashi philosophy. Another source would be the martyrdom of Husayn ibn 'Ali in Karbala', which he equates with the martyrology of Christ, positing a syllogism between Christianity and Bektashism. Another source would be the first imam, 'Ali, who would be the basis of Bektashi theology. This would imply four modes of understanding: exoteric understanding (*zahir*), esoteric (*batin*), moderation (*hadd*) and divine vision (*muttala'*). He also cites the well-known French historian Henry Corbin as a source for his work.

For Zeqo, Bektashism would imply an esoteric approach to Islamic knowledge, which would prescind a legalistic or literal approach (Zeqo 2001, p. 45). Bektashism thus implies a gnostic and mystical knowledge of the Qur'an. Although rooted in prophetic revelation, Bektashism would be "a prophetic philosophy, one of the branches of Persian Shi'ism. Bektashism would thus encompass Shi'i imamology, i.e. a mystical philosophy that would complement Islamic prophetology" (Zeqo 2001, p. 125). Zeqo also dedicates a section of his book to Hajji Bektash, regarded as an exceptional mystic who excelled in poetry and miracles: "Hajji Bektash have distinguished himself in the enlightenment of the eastern Islamic world, a reformer such as St. Francis of Assisi who would reform Christianity" (Zeqo 2001, p. 156). He would reform the Islamic religion and formulate the Bektashi doctrines.

At the same time, it is evident that there is a New Age or rather perennialist[11]/occultist[12] vocation in Zeqo's work, which tends to establish a communion between all religious traditions in history, deriving a single ontological matrix from them. This is also the case with Naim Frashëri, who would thus be a chosen one who inherited a kind of enlightened wisdom that would be handed down in history through various characters. Socrates, Osiris, Aristotle, St. Augustine, 'Ali and even the sixth Shi'i imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, would be characters who received this enlightenment, culminating in Naim Frashëri, who then condensed it into the "Naimian message" (Zeqo 2001, p. 148). Inherent in this idea is the existence of "chosen" characters who are the only ones capable of grasping this

enlightened knowledge. At the same time, there are chosen peoples who embody the enlightened knowledge of humanity. These peoples include the Albanians, who, through Naim Frashëri, received the enlightenment to be the vanguard of humanity. The "Naimian message" is thus the perfection of this hidden knowledge handed down over the centuries through various characters and various peoples, but which finds its zenith in Naim, the Albanian Bektashi.

The Bektashi doctrines, like its history and that of Hajji Bektash, are thus re-read in a typically New Age or perhaps occultist key. Zeqo is adept with his knowledge at creating a bricolage in which Bektashi elements are mixed with other religious and spiritual traditions, such as Christianity or Hinduism, but also the cult of the ancient Egyptians or Greeks. All elements that Zeqo knows very well and does not hesitate to use to propose Bektashism as a global religion, but at the same time as a typical Albanian one. A tension between universalism and particularism emerges, which will be analysed in the next section, but which at the same time is rooted in typical post-secular religiosity.

6. Between Particularism and Universalism

Zeqo's book reveals a tension between a universalist and a particularist conception of Bektashism. The former envisages Bekashism as a universal tradition common to all mankind; the latter, on the other hand, tends to consider Bektashism in its connection with Albanian culture as elected and, therefore, the only one capable of grasping esoteric divine enlightenment. This tension is rooted in Zeqo's deep personal convictions, but at the same time in a political vision—typically patriotic and nationalist—that considers Albanian culture as "special", in which, however, an overall ecumenism according to which all religious traditions are connected and united is present.

It would be Naim Frashëri who definitively reformed Bektashism, mixing it with Albanianism, to make it "a universal world philosophy, capable of representing a moral and ethical guide for the community" (Zeqo 2001, p. 87). A guide that also provided support to Albanian politics, in difficulty given the time of change, by providing guiding and reference values. Values that were set out by Frashëri in his work *Qerbelaja*, in which he outlines an all-inclusive ecumenical structure, a structure that would be based on an unquestioned monotheism. For men belonging to various religions, there would be only one anthropological truth: we all come from the same earth. Naim's ecumenism is the core of Bektashism, being embraced by all Albanians. Therefore, "Bektashian ecumenism is the ecumenism of all Albanians, which is the conceptual platform for world ecumenism" (Zeqo 2001, p. 67). For Zeqo, world ecumenism is a global political theory and a biological and political anthropomorphism (Zeqo 2001, p. 67).

Zeqo, therefore, reworks the Bektashi doctrines to propose a universal and inclusive model capable of involving other religions as well. This is obviously a legacy connected to the so-called Albanian national religion, according to which all religions are equal, so there is only one God who unites all human beings. At the same time, it is an adage of various traditionalist and occultist doctrines, according to which there is one and only one unifying ontological matrix. However, Zeqo argues it through Bektashism, which is elevated to a worldwide ecumenical model, ergo to be imitated. This is yet a discourse that encounters a tendency on the part of the Albanian Bektashi authorities to pose as a world unicum, that is, an ecumenical and inclusive religious cult that disregards any form of radicalism and division. A discourse that obviously endorses nationalist rhetoric but equally appeals to the Albanian political authorities, who seek in various ways to present the Albanian multi-faith state as a model to be exported.

From Zeqo's book, however, emerges a political, more properly particularistic nationalist register that tends to represent the background of his work. This yearning is mixed with and finds its fulfilment in the perennial doctrine of the chosen people. Albania and the Albanians are regarded as people who are almost privileged to have a certain election. This would be revealed by Naim Frashëri, who, through his reworking of Bektashism, would awaken the vocation of the Albanian people. Bektashism, in fact, finds its fulfilment in the

Albanian people, while at the same time, Albanianism was awakened by Bektashism. This dialectical relationship would find its fulfilment in Naim Frashëri, who set "the course for the development of mankind in his famous work, *Qerbelaja*" (Zeqo 2001, p. 105).

Zeqo compares the tragedy of Karbala', in which Husayn in 'Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and son of 'Ali, was defeated and killed, to the great battles that have marked humanity, such as the battle of Troy. Being the main subject of the work *Qerbelaja*, Karbala' is also comparable, according to the author, to Skanderbeg's struggle against the Turks, when he historically resisted in his stronghold (Zeqo 2001, p. 106). Shi'i martyrology is thus mixed with nationalist rhetoric, as when Zeqo compares Karbala' to the 1999 Kosovo war. The latter war has remained etched in the memory of the Albanians, such that the rhetoric of a greater united Albania, in which the Albanian peoples of Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro were included, is back in vogue. For Zeqo, Frashëri respected the basic structure of the Karbala' tragedy to propose a model of universal piety that could symbolise all the abuses and injustices of human history. Here too, it is a universalisation of a concept, that of Shi'i martyrology, to the whole world. This universalism becomes particularism when it refers to the Albanian people and to their writing as an expression of Albanian chosenness. For Zeqo, Naim Frashëri had elevated the literary and poetic model of Albanian writing through his verses, which were comparable to those of other famous poets such as Homer or William Blake. However, Naim is the apogee of a long tradition of extraordinary Albanian poets, such as Girolamo de Rada (d. 1903), considered one of the fathers of Albanian writing.

7. Conclusions: Post-Secular Religiosity?

What is the Third Eye? The third eye is that of Shiva. The third eye is that of Polyphemus. The third eye is Naim Frashëri himself, between the eye of earlier ages and the eye of later ages. The third eye is Albania, between the eye of the East and the eye of Naim's creativity. The third eye is Shqipëria between the eye of the East and the eye of the West. (Zeqo 2001, p. 221)

This passage summarises Zeqo's thoughts on Bektashism and Naim Frashëri. Both are a synthesis of various traditions and eras. References to the Indian or Greek tradition, however, indicate the presence of a tradition, a *fil rouge* in history, which found its culmination in Naimian Bektashism. Bektashi doctrines thus have mingled with Albanian culture, creating a universal and elected model, a third way, between West and East, between antiquity and innovation, and between science and religion. The third eye is thus an elected eye, but also a third way, going beyond Christianity and Islam, to propose another inclusive and ecumenical model.

Moikom Zeqo's work appears to be a New Age reworking of the Bektashi doctrines, as is the case with other mystical traditions—not only Sufis. The New Age reinterpretation of Sufism is, in fact, widely recognised as a rather widespread phenomenon in Europe and the US that seems to have some relevance elsewhere as well (Sedgwick and Piraino 2021). There is no evidence of the direct influence of Western esoteric or New Age doctrines in Zeqo's book, which nevertheless does not exclude them. Perhaps he was able to acquire some sources through unconventional channels, or he just did not mention them. However, it would be reductive to flatten this work to a mere intellectual and New Age elaboration of Bektashism, as it is highly representative of Bektashi reconstruction in the post-socialist era. This work is influenced by the immense literature the author consulted, which mostly concerned works by scholars of Sufism and Balkan history. In his bibliography, he mentions Irène Mélikoff, Alexandre Popovic, Thierry Zarcone, Henry Corbin or Annemarie Schimmel. The citation of these works serves mainly to give an almost scientific value to Zeqo's book, which aims to be a compendium of doctrine, history and poetry. His writing lies, in fact, between positivism and mysticism, mixing science, mysticism and poetry, a mixture that can be considered one of the results of radical socialist secularisation.

The Albanians were, in fact, socialised within a basically secular social context, in which the educational systems still largely have a positivist approach. Religious writing

would therefore be unfamiliar to most. Zeqo's work, consciously or unconsciously, embodies a secularist engulfment of post-socialist or even post-secular religion, of which Bektashism is a direct expression. Therefore, his work is not marginal but reveals a common trend in Albanian society that is not only common to the members of the Bektashi community. In fact, many Albanians—without necessarily being Bektashis—consider Bektashism to be a sect in which it is possible to detect an ancestral, almost pagan, religiosity that is common to all Albanians. This idea would thus tie in with the discourse of the national civil religion, according to which there exists an ontological bond between all Albanians, disregarding any other religious tradition. At the same time, Bektashism is a typically post-secular phenomenon. Anti-religious struggle, positivist propaganda and social and institutional secularisation have de-institutionalised religion, demineralising it of all formal aspects, and it ends up remaining a vague reference to the sacred, actually without any particular reference. Albanians mainly prayed, secretly during Communism and openly afterwards, to a sacred object or relic without thinking about what the reference tradition was, thinking that all religions were equal. An attitude that is the sublimation of nationalist discourse, but on the other hand, it is the result of a diseducation of religion and disintegration of religious memory, so decisive in delineating religious practice and even belief. For the Albanians, religion is a post-secular fact, implying a religiosity profoundly changed by secularisation (and not a denial of secularism). Optionality, flexibility and ontological security searching are among the main characteristics of post-secular religion, which also implies the emergence of new spiritualities and/or religious solutions. The latter may be individual as well as collective, but they certainly intercept a common feeling that characterises late or post-modernity, such as Zeqo's work. Although *Syri i Tretë* is a sui generis work, it expresses typically post-secular religiosity, in which Bektashism is reinterpreted in a New Age key to propose a spiritual solution or at least a spiritual narrative that neither the Albanians nor the leaders of the Bektashi community disapprove of, but rather legitimise.

The references to 'Ali, the Shi'i twelve imams, or the martyrology of Karbala' are well present in Zeqo's work but reinterpreted between the particular and the universal. Particular in that they are connected to Albanian history, as in the case of the Kosovo war being compared to Karbala'; general, in that the martyrdom itself is considered a global event. This tension—between the particular and the universal—is constant throughout the book: Bektashism's quest to be a universal model, somewhere between Christianity and Islam, a third tradition that can unite all of humanity; Bektashism's quest to be an elected model in its union with Albanian culture, to make the Albanians an elected people. A tension that Zeqo also builds using the tools of occultism, which, however, seems to derive more from the evolution of Bektashian thought in the post-socialist and post-secular era than from an external takeover.

Notes

[1]   For a broader study of the relationship between "mysticism" and "modernity" and various aspects of their reciprocity, entanglement and harmony, see Zarrabi-Zadeh (2020).

[2]   Janissary, also spelled Janizary, Turkish Yeniçeri ("new soldier" or "new troop"), signifies a member of an elite corps in the standing army of the Ottoman Empire from the late 14th century to 1826. Highly respected for their military prowess in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Janissaries became a powerful political force within the Ottoman state.

[3]   The Bektashi doctrines attest to a certain centrality to the veneration of the first Shi'i imam 'Ali, but also in general to that of the Prophet's Family (*Ahl al-Bayt*), including the Shi'i twelve imams. Such veneration assumed some distinctive hallmarks, such as various divine attributions assigned to 'Ali, in a manner close to some extreme Shi'i sects (Asghari 2008). The numerology

and science of letters of Hurufism was also present, especially in the Bektashi iconographic representations (Birge 1937). From a ritual point of view, the Bektashis observe fasting during the first days of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, in commemoration of the Karbala' massacre, and especially the tenth day of Muharram, which marks the martyrdom of Husayn ibn 'Ali. *Nevruz*, as the anniversary of 'Ali's birth, is also celebrated. In any case, the epic recital and mourning associated with the Karbala' massacre marked Bektashi piety, as evident in practices of ritual weeping or corporal mortification (chest blows), or in the literature of poets attributed to Bektashi milieus, such as Yunus Emre (d. 1321).

4   Kadızadelis (also Qadizadali) was a seventeenth century puritanical reformist religious movement in the Ottoman Empire, whose members followed the revivalist Islamic preacher Kadızade Mehmed (d. 1635).

5   The *tekke* is an architectural structure erected for a Sufi order and is a place of spiritual retreat.

6   Since the end of Communism, congresses of Albanian Bektashism have been held in 1993, 2000, 2005 and 2009. They redefined its institutional structure and the Bektashi creed as known today.

7   'Abbas ibn 'Ali (d. 680), the son of 'Ali and Fatima, is highly revered in Shi'i Islam for his loyalty to his brother Husayn ibn 'Ali and for his role in the Battle of Karbala', in which he was the standard-bearer for the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

8   Sarı Saltık (d. ca. 1297) is a 13th-century dervish venerated by the Bektashis.

9   The Albanian League of Writers and Artists is an organisation of writers, composers, and artists and critics of literary and artistic values, located in Tirana. During the Communist period, the League was a tool of the government's efforts to require writers and artists to advance the goals of the Regime and to censor, ban, and punish those writers and artists who failed to do so.

10   All translations from *Syri i Tretë* in this article is from the author.

11   Perennialism is the view that there is a shared core of truth and perennial wisdom in all major religions—sometimes called a perennial philosophy—and that this core is grounded in and justified by shared religious experiences, usually of the mystical variety (Draper 2020).

12   Occultism is a branch of human activity and is an orientation towards hidden aspects of reality, those that are held to be commonly inaccessible to ordinary senses. Such activity simultaneously shares a certain similarity with both science and religion but cannot be reduced to either of them (Bogdan and Djurdjevic 2014).

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Article

Bektaşi Female Leadership in a Transnational Context: The Spiritual Career of a Contemporary Female Dervish in Germany

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Abstract: In this article, I bring premodern and contemporary Bektaşi perspectives to the current ethical debate on gender equality in the Bektaşi Sufi order. While there is tremendous potential in the historical legacy of Kadıncık Ana, the spiritual successor of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli (d. ca. 1271), and her peers who served as female spiritual leaders in the proto-Bektaşiyye, the institutionalization of the Bektaşi order resulted in the marginalization of women and their exclusion from certain opportunities and positions in religious practice and leadership. This article explores the spiritual journey of Güllizar Cengiz (today also known as Neriman Aşki Derviş after becoming a Bektaşi "dervish"), including her foundation of an Alevi-Bektaşi cultural institute in Cologne, Germany, in 1997 and the opening of a Bektaşi Sufi lodge (*dergah*) in the Westerwald near Bonn in 2006. I explore the impact of Hacı Bektaş's teaching that both men and women have the same spiritual potential to become the ultimately ungendered *insan-ı kamil*, or spiritually and ethically completed human being. I also discuss the time-honored Bektaşi principle of "moving with the times and staying one step ahead of the times" and how it can inform contemporary understandings of ethical and spiritual prerogatives within Bektaşism.

Keywords: gender equality; female spiritual leadership; mysticism; Sufism; Bektashism; gender and Sufi ethics

> Among the women who lived in Rum was one called Kutlu Melek, Fatıma or Kadıncık Ana. One day, in those hopeless times, she had a dream. She saw the sky transformed into a skirt. She was wearing it, and the moon was swallowed by it. (The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture 2021)

1. Introduction

When it comes to gender relations, the Bektaşis (Bektashis) proudly maintain that women are considered to possess equal spiritual potential and are treated equally in all matters of belief and practice (Birge 1937, p. 164). Since the founding of the Bektaşi Sufi order (*tarikat*, literally "path"),[1] which remains an important representative of Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*), female members of the order participate in Bektaşi ritual practice together with men. During the rituals that are open only to the initiated, no distinction is made between the sexes. According to Bektaşi belief, all human beings bear within themselves the spirit of God/the Truth (*Hakk*), a tenet mentioned in Islamic revelation (Q 15:29 and 38:72). Bektaşi men and women are collectively addressed as *canlar* or "pure souls" (individually, men are referred to as *can*, and women as *bacı*). The soul (*can*) is thought to reside within the body, which in turn is described as "skin", the outer garment of the *can*. Where the body has a "sexual appearance", the soul is devoid of sexuality (Bahadir 2021).[2] As such, the Bektaşis are thought to be freed from their sexuality during worship, their bodies desexualized. They stand before *Hakk* not as men or women but as *canlar*, a state that transcends gender polarity. This article seeks to explore the extent to which this spiritual elimination of boundaries within ritual practice also neutralizes gender identity in social contexts.

Despite the traditional emphasis on gendered human prerogatives at the heart of its teachings, Bektaşism's historical development has been underpinned by a tension between patriarchal and gender-egalitarian tendencies. Today's Bektaşis continue to eschew a simplistic binary formulation of gender and sexuality and a division of gender roles. In examining aspects of the gender imaginary, as reflected in Bektaşi spiritual practice, I draw upon the writings of Sa'diyya Shaikh. She applies a mystical lens to Judith Butler's theoretical reflections on gender which contribute to the problematization of prevailing gender regimes (Butler 1990). Shaikh's studies promote a fluid understanding of the gender and sexuality systems that disrupt and suspend the social reification of these concepts Shaikh (2009, pp. 781–822; 2012; 2022, pp. 475–97; 2023, pp. 217–33). Access to Sufi life for women has traditionally varied depending on the specific Sufi order and the cultural context in which it operates, which is often extremely patriarchal (Fuller 1988; Murata 1992; Al-Sulami 1999; Buturovic 2001, pp. 135–60; Abbas 2002; Raudvere 2002; Helminski 2003; Dakake 2006, pp. 131–51; Silvers 2007, pp. 541–43; 2014, pp. 24–52; Küçük 2018, pp. 107–31; Cornell 2019). Yet, some Sufi orders have a long history of gender egalitarianism, welcoming women as equal members and even promoting female spiritual leadership/authority (Pemberton 2004, pp. 1–23; Hill 2010, pp. 375–412; Birchok 2016, pp. 583–99; Hill 2018; Xavier 2021, pp. 163–79; 2023, pp. 182–222). Others have been more restrictive, with women at times being excluded from the spiritual practices and rituals of the mystical path. This has begun to change in recent years, as more and more women play an active role in Sufi communities (for emic approaches, see Trix 1993; Özelsel 1996; Reinhertz 2001; Koca 2003; Evanson 2021; also, Nurbakhsh 2004),[3] and some Sufi *tarikat*s have made efforts to be more inclusive of women and to promote female spiritual leadership (Tweedie 1979; Tweedie 1986; Sargut 2017; Dorst 2018; Kuehn 2018, pp. 53–114; Kuehn and Buturovic Forthcoming; Kuehn Forthcoming).

We know that at least in the foundational period of Bektaşi Sufism, women could assume leadership roles and attain high spiritual rank. In modern times, the tradition of high-ranking female Bektaşi dervishes (*dervişler*, sg. *derviş*) within the Bektaşi *tarikat* has greatly declined. While the Bektaşi tradition as a whole is no longer widespread today, the Bektaşi *tarikat* was officially recognized and accepted by the Ottomans. It formed an important part of the religious and cultural landscape of their empire, especially in the Rumelia region, which included parts of present-day Turkey and the Balkans. Despite its relative decline, in recent decades the order has transformed itself into a transnational organization[4] with offshoots in the United States and Europe. As far as I am aware, there is currently only one high-ranking initiated female Bektaşi dervish: Güllizar Cengiz, today also known as Neriman Aşki Derviş, who has been living in Germany since 1978.

This article is divided into two parts. First, it examines the enduring legacy of Kadıncık Ana, a Turkmen woman who not only played a prominent role in the early history of Bektaşism in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, but whose pregnancy also precipitated broader social and religious tensions that led to a schism in the Bektaşiyye in the late Ottoman period (Soyyer 2012, pp. 95–106, cited after Kara 2019, p. 61, n. 36). This part also provides glimpses into other female spiritual leaders in the early Bektaşi context. Second, the bulk of the article explores Güllizar Cengiz's spiritual path, charting her rise in the spiritual hierarchy of the Bektaşi Sufi order, focusing on her time both before and after her initiation, after which she was also known as Neriman Aşki Bacı and, after she became a dervish, as Neriman Aşki Derviş.[5]

2. The Legacy of Kadıncık Ana

It is significant that the *dergah* which Güllizar Cengiz opened is today named after Kadıncık Ana, the prototypical female role model of Bektaşism. The high status accorded to her can be gauged from Bektaşi[6] and Alevi[7] traditions about the arrival of the Bektaşi patron saint (*veli*)[8] Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli (or Haji Bektash Veli; d. ca. 1271 in Anatolia, present-day Turkey) during the nascent period of Bektaşism within Turko-Iranian Sufism (Mélikoff 1998; Algar 1990, pp. 117–18).

The fifteenth-century *Vilayetname*, the main hagiography of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli[9] (Vilayetname 1995, pp. xxiv–xxv; Ocak 1996b, p. 471)—sacred to both the Bektaşis and the Alevis—tells us that the first person to foretell Hacı Bektaş's coming to Anatolia was a saintly unmarried Turkmen girl named Fatma Bacı: "standing up and putting her hand on her chest, she bowed three times" (Vilayetname 1995, p. 18). He arrived while she was preparing food for a gathering of Anatolian holy men, the so-called Abdals of Rum (Abdalan-ı Rum, referring to non-conformist "dervishes" from "Rum" or the Byzantine ["Roman"] empire which encompassed Anatolia; Ocak 1996a, pp. 217–26; Karamustafa 1993, pp. 128–29; Kafadar 1995, pp. 60–117). Fatma Bacı was thus the first to return Hacı Bektaş's spiritual greeting. Kadıncık Ana, also known as Kutlu Melek, was also the first to offer him hospitality upon his arrival in the village of Sulucakarahöyük, by preparing bread and butter for him (Vilayetname 1995, p. 21; Karakaya-Stump 2020, p. 155). Sulucakarahöyük is now known as Hacıbektaş and was home to the headquarters of Bektaşism until it was moved to Tirana, Albania, in the early twentieth century. The *Vilayetname* tells us that even before Hacı Bektaş reached Sulucakarahöyük, Kadıncık Ana, a married woman, dreamed that a moon had entered and left her body (Vilayetname 1995, pp. 26–27; cf. The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture 2021). Later, Kadıncık Ana miraculously becomes pregnant after drinking the water which Hacı Bektaş had used for his ablution. The saint's nose had started bleeding, and some drops had fallen into the water (Gross 1927, pp. 46, 115–16). Kadıncık Ana gave birth to two boys, regarded as Hacı Bektaş's (spiritual) sons: Habib and Hizir Lale (Mélikoff 2002, p. 6).

An acrimonious dispute as to whether they were in fact Hacı Bektaş's sons or merely his followers split the order into two branches, the Babagan and Çelebi Bektaşis (Karakaya-Stump 2020, pp. 66–67; Kara 2019, p. 61, n. 36). The Babagan Bektaşis[10] believe in the exclusively spiritual transmission of the teachings and the "spirit" of Hacı Bektaş (*yol evladları*), claiming that the saint was never married and had no children. The Çelebis, on the other hand, claim to be the descendants of Hacı Bektaş. They accept the biological transmission of the spiritual heritage (*bel evladları*)—the patrilineal *ocak* (literally "hearth") system and, as Güllizar Cengiz explains, "maintain that he [Hacı Bektaş] was married in the spirit of the Zahiri school [i.e., it was only outwardly a marriage]" (Neriman Aşki Derviş, email to author on 16 February 2022).

The story of Kadıncık Ana's miraculous pregnancies, as Cengiz points out, has been perpetuated by the Babagan Bektaşis to this day. It is an expression of the new definition of Bektaşism, which in the sixteenth century under Balım Sultan (d. 1519), the "second spiritual leader" (*pir-i sani*) of the Bektaşi order, began to take the form of an institutionalized order in which the individual is defined by the religious hierarchy. According to the Babagan Bektaşis, being a Bektaşi is not a right acquired by birth. Therefore, any soul (*can*) who travels down the Bektaşi path, also called *Tarik-i Nazenin* (literally "gentle path"), may enter the order (Neriman Aşki Derviş, email to author on 16 February 2022). The account of these unusual births is also said to have been the cause of differences between the Babagan Bektaşis and the heterogeneous Alevi socio-religious communities, even though both trace their spiritual lineage (*silsile*) through Hacı Bektaş back to Imam Cafer (Arabic Ja'far), Imam Ali, and the Prophet Muhammad, and even though both honor Hacı Bektaş as their second most important saint after Imam Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad.

Furthermore, although there are significant similarities between Bektaşis and Alevis in terms of beliefs and practices, they also differ in another major respect: the former is an initiatic Sufi order, in principle open to everyone, whereas the latter is a heterogeneous socio-religious community, traditionally tied to family lineage and so closed to outsiders. It was not until the twentieth century that Alevism (Alevilik) began to take on a more formal and organized transregional identity, as Alevis from different regions and backgrounds came together through transnational networks to share their practices and beliefs (Erol 2010, pp. 375–87; 2012, pp. 833–49; Langer 2010, pp. 88–123; Klapp 2015).

The worldview of both Bektaşis and Alevis is based on *batini*, the esoteric, interpretation of Islam that concentrates on the inner meaning of religion. As such, they generally

abstain from institutionalized Islamic practices such as daily prayer and fasting during the month of Ramadan. Bektaşi and Alevi men and (unveiled) women worship together in sacred spaces, rather than in mosques. Alevi gathering places are referred to as *cemevi*s (literally "houses of gathering"), while the ceremonial space in which most Bektaşis meet is known as *meydan*, located in *dergah*s. Both permit the consumption of alcohol, contrary to Islamic "orthopraxy".

But to return to our discussion on Kadıncık Ana and her peers: the *Vilayetname* informs us that it was Kadıncık who ensured the transmission of Hacı Bektaş's spiritual teachings, and also that she initiated men (Zarcone 2010, p. 87). Both Kadıncık Ana and Fatma Bacı recognized Hacı Bektaş's sainthood before any man did. Yet history demonstrates that the great spiritual leaders of the Bektaşi order have all been men, while women's access to Sufi life in the past is difficult to evaluate due to scarce and inconsistent source material. Nevertheless, records do exist. In his article on the colonizing dervishes and their lodges (*zaviye*s or small *dergah*s) at the time of the Ottoman conquest of Thrace and the Balkans, Ömer Lutfi Barkan confirmed the existence of female spiritual leaders at Sufi *zaviye*s (Barkan 1942, pp. 302–3, 323). Ottoman archives indicate that, like Kadıncık Ana, these women bore the title of *ana* ("mother"), alongside *bacı* ("sister"). Such titles are still widely used among Alevi-Bektaşi groups as terms of respect for spiritual leaders.[11] Several dervish *zaviye*s also bore female names such as Kız Bacı, Ahi Ana, Sagrı Hatun, Hacı Fatma, Hacı Bacı, Hundi Hacı Hatun, and Sume Bacı, and some of these communities were led by women (Beldiceanu-Steinherr 2005, pp. 262, 271; cf. Barkan 1942, pp. 302–3). We also find that in 1485 a *zaviye* in the town of Kırşehir, fifty kilometers west of Sulucakarahöyük, was headed by a female spiritual leader of Greek origin named Afendra (Barkan 1942, pp. 302–3). These women may have had male disciples, as seems to have been the case with Abdal Musa, a leader of the Abdals of Rum ("Abdalan-ı Rum", see Kaygusuz Abdal 1999, p. 130), who was the disciple of Kadıncık Ana. The evidence demonstrates that women played a leading role in various Sufi communities, many of which were later subsumed into the Bektaşi order during the formative sixteenth century.

These archival records support the testimony of the late fifteenth-century Ottoman chronicler Aşıkpaşazade (1400–1484), who also provides some details about the social role of female spiritual leaders in Ottoman society (Flemming 2018, pp. 352–74). According to Aşıkpaşazade, whose work is considered one of the most important primary sources for the history of the early Ottoman Empire, women held important spiritual and religious positions. He notes that the order that bears Hacı Bektaş's name was founded after his death by a woman: a certain Hatun Ana. She is said to have been a prominent member or "mother" (*ana*) of the mystical itinerant association of women known as the "Sisters of Rum" (Bacıyan-ı Rum; see Karakaya-Stump 2020, p. 155; Kafadar 1993, p. 195; Bayram 1987; Flemming 2002, p. 70). Aside from Aşıkpaşazade's account, there is only limited information about the Bacıyan-ı Rum, most of which comes from oral tradition (*sözlü gelenek*) (cf. Hoffman 2006, pp. 365–80). The Bacıyan-ı Rum were one of the four dominant social groups in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Anatolia: Aşıkpaşazade names them alongside the frontier warriors (Gaziyan-ı Rum), the above-mentioned wandering dervishes (Abdalan-ı Rum), and the guild-like *ahi* associations (Ahiyan-ı Rum). The latter were members of *fütüvvet*-based communities composed of groups of young urban men connected with the burgeoning *tarikat*-based Sufism (Ohlander 2008, pp. 271–91). All four associations contributed to the rich and diverse tapestry of Islamic mysticism during the formative years of the Ottoman empire (Aşıkpaşazade 2013, pp. 63–64, 279, 307–8, 315; Karamustafa 1994, pp. 65–84; Ocak 1999, pp. 103–20). Even though Anatolian *ahi* groups specifically excluded women from participation, contemporary sources indicate that in medieval Anatolia *fütüvvet* could sometimes be practiced by women. As noted above, there were women with the title of *ahi* (a version of the term *aki*, "brave man", used in *fütüvvet* groups for "master" members), suggesting that women may have been associated with this chivalric group (Bayram 1987; recently, Selçuk 2017, pp. 96–97; Goshgarian 2017, pp. 118, 120).[12] Aşıkpaşazade also records that Hacı Bektaş revealed his miraculous powers and

hidden knowledge to Hatun Ana, that she was his designated spiritual successor, and that she built a shrine (*türbe*) over his tomb (Zarcone 2010, p. 113).

Kadıncık Ana and Hatun Ana are in all probability the same person: the venerated Bektaşi woman who was given the surname "mother of holy men [dervishes]" (*erenlerin anası/annesi*) because of the key role she played in the history of the order (Vilayetname 1995, pp. 26–28, 64–65; Zarcone 2010, pp. 113–14; Mélikoff 2002, p. 4; Birge 1937, p. 46). According to Aşıkpaşazade, she was the saint's adoptive daughter, whereas according to the *Vilayetname,* she was his spiritual wife. Irène Mélikoff (1917–2009), the Russian-born French Turkologist with Azerbaijani ancestry, a friend and advisor to Güllizar Cengiz (Figure 1), argues that Hacı Bektaş passed his spiritual powers onto Kadıncık Ana, and Kadıncık Ana transmitted the knowledge she received from Hacı Bektaş to her disciple Abdal Musa, with whose help she founded the Bektaşi community (Arca 2011; Mélikoff 2002, p. 6). On this interpretation, at the very summit of the nascent Bektaşi community there was a woman.

Figure 1. Güllizar Cengiz and Irène Mélikoff in Cologne, western Germany. © Private archive Güllizar Cengiz.

Yet, even today, Mélikoff's voice is one of the few that emphasizes the centrality of Kadıncık Ana in the early Bektaşiyye. Most believe that Bektaşi spiritual leadership is a male prerogative and attribute this outlook to her disciple Abdal Musa. It is likewise telling that premodern male Sufis used to refer to exemplary Sufi women as (honorary) "men" (Shaikh 2009, p. 17; 2023, p. 224; cf. Xavier 2023, pp. 164–65; Hoffman-Ladd 1992, p. 83; Sharify-Funk et al. 2018, pp. 185–212). A notable example is provided by the great twelfth-century mystic Feriduddin Attar (d. 1221), who praised the archetypal woman Sufi Rabia el-Adeviyya (d. 801 in Basra, Iraq) as a "man", who lived a legendary life as a celibate among the male Sufis (Lawrence 1994, p. 156; Flemming 2018, p. 387; cf. Kugle 2007, p. 113; cf. Cornell 2019). "Maleness" on the spiritual path is typically associated with an active engagement in service to the world, while spiritual growth also requires a receptive "feminine" approach to the divine. Even though the cultivation of such "feminine" principles is crucial for the spiritual path, accomplished Sufis, both male and female, were nevertheless described in terms of "manliness", a spiritual state also emphasized by *fütüvvet* writings that focused on spiritual chivalry (Shaikh 2012, p. 13).

In his spiritual teachings, Attar further explains, "[I]t is not the outward form that counts, but the intention of the heart . . . . When a woman becomes a *man* in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman. . . . [T]he first *man* to enter paradise will be Mary, the mother of Jesus" (Attar 1966, p. 40, emphasis added; Shaikh

2023, p. 224; Hoffman-Ladd 1992, p. 83; Chodkiewicz 1994; Chodkiewicz 1995, p. 107; Elias 1988, p. 211). This reflects the contemporary idea that a "good and pious woman" could, through asceticism and the active "self-effacement" of her female nature, overcome the physical body in general and sexuality in particular and become "like a man", transcending what was seen by the normative social ideology of the time as the inherent weakness of femininity (Flemming 2018, p. 387; cf. Elias 1988, p. 211), a process Arezou Azad has called "reverse genderization" (Azad 2013, p. 81).

As Özgen Felek notes, the *Vilayetname* of Hacı Bektaş similarly uses the Turkish words *er* and *eren* (plural) for saint(s). While originally denoting a human (whether male or female), over time *er* came to be used for "man" and "male warrior", and from the thirteenth century, it was applied to male saints (Felek 2021, p. 172). Even though the term was also used for female saints, throughout the *Vilayetname* sainthood is predominantly associated with manliness. Thus, while *eren* is the common term for both male and female saints, the language of the *Vilayetname* is articulated through gendered language embedded in hierarchical binaries that valorize masculinity (Felek 2021, p. 172; Shaikh 2023, p. 224).

However, the Babagan Bektaşi *dedebaba* Bedri Noyan (d. 1997) emphasizes that in the context of Bektaşi practices, rituals, and discourses, the term *er* does not serve as a gender indicator, but primarily as an implication of "the distance traveled in the faith that makes a spiritually perfected man or woman an *er* . . . a person who has attained the knowledge of *Hakk*" (Bahadir 2021; Noyan 1987, pp. 105–26). To express this state, Bektaşis continue to use such paradoxical gendered language when speaking respectfully of an accomplished female savant, "There is an *er* person in her Bacı pants" (Menemencioğlu Temren 1999).

It can thus be argued that Attar's quote reflects his belief in the equality of men and women in the path of God. In this context, the term "man" does not refer to gender but rather denotes a spiritual state of being. It suggests that on the spiritual path, outward appearances such as gender do not matter, and what counts is the sincerity of the "heart". This idea of a genderless spirituality is not unique to Attar, as many Sufi mystics believe in the transcendence of gender in the realm of spirituality. Similarly, while Attar's perspective highlights the importance of recognizing the spiritual potential and achievements of both men and women and the breaking down of gender-based barriers to spiritual attainment, his reference to Mary being the first *man* to enter paradise sacralizes the mother of Jesus and "disembodies" her at the same time (parallels for which can be found in the Christian tradition, see Möbius 1996, pp. 21–38). Yet, it also suggests that Mary, as a woman, was able to attain a high level of spiritual realization and was rewarded with the highest level of spiritual attainment, entry into paradise. This reinforces the idea that spiritual realization transcends gender binaries and that women have the same spiritual potential as men. As such, it is a powerful statement that challenges patriarchal norms and stereotypes and reinforces the words of Bedri Noyan Dedebaba, who emphasizes the importance of spiritual realization above all else.

This potential is evidenced by the ability of women known as *ana*s and *bacı*s to occupy saintly and leadership positions in Anatolia during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries (Arca 2011). Yet, this does not seem to have been maintained beyond the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, when increasing state control in the Ottoman empire left little room for the less regimented, almost anarchic male and female dervish communities, such as the Abdals and the Bacıyan-ı Rum (Karakaya-Stump 2011, pp. 1–24; Mélikoff 2002, pp. 33–34). Gradually, most of these antinomian movements ended up taking refuge in the Bektaşiyye and were submerged within it. The ongoing presence of women in the order was a major cause for censure among certain mystics and religious scholars. The Turkish mystic Lami'i, a Sufi *şeyh* (Arabic *shaykh*) under Selim I (r. 1512–1520), for example, criticized the Bektaşis because they "have thrown off the yoke of Islamic law from their necks and were grazing in the meadow of lawlessness" (Flemming 2018, p. 408). The presence of women became increasingly undesirable in this environment, in the Bektaşi as well in other institutionalized dervish orders. Nevertheless, female membership in the Bektaşiyye has continued to the present day.[13]

3. The Spiritual Path of a Contemporary Female Bektaşi Dervish

This part focuses on Güllizar Cengiz's spiritual path by charting her rise in the spiritual hierarchy of the Bektaşi Sufi order. It concentrates first on the time before and second on the time after she chose the Bektaşi path. After choosing this path, she first became an *aşık* or sympathizer of the order. Then, she was initiated into Bektaşism as a *muhib* (literally "intimate friend", one who has taken the vow and entered the Bektaşi order), following which she was also known as Neriman Aşki Bacı. Subsequent to her attainment of dervishhood, she became known as Neriman Aşki Derviş.

After becoming a Bektaşi, Neriman Aşki Bacı opened a Bektaşi Sufi lodge (*dergah*) in the Westerwald near Bonn. During their visit to the *dergah* on the occasion of Güllizar Cengiz achieving dervishhood in 2009, Haydar Ercan Dedebaba (b. 1936) and the other *baba*s made the important decision to rename the *dergah*, formerly known as "Sarı Saltuk Dergah", as "Kadıncık Ana Dergah" (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 23 March 2019).

3.1. Dervish Karabulut, Güllizar Cengiz's First Spiritual Guide

Güllizar Cengiz was born in 1957 into a "layman" Alevi family in Kangal near Sivas in central Anatolia. Cengiz was greatly influenced by her father, Dervish Karabulut (1924–1976), who, even though he was not born into one of the Alevi spiritual lineages (*ocak*),[14] was accepted by the people as a "real" dervish because of his extraordinary abilities. From an early age, Cengiz accompanied her father when he led communal Sufi gatherings and rituals (*muhabbet*s) attended by Alevis, Bektaşis, and other non-affiliated dervishes. The *muhabbet*s also served to instruct and guide those present, with central texts being recited and interpreted and poetry sung to musical accompaniment to impart knowledge. She also joined her father's nocturnal spiritual conversations (*sohbet*s, which are closely related to *muhabbet*s). By listening to the *sohbet*s of the elders, her introduction to religious knowledge came at an early age. This was highly unusual, as normally she would not have been allowed access to ritual events until after her initiation and the completion of the central socio-religious institution of *musahiplik* (see Mélikoff 1995, pp. 75–84; Kehl-Bodrogi 1997, pp. 119–37); a ritualized lifelong relationship in which two married couples take their initiation vows together and have a special bond as brothers and sisters in both the Alevi community[15] and in the Bektaşi order. Since she exhibited qualities considered suitable for the Sufi path, she also accompanied her father to gatherings outside the parental home. During these meetings, the collective prayer (*ayin-ı cem*, literally "rite of gathering", also known as '*ayn-ı cem*, "essence of union"; cf. Karolewski 2005, pp. 109–31) took place. As it was held in the evening/night, it was a rare opportunity for a young girl at that time. She recalls that the inner circle that remained late into the night spoke from the heart to cultivate their spiritual development (*irşad muhabbet*). Some of those present were in a *hal ehli* state (a state of ecstasy in which they have the power to make "the absent saints" appear to them, also known as *irşad makamı*, or "station of guidance")—that is, they became conscious of divine manifestations within themselves, a state usually achieved only after a long period of service to the community. They are referred to as "people of spiritual realization" (Birge 1937, p. 260) (Neriman Aşki Derviş, telephone interview with the author on 19 May 2020).

It is said that, once seekers reach the spiritual state of *irşad makamı* (which conceptualizes a universal, genderless, ethical self), they will be thought to have cultivated the qualities of the "spiritually perfected human being" (*insan-ı kamil*) (Shaikh 2022, pp. 480–88; 2009, p. 36), seen as the pinnacle of spiritual development in Bektaşism. In this state of being, the seekers integrate divine qualities that are associated with gender. These may be considered "feminine" as well as "masculine" in equal measure, such as the immanent or *cemal* ("beauty") qualities, the manifestation of divine grace and mercy, as well as the transcendent or *celal* ("majesty") qualities, the manifesting of divine power. They attain a high degree of spiritual development involving complete detachment from the material

world, together with a profound understanding of the nature of the self and the ability to see the divine in everything.

At the darkest time of night at about 4 a.m., they prayed to *Rahman*, the Merciful, as well as to the *gayb erenler* (literally "absent saints", known as "those who attain", also referred to as *abdal*s), who are seen as sources of wisdom and inspiration in reference to the unnamed *gayb erenler*, who by means of their powerful influence participate in the preservation of the order of the universe (*kainat*) (see Moosa 1988, pp. 110–19). Cengiz recalls that, during an *ayin-ı cem* gathering (generally referred to simply as *cem*), some people asked for a sign or divine proof that there was a saint among them who is touched by divine grace—that is, a "friend of God" (*veli*) who could perform a miracle (*keramet*) as proof of his spiritual progress and closeness to God. It is believed that, through their spiritual practices and devotion to God, Sufis can achieve a state of proximity to the divine that enables them to perform *keramet*.

So, the presiding *dede* (literally "grandfather", the leader of the social and ritual community) asked the charismatic Dervish Karabulut to perform a *keramet* (Gril 1995, pp. 69–81). Cengiz's father asked for a *saj*, the flat iron pan on which flat bread is made. He asked for it to be made red-hot and brought to the center of the room. He then whirled around the red-hot pan three times in a *semah* (literally "listening", a ritual dance),[16] resulting in a trance (*vecd*), before stepping onto the pan with both feet.[17] The experience of such "sacred pain"—his ability to undergo intense physical torment without feeling pain or suffering physical injury—demonstrated Dervish Karabulut's spiritual strength and miraculous power. Feats such these were also seen by some as a form of spiritual testing or purification that brought one closer to God.

In many ways, then, Cengiz's father can be seen as her first spiritual guide (*mürşid*). When one of her sisters died at the age of 17, her father fell very ill. He died at the age of 52. Yet, even after his death, her father continued to transmit to her his own mystical experiences through dreams and visions. Cengiz continued to communicate with him in this way, seeking his spiritual guidance. Whenever she had inner difficulties, she sought her father's guidance for her spiritual practice and development through these visions.

3.2. Migration to Germany

After Cengiz married on 4 July 1978, at the age of 21, two years after her father's death, and moved to Germany, she lost this intimate connection to her father and "met" him only at important transitions in her life. After she gave birth to her first child, a daughter, she did not have a dream vision of her father. However, after the birth of her second child, a son, she did have a such a vision. In this dream, her father gave her the customary gift of a purse (*kese*), a traditional symbol of wealth and abundance, with a piece of gold inside representing the prosperity and good fortune he wished for his daughter and her new baby. While patrilineal thought and "traditional" gender roles may have influenced Cengiz's dream, it is questionable whether these determined the content of the dream itself, which was likely shaped by a range of factors including her personal experiences and emotional states.

A few months after her arrival in Germany, Cengiz started working with the Alevi community in Germany. Soon she was on the board of the Alevi Association in Cologne, at a time when women mainly had subordinate roles. In her early years, she was supported by Mahmut Gülcicek from Cologne and Haydar Kök from Ankara, both of whom were well-connected in the transnational Alevi networks (Keleş 2021, p. 39).

Migration and exposure to a foreign country may have positively affected her understanding of gender roles, for Cengiz's husband helped out by taking care of their three children, a support that was unusual at the time. He also gave her moral and financial support by letting her use a substantial portion of their finances to provide services to the Alevi community at large. This philanthropy was considered a form of spiritual practice, thought to bring blessings and spiritual benefits to the donor. In doing so, Cengiz sought to follow the example of Kadıncık Ana. According to the *Vilayetname*, she was a wealthy

woman owing to a bequest from her father. But she exhausted her wealth by helping the dervishes and soon had only a single shirt to her name. One day, Hacı Bektaş asked her to receive a group of Kalender dervishes from Khorasan. With nothing left, Kadıncık gave away her last shirt to prepare food for them, taking refuge in the bread oven (*tandır*) to hide her nakedness. Through a miracle of Hacı Bektaş, she received a bundle of clothes, so that she could come out to greet her visitors (Mélikoff 2002, p. 5; Menemencioğlu Temren 2010).

Cengiz's work for the Alevi Federation was accelerated in response to the Sivas massacre of 2 July 1993, in which 33 festival-goers (including Alevi intellectuals, poets, artists, children and youths in a *semah* troupe, two of the hotel employees, and two people from outside the hotel who were apparently part of the attacking mob) were killed and over 30 people were injured. They had gathered in a hotel for an annual cultural festival celebrating the life of the 16th-century Kızılbaş poet, Pir Sultan Abdal, in the city of Sivas in central Turkey, when a mob of ultranationalist Islamist extremists set fire to the building. The horrific massacre, universally condemned as a hate crime, targeted the Alevi community, a minority religious group in Turkey that has historically faced discrimination and violence. The attack was also seen as a turning point in Alevi political activism, with the Alevi community becoming more vocal in demanding their rights and representation in society. While developing her and her husband's construction company, Cengiz became the second chairperson of the steadily growing European Alevi Federation Germany, which was set up between 1993 and 1996. Through her professional efforts, she was able to continue to provide significant financial support for the Federation's endeavors.

3.3. Güllizar Cengiz's Advisors, Teachers, and Her Second Spiritual Guide

Early on, Cengiz met Mélikoff, herself a member of the Bektaşi order (Arca 2011), who became an important advisor and helped her build up an archive on Alevi-Bektaşi culture (see Figure 1). Through the Alevi intellectual Cemal Şener, she met the eminent Bektaşi *baba* Teoman Güre Halifebaba (d. 2009), also known as İlhami Baba, in the winter of 1994.[18] Deeply impressed by İlhami Baba's charisma and what she saw as his modern approach to Bektaşism, as well as the competence of his *muhib*s, Cengiz entered the Bektaşi path by becoming an *aşık*; a sympathizer of the order who is bound by loyalty but cannot participate in Bektaşi ritual ceremonies. It is the lowest position in the religious hierarchy of Babagan Bektaşism prior to formally entering the order.[19] In doing so, she agreed to follow İlhami Baba's guidance. Following his instruction—"you can't carry two watermelons under one arm"—she left the Alevi Federation to devote herself fully to her Bektaşi discipleship (Neriman Aşki Derviş, telephone interview with the author on 19 May 2020). She had committed herself to becoming fully initiated into this order.

3.4. Initiation into the Bektaşi Order as Neriman Aşki Bacı

Two and a half years after she was accepted as an *aşık* by İlhami Baba, her (second) *mürşid*, she underwent the initiation ritual (*nasip töreni*) on 15 February 1996. During the ceremony, Cengiz was given a new name by her *mürşid*, the "name of the path" (*yol ismi*) "Neriman Aşki Bacı". This symbolized the death of her old life and her symbolic rebirth as a member of the Bektaşi community. The idea of being "reborn" through the *nasip* articulates the spiritual transformation of the initiand, who emerges from the ceremony as a "new person" with a deeper understanding and connection to the divine. This rebirth involves entry into a spiritual (and thus genderless) state of being, and the corresponding death of one's former spiritual state. This process of dying before death is based on a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammed: "Die [to this world] before you die!" (Arabic *mutu qabla an tamutu*). This farewell to one's former life implies not only submission to God, but also surrender of body and soul to the *mürşid*, symbolically becoming a corpse in the hands of the undertaker. In this way, the *can* ("inspired soul"), after undergoing the *nasip*, is reborn from the hands of a *pir*, or *dede* (spiritual master). After the ritual, the initiands are referred to as *canlar*. No difference is made between the sexes.[20] In this way, Bektaşis implement a concept of "religious anthropology" as (to use the words of Sa'diyya

Shaikh) "a term that addresses questions of what it means to be a human being from a religious perspective" (Shaikh 2015, p. 106). Shaikh asserts that Islamic androcentric and patriarchal constructions of what it means to be human can be deconstructed by embarking on a spiritual path grounded in Sufi conceptions of self and personhood.

Being initiated is called *nasip almak*, "taking one's share" or "portion", which refers to the idea that each person has a spiritual share or portion that they can receive through initiation into the Bektaşi order. With this, Cengiz, now Neriman Aşki Bacı, was accepted into the Bektaşi order as a *muhib* (literally "lover") and received a ritual headdress, a green scarf symbolizing the color of the sky, reserved for female initiates,[21] a twelve-sided *teslim taşı* ("stone of surrender") to be worn around the neck symbolizing devotion to Allah, and a *tığbend*, a finger-thick cord woven from twelve strands of wool from the sheep sacrificed during the initiate's initiation ceremony (Menemencioğlu Temren 2010). With the introduction into the Bektaşi tradition of initiatory teaching, Neriman Aşki Bacı was allowed to participate in Bektaşi ritual ceremonies. The initiation ceremony included the Bektaşi ritual practice of the *ayin-ı cem* ("rite of union"), also called *ayin-ı ikrar* (or *ikrar erkanı*, "rite of affirmation"), which began at twilight. This involved the ritual lighting of candles and contained a reenactment of the time when Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, transmitted the secrets of the Qur'an to his companions (*kırklar*, held to be the spiritual directors of the world), which is why he is known as the "speaking Qur'an" (*Kuran-ı natık*). At the end of his nocturnal ascent to heaven (*miraç*), Muhammad encountered Ali's assembly with the other eleven imams and a number of mostly unnamed prophets and saints, consisting of women and men (the assembly or "banquet" of the Forty [*Kırklar meclisi*]; Schubel 2010, pp. 330–43; Mélikoff 1975, p. 64; Kehl-Bodrogi 1988, pp. 123–25; De Jong 1989, p. 8; Birge 1937, pp. 137–38). He gained access to the spiritual feast only by announcing himself as a *fakir* ("poor") in the manner of a Sufi aspirant, denoting a state of spiritual poverty bereft of God's grace. In the *Kırklar meclisi*, it is said that "everything comes out of secrecy and becomes real". No distinction is made, all participants, including the Prophet Muhammad, are considered equal—they are all brothers and sisters. Of the Forty, twenty-three are men and seventeen are women, including Fatıma, Muhammad's daughter and Ali's wife, who is referred to as Fatma Ana (Bahadir 2021; Yörükân and Yörükân 1998, p. 119). The meeting was held in no other place than the house of Fatıma, who is revered by the Bektaşis (and the Alevis) as divine perfection and is considered the repository of the esoteric reading of the Qur'an transmitted by her father.

As Thierry Zarcone has pointed out, Kadıncık Ana was early associated with, or even identified as, Fatıma (Zarcone 2010, p. 115; cf. Hendrich 2013, pp. 308–9). In the *Vilayetname*, Kadıncık Ana is also known as Kutlu Melek, although in later traditions her name was merged with the names Fat[ı]ma Ana or Fat[ı]ma Bacı. In this way, Kadıncık Ana, the spiritual wife of the eponymous founder of the Bektaşi order, acquired the qualities of the daughter of the Prophet. Two traditions (Arabic *hadith*) attributed to Muhammad are often referred to in order to convey the exceptional spiritual function that his daughter fulfils: "He who knows Fatıma knows himself" and "He who knows himself knows God" (Elias 1988, p. 218). Kadıncık Ana thereby also acquired the qualities of the wife of Ali, the most important saint of Bektaşism.

Shortly after the *nasip*, Neriman Aşki Bacı had another dream vision in which she encountered her father, her first *mürşid*, which she took as a sign that he supported her decision to follow the Bektaşi path (Neriman Aşki Derviş, telephone interview with the author on 19 May 2020). The details of this and other dreams cannot be revealed because Neriman Aşki Bacı, like all initiates, is only allowed to share the experiences of her spiritual path as well as her innermost thoughts and feelings with her *mürşid*. She thereby follows the principle of "preferring to die than to reveal the secret" (*ser verip sır vermemek*), considered a central commandment. The practice of keeping things hidden also reflects the Bektaşi belief that spiritual knowledge cannot be easily communicated or understood. As a result, many things remain concealed from those who have not been initiated or who are not part of the Bektaşi community.

Neriman Aşki Bacı's Poetry

Conversely, Bektaşi poetry, a literary genre known as *nefes* (literally "breath [of the spirit]"), is regarded as a powerful tool for conveying messages to society. Typically composed in a highly symbolic and metaphorical language, the poems describe the spiritual journey of the poet and can serve as inspiration for others on the spiritual path. Because the poems were frequently recited in ritual contexts and passed down orally, female Bektaşi poets are not as well-known, as their poems have not been recorded as extensively as those of their male counterparts. Nevertheless, female Bektaşi poets played a significant role in this Bektaşi tradition, and their poetry forms an important strand of the rich Bektaşi literary tradition (Zarcone 2010). Since there are few written sources in Bektaşism, Mélikoff emphasizes how valuable these poetries are: "*Nefes* are extremely rich and informative sources. You can learn everything from *nefes*". In fact, it is often said that in *nefes* "accomplished mystics" (*eren*) solve problems through divine wisdom (*hikmetler*). Following this time-honored tradition, Neriman Aşki Bacı describes the beginning of her spiritual journey in the following *nefes* (Neriman Aşki Derviş, email to author on 16 February 2022):

Ben gönlümü bir sevdaya kaptırdım
İkrar-ı bend oldum bir pire bağlandım
Üryan püryan oldum girdim irfana
İkilikten geçtim birliğe bağlandım

Bir kaşı kemana açtım razımı
Dostun cemaline döndüm yüzümü
Bir ulu bazara koydum özümü
Ene'l-Hakk Mansur'u dara bağlandım

Dostun cemaline döndüm yüzümü
Darda gözüm açtım pirimi gördüm
Meyl-ı muhabbette irfana erdim
Erenler Şahına gönlümü verdim

Beni benden alan ere bağlandım
Seyit Nesimi'nin talibi oldum
Dolular taşırdı boşlara doldum
Erenler bağında Neriman oldum
Yandım alev alev kora bağlandım.

I've lost my heart to a love,

I have made a vow and tied myself to a *pir* [*mürşid*],

I have become stark naked and entered wisdom,

I passed through duality and connected to unity.

I opened my secret to the one whose eyebrow is [as beautiful] as a bow,

I turned my face to my friend's beauty,

I put my self [*can*] in a great bazar,

I am tightly bound to Mansur's *Ene'l-Hakk* ["I am the Truth/Allah"].

I turned my face to my friend's beauty,

I tied myself to the gallows (*dar*) [that Hallac-ı Mansur was hanged on] and saw my *pir*,

I have attained wisdom in love,

I gave my heart to the Shah of the *erenler* [Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli].

I am tied to the father who took me from me,

> I have become the seeker of Seyyid Nesimi,
>
> I was filled to overflowing and filled to emptiness,
>
> I became Neriman in the vineyard of the *erenler*,
>
> I was burned in flames, I am bound to the embers.
>
> (Translation by the author with adaptions by Neriman Aşki Derviş)

Among the rich symbolism that Neriman Aşki Bacı evokes in her *nefes* is her "initiatory death", the consensual submission of her self (*can*) to the path, metaphorically implied by her remark that she has become "stark naked". The symbolic value of this nudity is also tied to the desexualization of the human body. This is followed by her symbolic rebirth, often described as a "second birth", which was accomplished by the hands of her *mürşid* and to which she refers by saying that she has "entered wisdom", an ultimately genderless state (cf. Zarcone 2016, pp. 781–98). Symbolic rebirth is also implicit when she speaks of the tenth-century mystic Hallac-ı Mansur (Mansur al-Hallaj), who first spoke the Arabic words *Ana al-haqq* (Turkish *Ene'l-Hakk*) and was martyred in Baghdad in 922, in part for uttering them. By mentioning him, Neriman Aşki Bacı alludes to a specific place in the *meydan*, the ceremonial space where the initiatory *cem* ritual takes place, marked by a sheepskin (*post*), known as *dar-ı Mansur* ("gallows of Mansur"), where the initiate is symbolically executed.

Neriman Aşki Bacı probably stood at this spot in the center of the *meydan* during her initiation, facing İlhami Baba, who performed the ritual. She would have crossed one or two arms over her chest, her hands pointing toward her shoulders, her right big toe placed on her left (to "seal" her feet), and her head slightly inclined, in the Bektaşi position of humility and respect, a ritual posture also performed in some other Sufi orders. At the same time, this scene represents the climax of the Bektaşi ceremony, alluding to Mansur's execution and Neriman Aşki Bacı's willingness to make sacrifices on the path to Allah/the Truth (*Hakk yolu*), as well as her symbolic death and rebirth, in accordance with the aforementioned saying attributed to the Prophet—"Die before you die". This central moment of the rite of passage is also evoked by the Bektaşi poetess Remzi Bacı (1883–?), who similarly refers to the voluntary sacrifice of her own person: "The secret of 'dying before [dying]' was revealed to me . . . The night I was taken to the gallows (*dar*) of [Hallac-ı] Mansur . . . At that moment, my master took my hand and girded my loins with the sword belt" (translation adapted from Özmen 1995, p. 147; cited after Zarcone 2010, p. 106, 57). In this context, Remzi Bacı also describes how, as a new initiate, she was girded with a special woolen belt known as the "sword belt" (*tığbend*).

Neriman Aşki Bacı next refers to another emblematic figure of voluntary death in the Bektaşi ritual, Seyyid Nesimi (d. ca. 1404–5), who was flayed alive for his ideas and whom she "sought out" from then on, she tells us. In Nurdan Arca's 2011 documentary *Canlar* on Bektaşi and Alevi rituals (Arca 2011), this part of the ritual is explained as follows: "The sheepskin spread in the *meydan* represents our skin. This is how we give up our existence, just as Nesimi was skinned. Thus we are skinned, we are ready to be judged, we place ourselves in the hands of the mystics, bound hand and foot (in the manner of a *kurban* [the propitiatory animal sacrifice, usually a sheep])". The *Evrad-ı Abdalan*, accessed by Menemencioğlu Temren in Bedri Noyan Dedebaba's library, provides further insights into the symbolism of the above-mentioned *teslim taşı* ("stone of surrender"):

> Its string is made from the leather of the sacrificial lamb of Ismail. It refers to the skin of Nesimi Sultan. The strap is the gallows rope of Mansur. The upper half [of the stone] symbolizes Hz. Hasan, the lower half symbolizes our Lord Hz. İmam Hüseyin-ı Karbala, and the twelve indentations (in the shape of a crescent moon) represent the twelve Imams. The outer side points to Hatice-tül-Kübra, and the inner side to Fatıma-tüz-Zehra. (Menemencioğlu Temren 2010)

By symbolizing two male (Hasan and Hüseyin, the sons of Ali and Fatıma) and two female saints (Hatice [Arabic Khadija], the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, and Fatıma), the central emblem of Bektaşism, the *teslim taşı* itself thus reflects the aforementioned Bektaşi principle of gender equality. Neriman Aşki Bacı ends her *nefes* by saying that she

has been "burned", a sensation that the poet Sıtkı Baba (1865–1928) also associates with this rite: "Initiation is difficult. It is like wearing shirts of fire, eating nuts of iron", and he calls on the initiates: "Submit yourselves to the holy ones". At the same time, Neriman Aşki Bacı concludes that she was burned by ardent love (*aşk*), a feeling that did not cease from then on because she is "bound to the burning embers".

3.5. Neriman Aşki Bacı as Muhib

In 1997, Neriman Aşki Bacı founded the Alevi-Bektashi Cultural Institute in Cologne to research and promote awareness of Alevi-Bektaşi teaching in the broader context of the transnational Bektaşi and Alevi circuits.[22] She was advised by Mélikoff (see Figure 1) and the anthropologist and initiated member of the Bektaşiyye Belkıs Menemencioğlu Temren, both of whom emphasized the importance of a scholarly approach, and the archiving of source materials of the Bektaşi and Alevi literary and musical tradition. They organized conferences in cooperation with the University of Bonn and the University of Cologne, published scholarly articles in the *Journal of Alevi-Bektashi Studies* since 2009,[23] and produced teaching material such as the recent short animated film "Hünkâr ["Sovereign"] Bektaş" (The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture 2021).

Over the next two years (2007 and 2008), Neriman Aşki Bacı regularly visited İlhami Baba's Gaziler Dergah in Ankara, strengthening the transnational bonds between *mürşid* and *mürid* (novice). She says that each time she "went there with empty arms and came back richly endowed". İlhami Baba invited her to the ritual gathering called *sofra* (the cloth spread in the *meydan*), a ritual "meal", which is open to non-initiates, the set table whose food, drink, and music are imbued with symbolism (Soileau 2012, pp. 1–30). As noted earlier, women participate fully with men in this and other rituals. During the *sofra*, wine or spirits are served—the Bektaşis (and Alevis) being perhaps the only Islamic group that condones and sanctifies the consumption of alcohol (Elias 2020, pp. 33–44). Neriman Aşki Bacı considered it a great honor and privilege to attend the *sofra*, as it was an opportunity to receive guidance and inspiration from her *mürşid*.

She also received guidance from Belkıs Menemencioğlu Temren and her husband, Adni Halifebaba (Mehmet Temren, see Figure 5). They were closely connected with İlhami Baba's *mürşid*, the well-known Turgut Koca Halifebaba (d. 1997), one of the leading Bektaşi *baba*s of the second half of the twentieth century, and his equally renowned wife Adviye Ana Bacı (d. 1996) (Koca 2003, pp. 280–84), whom Neriman Aşki Bacı met twice. She was especially impressed by the exceptionally harmonious relationship between these *baba*s and their wives. It is interesting to note that, when the Bektaşi order unofficially resumed its activities in Turkey in 1960, some of the leading *baba*s representing the Bektaşi hierarchy in Turkey, Bedri Noyan Dedebaba and Turgut Koca Halifebaba, as well as the present *dedebaba* Haydar Ercan[24], were all married *baba*s, despite being representatives of the celibate line of the Bektaşi order (cf. Küçük 2002, pp. 24–25; Yaman and Erdemir 2006, p. 26). Was this possible because of the Bektaşi principle of "moving with the times and staying one step ahead of the times"?

3.6. The Opening of the Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Western Germany

In 2006, Neriman Aşki Bacı purchased a former guesthouse in Hausen on a hill in the Westerwald near Bonn and converted it "in accordance with the needs of a traditional Bektaşi *dergah*" (Figure 2) (Neriman Aşki Derviş, telephone interview with the author on 2 July 2020).[25] With this ritual transfer to the transnational community in western Germany, a (re)contextualization and adaptation to the local context, she created a sacred space where both the Babagan Bektaşis and the members of the Alevi community of the Turkish diaspora in Germany can gather for religious ceremonies and rituals, as well as for the study and practice of Bektaşi and Alevi teachings (Sökefeld 2005, pp. 203–26; also Gal 2003, pp. 93–120). The *dergah* thereby also serves as a place of refuge where people can seek spiritual guidance.

On the first floor of the main building is a *meydanevi* with a ceremonial room (*meydan odası*), the central place of the *dergah* where the Babagan Bektaşis perform their ritual ceremonies (Figure 3). The reception of the guests takes place on the ground floor of the main building, which consists of a reception room, a dining room, a library, a kitchen (*aşevi*), a pantry, and a laundry room. On the second and third floors are the guest (*mihman*) rooms. Across the courtyard from the main building, there is a small separate building, an Alevi *cemevi*, built in the traditional *cemevi* style (Figure 4). While the Bektaşi *meydanevi* is reserved for initiated Bektaşis only (their ritual activities taking place discreetly), the Alevi *cemevi* is open to all invited guests.

Figure 2. Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Hausen near Bonn. © Sara Kuehn, 2021.

Figure 3. Neriman Aşki Derviş, Haydar Soylu Baba, and Kutsi Halifebaba (from right to left) in the Babagan Bektaşi *meydan odası* at the Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Hausen. After the *nevruz* ritual, there was an exceptional opportunity to enter this sacred space for a brief moment and take a photo. © Sara Kuehn, 2019.

Figure 4. Alevi *cemevi* in the garden of the Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Hausen. © Sara Kuehn, 2019.

In 2007, Haydar Ercan Dedebaba, the spiritual leader of the Babagan Bektaşis, along with *halifebaba*s, *baba*s, dervishes, and *muhib*s (Bektaşis with different ranks within the order's hierarchy), and *dede*s from twelve Alevi *ocak*s attended the inauguration ceremony of the *dergah*. From then on, a *baba* came every month to perform a ritual ceremony in the *meydan* of the *dergah* (Figure 5). From 2007 to 2012, Ali Naki Baba (Faysal İlhan) (d. 2016) from Duisburg was the acting *baba* in the *dergah*, followed by Kutsi Halifebaba (Yücel Top) from Brussels from 2012 to 2016. Since 2016, Haydar Soylu Baba from Wuppertal has been the acting *baba* in the *dergah*.

Figure 5. Neriman Aşki Derviş and Adni Halifebaba in the *meydan odası* at the Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Hausen. © Private archive Güllizar Cengiz.

Neriman Aşki Bacı herself divides her time between living in the Kadıncık Ana Dergah in the Westerwald and working in Cologne. Neither her professional nor her family life appears to impede her progress on the mystical path. She continues to pour her heart and soul into all the activities at the *dergah*, which receives a steady stream of guests throughout the year, especially during Alevi-Bektaşi holidays, such as *muharrem*, *nevruz*, or *hidirellez*. These celebrations are attended by transnational Alevi and Bektaşi communities. Hospitality is also extended to individual guests as well as German and

Turkish delegations (for instance, from DİTİB, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs). Everyone, regardless of their background, is invited to come to the *dergah*.

The food brought into the *dergah* is blessed by Neriman Aşki Derviş or, if present, by a *baba* in the company of Bektaşi initiates and visitors, and then eaten by the participants at the end of the ritual (Figure 6). Assisted by both male and female *mürid*s, she oversees the preparation of the *lokma* food (literally "bites, morsels" served in a ritual context). During the *cem*, the latter is distributed by both men and women, which again points to an adaptation to new social realities in a transnational context. Traditionally, women only assist, and it is the men who take on the task of distributing the *lokma*s.

Field observations of the rituals at the Kadıncık Ana Dergah could only be conducted in the Alevi *cemevi* and not in the Bektaşi *meydanevi*, which is reserved for the initiated. There, unlike in a traditional setting where men are placed to the right and women to the left of the *cem* area (*meydan*)—symbolizing a hierarchy between the sexes (Arslan 2017, pp. 3–4, 94)—I did not observe a male-female division of space.[26] Gender segregation does not exist, and women and men participate together in ritual dances[27] (Figure 7). They are likewise both present in ritual ceremonies, such as in the *cem* when the twelve ritual services (*On İki Hizmet*) are performed, which structure both Bektaşi and Alevi assemblies. Both men and women carry out the ritual functions in the *On İki Hizmet* and other spiritual practices, although the majority of functions are still performed by men. Thus, even within the framework of the *cem*, traditional gender distinctions have not been completely eliminated. Moreover, while women can play an active role in the performance of the ritual ceremonies, it is still wholly exceptional for women to preside over the ritual.[28] The service of the *çirağcı* (candle keeper), by contrast, is usually reserved for women. This is related to the fact that Fatıma Ana is regarded as the head of the hearth (Bahadir 2021). It is also connected with the idea that Fatıma Ana (the namesake of Kadıncık Ana), whose epithet is "Resplendent" (Zehra), was present "at the origin of the transmission of the divine light" (Zarcone 2010, p. 119).

Figure 6. Haydar Soylu Baba blessing food with Neriman Aşki Derviş, Bektaşi initiates, and guests in the kitchen (*aşevi*) at the Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Hausen. © Sara Kuehn, 2019.

Figure 7. Neriman Aşki Derviş performing the dance of the crane bird (*turna*) at the Alevi *cemevi*, Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Hausen. © Sara Kuehn, 2019.

Despite this potential and the historical legacy of Kadıncık Ana and her peers, who served as female spiritual leaders that performed religious ceremonies and rituals and transmitted spiritual teachings, women did not have a place in the Bektaşi order in its institutionalized form. Women were and are mostly confined to the lower ranks of the order, as *aşık*s or *muhib*s. They are denied advancement within the order's hierarchy. Only male dervishes are deemed fit to guide disciples through another rite to receive *icazet* ("certification") to become a *baba*. Beyond this, there is also the rank of the *halifebaba* and, at the top of the hierarchy, the *dedebaba*.

3.7. Becoming Dervish as a Woman: Neriman Aşki Derviş

In 2008, after receiving the necessary instructions and making progress on the inner path, İlhami Baba said, "It is time for Neriman Aşki Bacı to wear the dervish *taç* [literally "crown"]". Neriman Aşki Derviş recalls that "he was so pleased to put the dervish *taç* onto a woman" (Neriman Aşki Derviş, telephone interview with the author on 2 July 2020). İlhami Baba prepared for her to take her next vow, during which she would be initiated as a dervish, often referred to as "taking the hand [of the baba]" ceremony, which took place both in Ankara and in Cologne. Her measurements were taken to tailor her ritual garments and entered into the book at the Gaziler Dergah in Ankara. İlhami Baba prepared the ritual garments that she would wear during the initiation rite. This included a tall conical felt *taç* symbolizing mystical realization (*marifet*)[29]—women receive a special *taç* similar in shape to an *elifi taç*[30]—and the *kisve* (or *kıyafet*, "clothing"). The *kisve* includes a white dress (*tennure*), representing a "garment of the hereafter", a waistcoat (*haydariye*), symbolizing the fight with the self or *nefs* (*cihad-ı ekber*, or the greater *cihad* [Arabic *jihad*], that is, the struggle against the lower self) through complete submission to God and purification of the heart, a cloak (*hırka*), a symbol of service, and various accoutrements (Menemencioğlu Temren 2010; cf. De Jong 1989, pp. 7–29).[31] The symbolism of the *haydariye* implicitly recognizes the equal autonomy, agency, value, and spiritual capacity of women and men, as the patriarchal nature of gender relations inherent in the Islamic interpretive tradition is seen as a manifestation of *nefs-i emmare* (the lower soul) (Shaikh 2009, pp. 14–16). These ritual regalia, especially the *tennure*, symbolize her detachment from worldly concerns and her spiritual rebirth as she enters upon the path of the cosmological triad "Allah (or *Hakk*), Muhammad, Ali". *Hakk* is the ultimate truth and the transcendent essence of the divine,

Muhammad is the spiritual guide and model for human conduct, and Ali is the gatekeeper of the divine mysteries and the guide to the path of truth.

In 2009, İlhami Baba started having heart problems. He nonetheless went to the German embassy in Ankara to apply for a visa. Before receiving it, however, he died. On that day, Neriman Aşki Bacı had the feeling of being with him, and kept calling him. When she went to İlhami Baba's funeral in Ankara, the other *baba*s bestowed upon her the *taç* and *kisve* in accordance with İlhami Baba's wish. Afterwards, Haydar Ercan Dedebaba, Kutsi Halifebaba and all the other *baba*s came to the *dergah* near Cologne, where the main ceremony was held, during which Neriman Aşki Bacı donned both *taç* and *kisve* (Figure 8). With the attainment of dervishhood, Neriman Aşki Bacı became known as Neriman Aşki Derviş.

Figure 8. Sebadin Jusufoska Halifebaba (North Macedonia), Haydar Soylu Baba (Wuppertal), Neriman Aşki Derviş, Haydar Ercan Dedebaba (Izmir), Kutsi Halifebaba (Brussels), Hüseyin Durak Baba (Istanbul), Isa Vatansever Baba (Istanbul), and Elif Adigüzel Bacı (Wuppertal) (from right to left) in the *meydan odası* at the Kadıncık Ana Dergah in Hausen. © Private archive Güllizar Cengiz.

During their visit, the *baba*s took the significant decision to rename the *dergah* "Kadıncık Ana" (formerly known as "Sarı Saltuk Dergah") (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 23 March 2019). Did the *baba*s make this decision to rename the *dergah* after the prototypical female role model of Bektaşism because the Bektaşis around Neriman Aşki Derviş named her Kadıncık Ana for her efforts and merits on the path? Or should it be seen as a recognition that Neriman Aşki Derviş has a certain family resemblance to her namesake Kadıncık Ana and will follow in her footsteps?

To date, seventeen *mürid*s have taken *nasip* at the Kadıncık Ana Dergah, with an almost equal proportion of women and men, most of whom have an Alevi background.[32] While the initiates contribute to the financial expenses for the services of the *dergah* in the Westerwald and the Alevi-Bektashi Cultural Institute in Cologne, these two institutions continue to be financed mainly by Neriman Aşki Derviş through her professional activities. Neither of these institutions receives any additional funding (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 23 March 2019). This is possible because—unlike the Albanian Bektaşis, for whom serving as a dervish or *baba* is the sole activity—Turkish Bektaşis maintain that everyone must have a profession in society in addition to serving as a dervish or *baba*.

Neriman Aşki Derviş herself acknowledges that her transnational position and the fact that she founded a *dergah* in Germany made it easier for her to be initiated as a dervish (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 16 February 2019). Had she continued to live in Turkey, this might have been more difficult. Be that as it may, the fact that Neriman Aşki Derviş, as a woman, was initiated as a Bektaşi dervish is a striking testimony to her exceptional abilities.

4. Women Dervishes

In the past, only a few women attained the rank of fully initiated Bektaşi dervishes. Only the names of a few female dervishes have survived, and little is known about their lives. Even less is known about women leading a Bektaşi lodge in modern times. The seventeenth-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi mentions a Bektaşi lodge established in Niš (in southern Serbia) in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, which was led by "a reputable woman" known as Zahide Bacı (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi n.d., pp. 126–27; Katić 2021, p. 90). The eighteenth-century women poets Gülsüm Bacı and Münire Bacı were both dervishes of Nuri Baba (d. 1801), the *tekke* incumbent (*postnişin*) of the Çamlıca Bektaşi Tekke in Istanbul (see also Keleş 2020, pp. 117–18, 129–30, respectively).[33] The names of several nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women dervishes were likewise noted down when their *nefes* were recorded.[34] Less direct evidence also points to the existence of female Bektaşi dervishes, such as the tombstone of Derviş Fatma Hanım (d. 1812), which is inscribed with a *nefes* surmounted by her *teslim taşı* and is crowned by her *taç* (Laqueur 1992, pp. 291–93, Figure 15.8). A certain Derviş Hanım in Thessaloniki is mentioned in a nineteenth-century travelogue (Buturovic 2005, p. 761). We know of an unnamed woman who replaced her deceased husband as *postnişin* of the "sisters of Rum" (Bacıyan-ı Rum) lodge in Kavala, Greece (Buturovic 2005, p. 761). Another woman Bektaşi dervish, known only as the mother of Ahmed Idris, was part of a small "independent" Bektaşi community in Sarajevo, Bosnia, several decades ago (Šamić 1995, pp. 381–91). In addition, Menemencioğlu Temren describes the institution of the Atasagun Bacılık, which was established as one of the important functions of Bektaşism. The Atasagun *bacı*s were a group of dervish *bacı*s who were well-versed in healing techniques and treated both male and female patients without discrimination. As a sign of their devotion to this path, they shaved their heads completely. Menemencioğlu Temren suggests that this institution can thus be seen as a survival of the healing role of women in ancient Turkish traditions (Menemencioğlu Temren 1999).[35]

In the context of Alevi belief and practice (Alevilik), some women have held significant religious leadership positions. Anşa (Ayşe) Bacı (1817–1890?), for example, is celebrated in the oral culture of the Babacı-Hubyar Alevis for her courageous resistance against the Ottoman administration, her leadership role in the community, and her miraculous work. After her husband Veli Baba's death in 1864, Anşa Bacı took over the leadership of this Alevi community and began to lead the *cem* ritual (Okan 2018, pp. 69–89).[36] She later became the subject of an official investigation by the Ottoman administration, which feared that she might incite an uprising, as she was said to have gathered more than thirty thousand Hubyar Alevis around her. In 1894, she was exiled to Damascus along with her children and son-in-law, where she spent three years before returning to her village of Acısu in Zile, Tokat. Upon her return, she remained the religious leader of her community in Acısu for the rest of her life, which became a place of pilgrimage after her death (Okan 2018, pp. 69–89). To this day, her followers are known as the Anşabacılıs ("followers of Sister Anşa"), which in a contemporary context, as Nimet Okan concludes, "refers to the equality of women and men, and even to women's privileged positions in society". Anşa Bacı, as a symbol of the equality between women and men, helps to reinforce the rhetoric of equality, and for the male members of the community, as Okan reports, being an Anşabacılı has indeed become a source of "pride" (Okan 2018, pp. 69–89).

Bridging the transcultural gap also requires cultivating relationships in the home milieu, which is why Neriman Aşki Derviş regularly visits Alevi and Bektaşi holy sites in Turkey, such as the annual August pilgrimage to the *dergah* in Hacıbektaş and the sacred site of Kadıncık Ana's disciple, Abdal Musa, in the Alevi village of Tekke Köyü in southwestern Turkey. She also visits the Balkans. During her visit to Albanian Bektaşi sites, she met with Edmond Brahimaj (b. 1959), popularly known as Baba Mondi, the current leader of the Albanian Bektaşi at the World Headquarters (*Kryegjyshata*) of the Albanian Bektaşis. Baba Mondi told her personally at their meeting on 7 September 2015—seven years after she had received the dervish *taç*—that he does not accept female dervishes in the (Albanian)

Bektaşi fold (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 23 March 2019).[37] This view was confirmed in the interviews I conducted with Baba Mondi in Tirana in 2012 and 2019, in which he similarly said that he does not envisage any female leadership roles within the (Albanian) Bektaşiyye. He said that this also applies to post-menopausal women. Even though they are often considered "no longer female" in the sense that they are no longer able to reproduce and thus transcend sexuality, for Baba Mondi their gender remains constant (Baba Mondi, interview with the author on 31 August 2019 at the Kryegjyshata, Tirana). Thus, in the Albanian Bektaşi order, women were and are to be found only in the lower ranks, as *aşık*s or *muhib*s.

Baba Mondi's perspective contrasts with that of Haydar Ercan, whom the Babagan Bektaşi consider to be the only elected Bektaşi *dedebaba*. When I interviewed him in Izmir, Turkey, on 14 December 2019 (Figure 9), I asked him if he could imagine a woman holding a hierarchical rank similar to that of a Bektaşi *baba* (I avoided using the term *ana* because it does not [currently] seem to denote the same hierarchical level as *baba*).[38] He responded:

> The sisters (*bacılar*) have very important services on the path of the Bektaşi Order. The best example of this is Kadıncık Ana and her services on the path. It seems unlikely that a *bacı* can become a *baba*, *halifebaba* or *dedebaba* in today's conditions. But only the elders who have completed the path know what will happen in the future. We see no obstacle for the female *muhib*s who are serving today to become dervishes. In our opinion, the highest position of service is that of dervish.

Haydar Ercan Dedebaba means by this that everyone who lives in a Bektaşi *dergah*, past and present, is a dervish. Duties such as Babalık, Halifebabalık, and Dedebabalık are also performed through the office of the dervish. The Dedebaba used a story which is said to have taken place at the time of Hacı Bektaş to support this claim. He said that Mevlana Rumi (d. 1273) wanted a *baba* from the Bektaşis to join his ranks—a *baba* like Şems-ı Tebrizi, who is said to have held the de facto position of "*baba*" in the nascent Mevlevi community. "If he had wished for a dervish instead of a *baba*", said Haydar Ercan Dedebaba, "I would have had to go to him myself". By this he is implying that, according to the Bektaşi teachings, the most advanced degree in terms of the spiritual path taken is that of a dervish, because this position requires constant service.

Figure 9. Neriman Aşki Derviş with Haydar Ercan Dedebaba and his wife, Gülümser Anabacı, Izmir, Turkey. © Sara Kuehn, 2019.

In the life of Neriman Aşki Derviş and her peers, everything is handled according to Bektaşi *edeb*, which refers to the prescribed rules of etiquette and the ethical behavior of the order. On many matters, she regularly consults Haydar Ercan Dedebaba by telephone.[39] Everything must be done with his permission, and many activities require his approval (for example, in order for me to interview Neriman Aşki Derviş for this article—which would inevitably make her better known internationally and would undoubtedly stimulate

discussion about the leadership role of women in the Bektaşiyye—she needed to receive the blessing of the Dedebaba).

It was with the permission of Haydar Ercan Dedebaba and other leading Bektaşi *baba*s that Neriman Aşki Derviş got divorced on 7 July 2020. While divorce is rare among Bektaşis and Alevis (Arslan 2017, p. 83), the parameters of the social institution of marriage are changing in their communities as well. When I asked her if it was alright for me to mention the fact of her divorce in the article, she emphatically said yes. Here is how she explains her decision:

> We are people of faith. We accept and think about everything that comes from God. The door to marriage is also a service. We do everything for our spouses, our children and to keep the family together. However, if one of the parties in the relationship does not behave according to the rules of the path, we inform our *mürşid* about the situation and do what is necessary. This case is the same. We live as we have to live. It is our duty to accept everything. (Neriman Aşki Derviş, email to the author on 16 February 2022)

On the day of her divorce, she had a dream vision in which she met her father-in-law, who died in 2005. She had a very close relationship with him—more like a daughter–father relationship. Despite the serious decision she had made, her father-in-law was very supportive and loving in this vision (Neriman Aşki Derviş, telephone interview with the author on 2 July 2020). Her family, including her children and her ex-husband's family, fully support her decision. During my visit in 2021, I met her (ex-)brother-in-law at the institute and at the *dergah*, who told me that he would continue to support her (Figure 10). The day after the divorce, Neriman Aşki Derviş immediately made a pilgrimage to the *dergah* in Hacıbektaş, where the Kadıncık Ana Evi ("Kadıncık Ana House") and her tomb (*türbe*) are also located.[40]

Figure 10. Neriman Aşki Derviş at the Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture in Cologne. © Sara Kuehn, 2021.

5. Concluding Remarks

In the early period of Bektaşism, there were instances where women held positions of authority and played pivotal roles in the nascent Sufi community. Kadıncık Ana was clearly a spiritual leader. Apart from her, no other woman seems ever to have become the spiritual leader of the Bektaşis, a hierarchical rank usually referred to as *baba*, or father, roughly equivalent to *ana*, or mother. However, the view that Kadıncık Ana held a rank equivalent to that of a *baba* is not widely accepted. Most sources assign Kadıncık Ana only the rank of a dervish. My own view is that her importance within the proto-Bektaşiyye cannot be translated into a "rank" of the later Bektaşi community. Perhaps her position was even more influential than that of a Bektaşi *baba*—but that is a conjecture that only future scholarship can verify or refute.

The deep affection for Kadıncık Ana continues to this day. She is venerated, praised, and celebrated in song by men and women Bektaşi poets. Adviye Ana Bacı, well-known for her *nefes*, refers to herself as a "slave" of Kadıncık Ana:

Gelincek baş açık Kadıncık ana

Adviye Bacı'yım mecburum sana

Birlikte batınan eyledik semah

Hünkar Hacı Bektaş Horasan eri.

When Kadıncık Ana comes with a bare head,

I am Adviye Bacı, I am bound to you,

We did *semah* together in secret,

Sovereign Hacı Bektaş, perfect man of Khurasan.

(Translation adapted from Zarcone 2010, pp. 70–1)

It is also important to remember that, as Neriman Aşki Derviş points out, women make up slightly less than half of the group of the Forty [saints] (*kırklar*) revered by the Bektaşis (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 23 March 2019). This implies that women can also ascend to the rank of *abdal* (or *er*, a rank of the *kırklar* referring to the "men of the invisible spiritual realm", Arabic *rijal al-ghayb*) (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 23 March 2019), as is also depicted in the cartoon (film) *Hünkâr Bektaş* (The Institute of Alevi-Bektashi Culture 2021). In this context, she also reminds us that according to tradition, Hacı Bektaş said:

Erkek dişi sorulmaz muhabbetin dilinde

Hakk'ın yarattığı her şey yerli yerinde

Bizim nazarımızda kadın–erkek farkı yok

Noksanlık eksiklik senin görüşlerinde.

In the language of divine love, there is no question of male or female,

Everything created by God is in its place,

There is no difference between men and women in our eyes,

The deficiency is in your views.[41]

(Neriman Aşki Derviş, email to the author on 16 February 2022)

With this, Hacı Bektaş implies a Sufi religious anthropology according to which both men and women possess the same spiritual potential to become the ultimately ungendered *insan-ı kamil*, or spiritually and ethically completed human being, to which all women and men should aspire. In this state of being, seekers have integrated all the divine qualities associated with gender (Shaikh 2022, pp. 480–88; 2009, p. 36). Hacı Bektaş thus demands that the inner spiritual state of a human being is the central criterion of his or her worth, irrespective of his or her gender or biological makeup (cf. Shaikh 2015, p. 185). In this way, he connects the metaphysical and ontological equality of the sexes with its natural and logical corollary, namely the notion that men and women have equal abilities, rights, and

obligations (cf. Shaikh 2009, p. 37). His teaching thus postulates a discernment of gender ethics that deals equally with gender hierarchies in the physical and metaphysical world. In spite of this pathbreaking teaching, the spiritual accomplishments of woman Bektaşis earned them only "honorary male" status, indicating (at least theoretical) gender fluidity. As this article has shown, Bektaşi thought nevertheless resists static notions of gender, allowing for ways of imagining humanity beyond binary formulations. At the same time, the desexualization of the body in Bektaşism did not lead to a fundamental abolition of social sex and gender, which was confirmed by field observations.

This has resulted in women occupying a marginal position compared to men, and their exclusion from certain opportunities and positions in religious practice and leadership (cf. Kafadar 1993; Havlioğlu 2017, p. 6). This imbalance was exacerbated with the institutionalization of Bektaşism, when women's opportunities to participate in Bektaşi leadership became increasingly limited and women were barred from advancing in the Bektaşi hierarchy beyond the rank of dervish, a position reiterated by Haydar Ercan Dedebaba in 2019 (see above).

In 2011, eight years before I asked Haydar Ercan Dedebaba a very similar question, Menemencioğlu Temren had published an interview with Bedri Noyan and Turgut Koca about the inclusion of women in leadership roles within the Bektaşiyye. She asked them how the understanding of the full and equal spiritual potential of human beings in the Bektaşi teachings can be reconciled with the perpetuation of the "gender distinction that is still maintained in positions such as Babalık, Halifebabalık, Dedebabalık?" It is noteworthy that she was told that this was due to the Bektaşi principle of "moving with the times and staying one step ahead of the times". Bedri Noyan and Turgut Koca further explained, "At the time of the institutionalization of Bektaşism, society lived in a patriarchal environment. Although women were crowned with the *taç* [initiated as dervishes] and were equal to men in internal ritual practices, as women, they could not appear in public, and these [leadership roles] continued to be performed by men". According to Menemencioğlu Temren, the conversation ended with the two Bektaşi spiritual leaders stating that "if society is willing, there is no obstacle [to women holding "*baba*" positions] and that these tasks could be taken on by women if necessary" (Menemencioğlu Temren 2010, pp. 129–40).

We have seen that this time-honored Bektaşi principle eventually allowed three leading *baba*s in Turkey—Bedri Noyan, Turgut Koca, and Haydar Ercan—to be married (*müteehhil*),[42] even though they represent the celibate line of the Bektaşi order. Following this principle, a contemporary understanding of gender is also urgently required in the Bektaşiyye today. In the wake of this, steps have been taken in the Alevi ritual context at the Kadıncık Ana Dergah to ensure that there is no separation of male and female spaces and that both men and women perform the ritual functions in the *On İki Hizmet* and other spiritual practices. However, most functions are still performed by men, and women are not allowed to preside over the *cem*. If the Bektaşis (and Alevis) do not want to remain a step *behind* the times, a change in mentality must ultimately take place, one that challenges gender essentialism and paves the way for a renegotiation of gender roles. Perhaps the fact that Haydar Ercan Dedebaba (together with other *baba*s) renamed the *dergah* "Kadıncık Ana" after Neriman Aşki Derviş was initiated into dervishhood, and that he supports the publication of this article on Neriman Aşki Derviş/Güllizar Cengiz, should be taken as an implicit and auspicious sign of such a change in outlook. This awareness is of great significance because, as Shaikh succinctly states, "[t]he realm of spirituality is in fact intimately linked to and must promote social and legal equality" (Shaikh 2023, p. 231). For it is only when the Bektaşis are committed to empowering women's leadership potential that Hacı Bektaş's vision of "there being no difference between men and women" can become a reality.

Notes

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all words in italics are Turkish terms.

[2] "Unlike sex", argues David Halperin, "sexuality is a cultural production" (Halperin 1989, p. 257) whereas "gender" is performative (Butler 1990, p. 185), referring to practice and social recognition (cf. Hendrich 2013, pp. 303–4). At the same time, Sara Haq Hussaini (2012) reflects on the conceptual pair of gender and sexuality as in-between states that transcend binaries.

[3] Videos of the 2020 conference presentations by Güllizar Cengiz, Fawzia Al-Rawi Al-Rifai, H. Nur Artiran, Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi, Cemâlnur Sargut, and Fariha Fatima al-Jerrahi at "Female Visions: The Religious Visual Culture of Contemporary Female Islamic Mysticism" (as part of Sara Kuehn's project "SufiVisual") can be found on the conference website. See Female Visions (2020).

[4] Following Ralph Grillo, in this article "transnationalism" refers to "social, cultural, economic and political relations which are between, above or beyond the nation-state, interconnecting, transcending, perhaps even superseding, what has been for the past two hundred years their primary locus. Specially, within anthropology, transnational used in a migration context refers to people, trans-national migrants ('transmigrants') who in the simplest formula 'live lives across borders'" (Grillo 2004, p. 864) (cf. Spivak 1996, pp. 245–69).

[5] The study is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2018 and 2021, in both the Cologne and Bonn regions and in Izmir, including interviews with Güllizar Cengiz, combined with an analysis of documentary sources.

[6] For helpful introductions to Bektaşism, see Kara (2019); Küçük (2002); Popovic and Veinstein (1995); Faroqhi (1981); Birge (1937).

[7] Useful contributions from the growing body of research in Alevi studies include Aksünger-Kizil and Kahraman (2018); Weineck and Zimmermann (2018); Issa (2017); Shankland (2003); Dressler (2002); Şahin (2001); Olsson et al. (1998); Vorhoff (1995); Kehl-Bodrogi (1988).

[8] Common English translations have been used for Sufi terms, such as "saint" (for *veli*; literally "friend of God") or, in the following, "miracle of the saints" (for *keramet*), although the concepts behind these terms are clearly different from the Christian ones. On the concept of holiness in Sufism, see also McGregor (2000, pp. 33–49).

[9] The full title is *Manâkıb-ı Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî* ("Legends of Saint Hacı Bektaş").

[10] The term "Babagan" is not normally used by the Bektaşis themselves in reference to their tradition.

[11] Over the course of the twentieth century, the problematic modern term "Alevi-Bektaşi" was often used to reflect a single identity of the two communities. The Bektaşi Sufi order and the Alevi communities are, in the words of Thierry Zarcone, "two syncretic Turkish religious traditions that are close to each other and originate from the same matrix that emerged around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Anatolia" (Zarcone 2017, p. 203). The self-designation "Alevi" (historically referred to as Kızılbaş, "redhead", probably from the wearing of crimson headgear, *taç-ı haydari*) derives from the Arabic term "'Alawi", referring to the descendants and followers of Ali b. Abi Talib. As the term indicates, "Alevi communities are spiritually bound to Imam Ali" (Erol 2012, p. 837; Engin 2016, pp. 145–46).

[12] İklil Selçuk recently pointed out that it remains difficult to assess the status of these women and how they received their epithets, as well as the extent to which women were systematically involved in *ahi* activities or in the study of *fütüvvet* ethics. She also notes that it is possible that the women simply received their titles as daughters or wives of prominent *ahi*s (Selçuk 2017, pp. 96–97).

[13] Women's membership in Sufi orders seems to have continued to be an important factor despite their exclusion from higher positions within each order. Interestingly, the 1882 general census revealed that in Istanbul alone, the 260 dervish lodges (Bektaşi and other Sufi orders) had a total of 2375 members, of whom 1184 were women (Ergin 1977, p. 240).

[14] Birth into one of the *ocak* lineages was a prerequisite to becoming a (male) spiritual leader, referred to as *dede*. For a detailed discussion of the Alevi religious institutions of *ocak* and Dedelik, see Langer (2013).

[15] Alevilik developed as an endogamous social group, and thus as a kind of ethnic group in which children of Alevi parents were considered Alevi. However, the initiation into ritual life occurred after marriage through a ceremony in which couples were united in a bond of spiritual siblinghood (*musahiplik*), in which the husband of one couple was considered the brother of the wife of the other spouse, and vice versa, to ensure the protection of the women in case something happened to their husbands.

[16] On the Alevi-Bektaşi *semah*, see Arnaud-Demir (2004, pp. 143–58).

[17] For similar *keramet* involving heat and fire, see Greve (2020, pp. 109–10).

[18] On İlhami Baba, see Küçük (2002, pp. 270, 375).

[19] The religious hierarchy of Babagan Bektaşism is as follows: *aşık* (sympathizers of the order), *muhib*, *derviş*, *baba*, *halife* (representative) *baba*, and *dedebaba* at the top.

[20] On the Bektaşi initiation ritual, see Soileau (2019); Zarcone (2016, pp. 781–98); Ringgren (1965, pp. 202–8).

21 Male initiates are given a white headdress symbolizing purity, known as *arakiye* (pl. *arakiyeler*). There is evidence that women also wore white and red *arakiyeler* in the past (Noyan 1977). Over time, however, the headscarf, which was the customary head covering for women, prevailed. See Menemencioğlu Temren (2010).

22 See https://alevibektasikulturenstitusu.de/. Accessed online on 25 February 2023.

23 See https://www.abked.de/index.php/abked. Accessed online on 25 February 2023.

24 Since the death of Bedri Noyan in 1997, there has been an ongoing dispute in Turkey over the appointment of the *dedebaba*.

25 The question of what kind of specific transnational transformations and adaptations have been made to create an appropriate "spiritual milieu" in which this transplanted Bektaşi community in diaspora can thrive will have to be the subject of a separate investigation. For a general discussion on the engagements of Sufism with modernity in the Western spiritual milieu, see Zarrabi-Zadeh (2019).

26 The fact that women participate in Bektaşi ritual ceremonies alongside men has, in the public imagination, often associated the Bektaşi order with the mysterious, the immoral, and the heretical. This is reflected, for example, in the best-selling novel *Nur Baba* (1921) by the Turkish writer Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889–1974). The novel has been translated widely, including a German translation by Annemarie Schimmel in 1986 and an English translation by M. Brett Wilson in 2023. See Karaosmanoğlu (1921, 1986, 2023).

27 A useful insight into Alevi dance is given in the short documentary film *Heavenly Journeys—Insights into Alevi Ritual Dance* (Klapp 2015).

28 For historical and contemporary examples of women leading the *cem*, see Bahadir (2004, pp. 13–28). Knowledge about women leading the *cem* does not appear to be widespread though. According to Arslan (2017, p. 4), tradition suggests that there were only one or two *cem* assemblies that were led by an *ana*.

29 In the past, a female dervish was therefore known as *Taçlı Bacı* ("crowned sister"). See Menemencioğlu Temren (2010).

30 On the *elifi taç*, see Birge (1937, pp. 37–38, n. 3, 46–47, 50, 104, 217, illustration no. 26).

31 For further information on the *haydariye*, which is also worn by other Sufi orders, see Kuehn (2019, pp. 164–66).

32 In early December 2021, four members who had been waiting for years were at last admitted to the *dergah* as *muhib*s.

33 As Cemal Kafadar notes, Bektaşi women poets do not appear in the written sources before the late eighteenth century, and thus there is also no trace of their position in the Bektaşi hierarchy (Kafadar 1993, p. 194); see Yenisey 1946, but also Ergun's (1956) anthology, which goes back to the seventeenth century but does not list any women poets from that century.

34 For instance, Arife Bacı (b. 1868), who was one of the dervishes of Hafız Baba, the *postnişin* of the Istanbul Karyağdı Dergah (Keleş 2020, p. 116); Hatice Bacı (d. 1936), one of the dervishes of Ahmet Burhaneddin Baba, *postnişin* of the Istanbul Merdivenköy Dervish Lodge (Keleş 2020, p. 118); likewise, Naciye Bacı (b. 1872) and her friend Zehra Bacı, both dervishes of the Istanbul Merdivenköy Dervish Lodge (Keleş 2020, p. 131); İkbal Bacı and Şeref Bacı (d. 1908), dervishes of the Çamlıca Bektaşi Tekke (Keleş 2020, pp. 129–30); Arife Bacı (b. 1868), a dervish of Hafız Baba, the *postnişin* of the Eyüb Karyağdı Dervish Lodge; and Emine Beyza Bacı (d. 1934), a dervish of Abdullah Nur Baba, the *postnişin* of the Topkapı Bektaşi Lodge (Alvan 2021).

35 Mention must be made of the wives of *baba*s, who were also elevated in the religious hierarchy with the title of *ana bacı* (Menemencioğlu Temren 1998, pp. 128–31), a title associated with the husband's socio-religious advancement in the order.

36 Hıdır Temel (2017, p. 227) has recently questioned whether Anşa Bacı, as a woman, could have actually led the *cem*, or whether one of her three sons did not lead the ritual. That Anşa Bacı's example would not have been such an exception has been shown by İbrahim Bahadir, who lists examples of female *cem* leaders (Bahadir 2004, pp. 13–28).

37 As Neriman Aşki Derviş explains, Baba Mondi is not recognized by the Bektaşis in Turkey because, according to the canon (*erkan*) of the Babagan Bektaşi, a *baba* must renew his vows annually with the officiating *dedebaba* in Turkey, as Baba Mondi's predecessor Reshat Bardhi (d. 2011) did. Baba Mondi reportedly did not renew his vows, so his claim to the office of *dedebaba* is not recognized by the Babagan Bektaşis (Neriman Aşki Derviş, interview with the author on 23 March 2019).

38 On the complexities of the terminology of such ranks held by women in the Bektaşi and Alevi contexts, see Hendrich (2013, pp. 311–12).

39 It is interesting to note that, while cyberspace has been instrumental in transforming most international Sufi orders into transnational phenomena, this is not the case with the Bektaşis. "Traditional" means of contact, such as the telephone, are still common forms of communication. Audio-visual media, multimedia representations of ritual practices led by a Sufi *şeyh*, as practiced by other transnational Sufi movements, are incompatible with the Bektaşi practice of conducting their ritual activities discreetly. According to John Kingsley Birge, the "Bektaşi secret" includes political, ritual, moral, and social teachings known and transmitted only by the Bektaşis (Birge 1937, pp. 159–61).

40 Significantly, Kadıncık Ana's *türbe* is said to be in the Çilehane, a cell for ascetic retreat (*çile*). For ritual activities at the Kadıncık Ana Evi, see Hendrich (2005, p. 240).

41 This is reiterated by Edip Harabi (d. 1917), one of the greatest Bektaşi poets of the last century, who reminds us, for example, that men and women, though different, are both creatures and servants of God: "Is it not the Praised One who created us? Is not the female lion a lion?" See Zarcone (2010, p. 107).

42 In fact, most of the *baba*s in Turkey today are married (cf. Küçük 2002, p. 375).

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Article

Naqshbandi Mujaddidi Mysticism in the West: The Case of Azad Rasool and His Heirs

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Abstract: The transfer of Sufism as a lived tradition to the Euro-American sphere, which first began in the early twentieth century, is a notable modern development that has been the subject of increasing academic interest in recent decades. Yet much of the literature on this topic to date has focused more on what has changed during the process of transfer, rather than on what has remained the same. It has also tended to prioritize context over mysticism. However, examining the main mystical doctrines and practices of the case study lineage of the Indian *shaykh* Azad Rasool (d. 2006), who from 1976 sought to introduce his teachings to Westerners arriving in India in search of spiritual fulfillment, in fact reveals substantial continuity with the early and pre-modern past. Such examination involved textual analysis of the primary sources of this lineage combined with multi-sited ethnography, comprised of participant observation as well as interviews, conducted primarily in Germany and the US, along with an excursion to India, among members of the two branches of this lineage between 2015 and 2020. It thus seems that shifting focus from context to mysticism itself, at least in some traditions, has the potential to also reveal much continuity in spite of changing contextual factors.

Keywords: Islamic mysticism; Sufism in the West; contemporary Sufism; neo-Sufism; New Religious Movements (NRMs); history of ideas; dynamics of religion; resonance

1. Introduction

Whether with German Romanticism around the turn of the nineteenth century or later with the New England Transcendentalists, the Theosophical Society, the Beat Generation, the larger 1960s counterculture as well as the Human Potential Movement (HPM) or even larger still with the New Age Movement (NAM), an ever-growing number of people in the West during the modern era have turned toward the "mystic East" for spiritual fulfillment. This phenomenon has been referred to, for instance, as "the 'Easternization' of Western spirituality" (Geaves et al. 2009, p. 2; Hamilton 2006, pp. 173–77; Campbell 2007; Bruce 2017). As such spiritual traditions from the "East" became increasingly commonplace in the "West", they have sometimes been studied under such rubrics as alternative spiritualities, emergent religions or New Religious Movements (NRMs) (e.g., Ellwood 1979; Clarke 2006a, 2006b; Hammer and Rothstein 2012), indicating that something new is in the making. Even without such labels, there seems to be a tendency in studies on Eastern spiritual traditions that have expanded to the West to devote more attention to change than continuity. A major case in point is the study of Sufism in the West, a field which has grown in recent decades, having been addressed in multiple edited volumes (Westerlund 2004; Malik and Hinnells 2006; van Bruinessen and Howell 2007; Geaves et al. 2009; Raudvere and Stenberg 2009; Geaves and Gabriel 2013; Sharify-Funk et al. 2017; Piraino and Sedgwick 2019; Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019; Bazzano and Hermansen 2020; Hermansen and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2022; Zarrabi-Zadeh et al. 2022), dissertations (Habibis 1985; Atay 1994; Genn 2004; Hazen 2011; Asbury 2020), monographs (Geaves 2000; Werbner 2003; Pittman 2012; Idrissi 2013; Dickson 2015; Sedgwick 2017; Sharify-Funk et al. 2017) as well as individual articles.

For just one example of the emphasis on change in such literature, in his perceptive chapter "Sufism for Westerners", Olav Hammer notes that "Yoga in London is not the

same as yoga in Varanasi", and more importantly here, he asserts that it is possible to discern two distinct trends in Sufism in the West. He calls one "Islamic Sufis" as compared with a Sufism custom-tailored for Western consumption which he has labelled "Sufism for Westerners" as well as "neo-Sufism".[1] Yet something new is created with every generation, whether or not there has been a transfer to new settings and audiences. So, it is of course important to not only consider what it is that is new, but also that which still endures and makes it warrant the label of Sufism. Of the five points Hammer presents in a chart comparing these two Sufisms, only one touches upon what we might call mysticism,[2] while his other points deal with more contextual aspects, namely: society, gender, culture and modes of dissemination (Hammer 2004, pp. 129, 139).

While a particular Sufi lineage may well seem like something new from such metrics, they may at the same time be very much in line with preceding tradition in other ways. In more recent scholarship on Sufism in the West, using the case study of Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee's non-Islamic Mujaddidi lineage, William Rory Dickson shows how a group that some scholars might classify as something new might actually be traditional from a different perspective (Dickson 2015, pp. 188–89; 2020). And in an article also published in the present Special Issue "Sufism in the Modern World", he demonstrates that shifting from the question of the relationship to Islam to the relationship to *shari'a* can reveal how different strands of Sufism in the West may follow along the lines of long-established trajectories from their earlier contexts (Dickson 2022).

To proffer another possible perspective shift here, a likely contributing factor to what seems to be an emphasis on change at the expense of acknowledging real continuity in studies on Sufism in the West may be that they often approach their subjects from a more sociological or otherwise contextual angle, sometimes only obliquely touching on the topic of mysticism. We might also consider, inter alia, the influence constructivist models of mystical experience (Katz 1978, 1983; Proudfoot 1985), which present it as being primarily determined by contextual factors, have had in Religious Studies more generally. Moreover, although philological studies of medieval Sufi texts abound, it seems almost as if the mystical teachings of modern *shaykh*s are somehow not worthy of study, possibly in part due to the lingering legacy of proponents of the notion of a Sufi golden age whose demise was heralded by the emergence of the *tariqa*s and popular Sufism (e.g., Arberry 1950; Trimingham 1971).

Whatever the cause, academic knowledge about the mysticism of modern Sufis and also of Sufi *tariqa*s in general, not only in the West, could stand to be much further developed. Regarding the Naqshbandiyya, Algar admits that "At a certain level, it is legitimate to detach the devotional practices of the Naqshbandi order from historical, geographical and social contexts and to examine them independently". Yet context is crucial for understanding, so "detaching" mysticism from such factors is certainly not what is advocated here, only that mysticism should not simply be glossed over and is an important topic of inquiry in its own right. Algar continues: "Very little has yet been achieved in this area; much of the discussion concerning the political role of the Naqshbandiya takes place in ignorance of what Naqshbandis, *qua* Naqshbandis, actually practise and believe" (Algar 1990, p. 53). While there have been important contributions in this direction since he made this statement (e.g., ter Haar 1992; Buehler 1998; Lizzio 1998; Dahnhardt 1999; Widiyanto 2012), there is still much to be done.

In a similar vein, Westerlund observes how there are more and more studies of Sufism focused on "political and socio-economic issues", due in part to how "an increasing number of social scientists and social science-influenced scholars of religion have become interested in Sufism", and he posits "a risk that, in the long run, there will be a new one-sidedness, so that the religious [incl. mystical] and cultural aspects of Sufism become marginalized in the research" (Westerlund 2004, p. 12). It appears that if his fears had not already been realized at the time he wrote that, as Algar's statements suggest, we have at least reached that point by now. A significant byproduct of the current emphasis on context over mysticism seems to be that when considering transfer, it is change rather than continuity that tends to

come to the fore. By focusing on contextual factors, like the social, political, institutional or gender ratios and other demographics, we are already setting ourselves up to see primarily change. Yet depending on the particular tradition and lineage in question, shifting the focus to mysticism itself might reveal greater continuity.[3]

While there are undoubtedly limitations to seeing Sufism as merely Islamic mysticism, as has been well-argued by Nile Green (Green 2012, pp. 1–14), the notion of mysticism ought not be abandoned or marginalized. After all, at the risk of essentializing, the encounter with ultimate Reality that is at the core of mysticism might be seen as the very *raison d'être* of Sufism. By analogy, it would certainly be possible to write a study on football and only consider its major personalities and institutions like teams, leagues and so forth along with their social, cultural, economic and even political impacts all without ever touching upon or even knowing the rules of the game or how it is played. But this would perhaps be more writing around the game rather than about it. This article seeks to examine the game itself, viz., mysticism, which we define here as consisting of a human–divine encounter at its core along with all that leads up to as well as all that results from such encounter.[4]

Without detracting from the valuable insights of more context-focused studies on Sufism in the West, or denying the usefulness of such labels as NRMs or neo-Sufism, it must also be acknowledged that they have a tendency to place the focus on that which has changed *at the expense of* that which has actually remained the same. It is argued here that in spite of changing demographics and other contextual factors, depending on the particular group in question, when examined through the perspective of mystical doctrines and practices, there may actually be some very important ways in which Yoga in London and Yoga in Varanasi might actually be the same, something that is also true in the case of Sufism between Western settings and its preceding contexts.

Moreover, it seems that the very labels of change versus continuity themselves may not only be rather subjective and based on one's chosen focus of inquiry and metrics, but they may fail to fully apprehend the complex and multifaceted character of such transfers. The notion of "dynamics" has been proffered as a potential alternative to help overcome the limitations of this dichotomy (Asbury and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2022). Here, instead of just reporting and describing change and/or continuity, we seek to understand the dynamics of how change and continuity are determined and shaped, and in this endeavor, the notions of resonance and damping can be helpful.

The choice of employing these concepts was inspired by an auditory analogy wherein Sufism, in its varied forms, is seen as a sound emitted into the soundscape of "East and West", being shaped by innumerable factors encountered as it travels through that space; resonating, echoing and reverberating within it or conversely it may be dampened, muffled or distorted (Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019, pp. 1–29). It is argued here that examining how, between old and new contexts and audiences, areas of similarity or congruity may resonate and be capitalized upon as well as how areas of dissimilarity or incompatibility that may produce damping or dissonance are dealt with and negotiated, provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics behind change and continuity. Understanding how such cases of harmony or tension, resonance or damping, consonance or dissonance, are dealt with and resolved, or not, is crucial to fully understanding as well as going beyond change and continuity. Of note, certain broader trends pertaining to mysticism in modernity which may affect sender, receiver or both and can be sources of resonance or damping will be returned to frequently below and include the scientification, rationalization, de-mystification, individualization, psychologization and experientation of mysticism as well as the emancipation of mysticism from religion (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2020).

2. Examining the Mysticism of Azad Rasool and His Heirs

As its case study, this article examines the mysticism of a Sufi lineage associated with five different *silsila*s (Chishtiyya, Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya, Naqshbandiyya and foremost of all as well as the focus of this study, the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya)[5] that spread from India to the West, and eventually globally, starting from 1976 when, after noticing large

numbers of Westerners arriving in India in search of spiritual fulfillment, Azad Rasool (1920–2006) established the Institute of Search for Truth (IST) to make his Sufi teachings available to such a demographic. Gradually, an international network of his students that would come to be known as the School of Sufi Teaching (SOST) expanded to the point where there are now groups on every inhabited continent with a membership that has grown far beyond Rasool's original target audience to include Muslims and non-Muslims of diverse backgrounds.[6] After Rasool passed away in 2006, two different branches emerged, and while leadership of IST and SOST continued under his son Hamid Hasan (b. 1961), Rasool's American *khalifa* ("deputy"), Ahmed Abdur Rashid (b. 1942), whom he had appointed in 1984, continued to lead his own students from their shared community in rural Virginia, known as the World Community, as well as internationally.

This study is based on analysis of the main textual sources of this lineage, foremost of which being Rasool's two works *Turning Toward the Heart* (Rasool 2002) and *The Search for Truth* (Rasool 2010), along with a consultation of their broader literature and electronic media combined with insights gained from multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Germany and the US, along with an excursion to India, and including participant observation as well as interviews, conducted with both communities from 2015 to 2020.[7] While there are some differences among Rasool and his two living heirs, the six core mystical doctrines and practices examined below remain basically the same in the teachings of all three men. Hasan has streamlined explanations with his clear and concise descriptions (e.g., Sufi School of Sufi Teaching on YouTube) and major parts of the SOST website (SufiSchool.org) consist of carefully selected excerpts from Rasool's writings, especially as related to the main teachings analyzed here. Moreover, the introductory lessons developed by the London group and adopted for use in Germany deal with these terms and faithfully reproduce the descriptions of them in Rasool's writings. Conversely, Abdur Rashid has semantically expanded some terminology as well as (re-)introduced other ideas and practices from wider Sufi tradition (Asbury and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2022; Abdur Rashid 2007), yet these have been added to and have not changed Rasool's original core teachings. Thus, in the interest of space and avoiding repetition, we focus on Rasool's account of his main mystical teachings, which also remain the central common core for both of his heirs.

This also seems appropriate given the considerable degree of standardization in mystical doctrines and practices across this lineage in spite of changing contextual factors. By way of illustration, the first SOST meetings attended by the researcher in Germany beginning in 2015 took place in the art studio of one of the participants or in private apartments in Munich or Nuremberg among small groups of mixed gender, but ranging from roughly equal to a slight female majority, and often of non-Muslim origin and usually wearing Western-style clothing with few men having beards. Participants spoken to often cited past experiences with other forms of alternative spirituality in the West, especially Yoga, Qi Gong and Buddhist meditation as well as universalist forms of Sufism, including in the line of Irina Tweedie. In contrast, the retreat attended in a Muslim-majority area of Hyderabad, India in 2016 was held in a large prayer room that was filled to capacity with only men and boys, almost all of whom were of Muslim upbringing, donned white *shalwar qamiz* (traditional dress often worn by Muslims in South Asia) with a prayer cap and had beards. There were only two female participants and they prayed and performed the practices separately and were not even seen by the researcher during the retreat.[8] Yet in spite of these apparent differences, both groups were engaged in the very same practices and when asked to elaborate on the core mystical teachings analyzed here, they consistently and faithfully reproduced the same basic descriptions found in Rasool's works and examined below.

Such consistency and standardization were also apparent in the interviews conducted among Abdur Rashid and his students at the World Community as well as in conversations with members of other SOST groups encountered, such as from the London, New Zealand, Singapore or Malaysia groups. This is not to mention the standardization evident across SOST's numerous country websites, including articles on the six key terms examined here

drawn from Rasool's works and translated into the main languages of those countries. Thus, hailing back to Hammer's assertion that Yoga in London versus in Varanasi are not the same, while they may look like very different things through the lens of contextually determined factors, from the perspective of their main mystical doctrines and practices, it seems that for this particular lineage, Sufism in Munich is actually very much the same as Sufism in Hyderabad. The same is also true of their Sufism in Nuremberg, London, Wellington, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur or rural Virginia *vis-à-vis* that found in Delhi.

Ultimately, it is argued here that, in the expansion of our case study lineage to the Euro-American sphere, there was more resonance than damping and that areas of damping were successfully negotiated in such a way as to eliminate the need for substantial change to its main mystical doctrines and practices. In order to argue our thesis and to demonstrate the predominance of such continuity, we take as our basis the six primary technical terms used by Rasool and his heirs. These cannot encompass all of their mysticism, for instance, the practice of shrine visitation (*ziyara*), which was a central part of the retreat attended by the researcher in Hyderabad, and its continuation for students in the West through international retreats, held each year in a different city in South Asia, Central Asia or the Middle East, where Sufi shrines abound, could regrettably not be covered here.[9] Yet the six identified key terms might be seen as the foremost concepts and practices, particularly when explaining their highly practice-oriented mysticism as well as in relation to the everyday lives of their students with their regimen of daily practices.

Three of these terms provide the cosmo-psychological foundation for their mysticism; *nisbat* ("relationship"), *lata'if* ("subtleties") and *indiraj al-nihayat fi al-bidayat* ("inclusion of the end in the beginning"); while the remaining three pertain to actual mystical practices and their performance with the guidance and support of the shaykh; *muraqaba* ("watchfulness"), *dhikr* ("remembrance") and *tawajjuh* ("to face"). After describing each of these in turn as well as considering their potential for resonance or damping and how these have been capitalized upon or negotiated, we trace a brief history of these ideas and practices over the *longue durée*, considering the emergence and development of each of the six key technical terms as well as that which they denote. This drew on several important surveys of Sufism and its history (e.g., Nicholson [1914] 2002; Schimmel 1975; Knysh 2000; Karamustafa 2007; Baldick [1989] 2012; Green 2012) as well as various specialized literature and primary sources among contemporary lineages cited below.

It should be made clear that this is in no way a presentation of the full breadth of diversity found throughout the history of Islamic mysticism. Instead, it is an attempt to identify samples from the strata of various time periods in the development of Sufism which provide reasonable precedents, if not direct antecedents, to trace a plausible trajectory of development for the specifically selected six key terms and the concepts and practices they denote. Each concept or practice that we describe must be understood as only one example from a vastly larger field of other possibilities that existed in the same time and even space. Thus, the examples mentioned do not necessarily indicate the dominant trend for any given period or place. To aid in this venture, we draw on and adapt a periodization of the history of Sufism that was introduced by Jamal Malik in one of the seminal works on the study of Sufism in the West (Malik and Hinnells 2006, pp. 2–11). For us, those periods include (1) early Islam and asceticism-oriented mysticism (600–800 AD), (2) the inward turn and the emergence of Sufism and other mystical trends (800–950), (3) standardization of Sufism (950–1100), (4) Sufi theosophy and the emergence of the *tariqa*s (1100–1300), (5) the early period of the Naqshbandiyya, a late-arriving *tariqa* (1300–1550), (6) the Naqshbandiyya in India and the early Mujaddidiyya (1550–1800), and finally, (7) British colonialism, independence and Western spiritual seekers (1800–1975).

Note that the final period ends the year before Rasool established IST and began his mission to spread his lineage far beyond India. This also coincides with what has been called the period of the re-orthodoxization of Sufism in the West (Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2019, pp. 14–17; Asbury and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2022, pp. 295–96). It was around this time that we see most Naqshbandi-related presence in the Euro-American sphere beginning to

grow, either as a result of increased immigration, particularly from Turkey and Pakistan but also/or eventually from elsewhere, including Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, India, Bosnia, Indonesia and Malaysia, or related to the interests of Western spiritual seekers, such as in search of the origins of Theosophical or Gurdjieffian teachings.[10] Here, examples from the extremely diverse range of Naqshbandi-connected groups in the West as well as on the global stage will be cited to demonstrate that, despite how there is far from any standard Mujaddidi mysticism, many of the core doctrines and practices taught by Rasool and his heirs can also still be found in some form or another among other related lineages.

These groups were divided here based on existing typologies (esp. Hermansen 1997, 2009, 2014; Geaves 2000; Hammer 2004; Godlas 2005; Lassen 2009; Green 2012)[11] but modified to specifically address these groups' relationships to the Naqshbandiyya and to Islam, thus resulting in (1) *universalists* who offer a religiously unattached mysticism with Naqshbandi origins;[12] (2) *Sufism 1st*, describing groups in which, despite being Islamic, it is possible for non-Muslims to encounter Sufism prior to Islam (hence, "1st" denotes sequence of encounter and not degree of importance); (3) *Islam 1st*, wherein Islam is generally encountered prior to or concurrently with Sufism;[13] and (4) *post-tariqa* groups which adhere to Islam and have historical roots in the Naqshbandiyya, but no longer maintain the traditional *tariqa* structure. Considering these can lend further support to the thesis of continuity by demonstrating that the same or at least similar concepts can also be found among the diverse array of other Naqshbandi lineages today, including in cases of "binary fission" (Geaves 2000), "transplants" (Hermansen 1997, 2022) or as labelled here, Islam 1st groups who have not programmatically sought to appeal to Western spiritual seekers. So without further ado, we turn to the main six key terms in the mysticism of Rasool and his heirs.[14]

3. Cosmo-Psychological Foundation

We begin our exploration by first turning to three of the six identified key terms that provide much of the cosmo-psychological foundation of the mysticism of Rasool and his heirs. These span the full breadth of our definition of mysticism, including the encounter with God as well as both that which leads up to it and that which results from it. Specifically, they deal in turn with the relationship sought between the aspirant and God (*nisbat*) followed by their conceptualization of the subtle anatomy, anthropology or psychology (*lata'if*) understood to be involved in seeking to develop such a relationship. We then address the main principle that dictates how this is pursued (*indiraj al-nihayat fi al-bidayat*).

3.1. Nisbat

Rasool uses the term *nisbat* ("relationship", or as he translates it, "affinity") in two main senses, first, to refer to the ultimate goal of the Sufi path, viz., a deeper relationship with God as well as various facets thereof, and second, to indicate an affinity between people, particularly the disciple's relationship with the shaykh, which is held to facilitate the first sense of the term. We return to the latter sense further below but deal here with its technical Sufi meaning as "the affinity that develops between God and human beings" (Rasool 2010, pp. 53–54). To gain some idea of what it might mean, for Rasool and his heirs, to develop an affinity with God, we turn to some of the different ways he describes the aim of Sufism.

In one summarizing statement, Rasool explains the overall goal of Sufism itself in rather ecumenical, even humanistic ethics-oriented terms, which can be appealing to the anti-exoterically minded while also making use of the language of personal transformation so common to the HPM (Puttick 2004), as being "to transform the seeker into a highly humane and moral person by building the seeker's character through spiritual training". Such a framing has the potential to make this concept appealing to prospective students who may be anti-exoterically minded. Yet what precedes this is also an explanation of the goal of Sufism in more specifically Islamic and traditionally Sufi vocabulary. Therein,

Rasool states that Sufism's goal is "the development of certain noble qualities", examples of which he lists as "the purification of the self, purification of the heart, moral etiquette [*akhlaq* or perhaps *adab*], doing what is beautiful (*ihsan*), nearness to God [*ma'iyyat*], inner knowledge (*ma'rifat*), annihilation in God (*fana'*), and subsistence in God (*baqa'*)" (Rasool 2010, p. 43). Another list of affinities to be developed is provided as: "the affinity of doing what is beautiful (*ihsan*), the affinity of purity, […] of intense love, […] of spiritual ecstasy, […] of unity, […] of peace, and […] of remembrance" (Rasool 2010, p. 53). Still yet another list of affinities, or categories thereof, includes *fana'*, *baqa'*, *jadhba* ("attraction [to God]"), *suluk* ("wayfaring") and *sayr ila Allah* ("journeying to God") (Rasool 2010, p. 47).

Thus, *nisbat* can be used to refer to a broad range of things on the Sufi path toward cultivating a profound relationship with God as well as to refer to that relationship itself. There is, however, another crucial point to note in this regard, that for Rasool, the experience of unity, often associated with mystics like Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), is not the ultimate aim of the path, rather the greater aim is to go beyond this to return to the world transformed from the experience, as a specifically Mujaddidi feature (Rasool 2002, p. 3) that resonates well with and can be culturally translated through the language of personal transformation as found in the HPM and among Western spiritual seekers. Yet it also embodies the Naqshbandi emphasis on being with God and in society at the same time (*khalwat dar anjuman*, "solitude in the crowd"). Rasool's son and the current leader of SOST and IST highlights how such an approach is compatible with modern lifestyles, allowing a spiritual life next to work, family and social responsibilities,[15] much like it was for the artisans who were drawn to the Naqshbandiyya in its first years in fourteenth-century Bukhara (Weismann 2007, pp. 15, 22). Moreover, one of the two supposed defining characteristics of the Naqshbandiyya is "activism", the other being "orthodoxy" (Weismann 2007), a trend that would resonate and converge in the West with a broader trend towards societal engagement, including "Engaged Buddhism", "Engaged Hinduism" and also "Engaged Sufism" (Clarke 2006b, pp. xiv, 278–80) as well as specifically with the societal engagement of Rasool's American *khalifa*, Abdur Rashid, which began in the 1960s, prior to his discovering Sufism, with social activism such as taking part in the Civil Rights Movement or protesting the Vietnam War, but which has since evolved to become more societal engagement, notably through interreligious dialogue as well as service through the civic education, peace education and leadership development programs of the NGO he founded, Legacy International (LegacyIntl.org; Asbury and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2022). But this facet of the return descent after mystical attainment is important to keep in mind as we turn to consider the historical trajectory of the development of this notion of cultivating an affinity with God (Rasool 2002, p. 3; 2010, pp. xvi, 46–54).

Nisbat in Historical Perspective

From the very beginning of Islam, God was understood as being paradoxically both transcendent and immanent, being the "Most High" (Q 87:1) who established Himself "above the Throne" (Q 10:3) but who is also closer to man "than his jugular vein" (Q 50:16). Early forms of Islamic mysticism were characterized by asceticism and an emphasis on God's transcendent nature. Yet toward the end of this first period, we begin to see a shift toward a relationship of proximity to, and even love of, God (Melchert 1996; Malik 2006, p. 4; Schimmel 1975, pp. 23–41; Knysh 2000, pp. 5–42; Karamustafa 2007, pp. 1–7; Green 2012, pp. 16–24). This shift in emphasis toward achieving nearness to God in this lifetime would come to fruition in the second period, marking the very emergence of Sufism (Malik 2006, pp. 4–5; Schimmel 1975, pp. 42–77; Knysh 2000, pp. 43–82; Karamustafa 2007, pp. 1–55; Green 2012, pp. 24–41). In the third period, such an understanding and goal would become more systematized and reconciled with juristic normative Islam, most notably in the figure of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) (Malik 2006, pp. 4–5; Schimmel 1975, pp. 77–97; Knysh 2000, pp. 116–49; Baldick [1989] 2012, pp. 50–67; Karamustafa 2007, pp. 57–113).

The fourth period would be marked by (1) the further elaboration of Sufi theosophy, characterized by the attainment of proximity to God, by such monumental figures as Ibn

'Arabi and Rumi (d. 1273), but also by (2) the emergence of formal institutions (*tariqa*s) devoted to pursuing this goal (Malik 2006, pp. 6–8; Schimmel 1975, pp. 228–86; Knysh 2000, pp. 150–244; Baldick [1989] 2012, pp. 69–85; Karamustafa 2007, pp. 114–55). In particular, the Central Asian Kubrawiyya would provide a number of precursors to later Naqshbandi doctrines and practices, as we will shortly see. In the fifth period, we find critiques of Sufism's elaborations of attaining a profoundly close relationship with God (even to the point of unification) from the likes of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and 'Ala' al-Dawla al-Simnani (d. 1336). The latter advocated a notion that re-emphasized God's transcendence which he called *wahdat al-shuhud* ("unity of witnessing"), to critique and also serve as an alternative to the idea of *wahdat al-wujud* ("unity of being"), ascribed to Ibn 'Arabi (Elias 1995; Landolt 1973, 1996).

In the sixth period, Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), the founder-figure of the Mujaddidiyya, propounded his own version of *wahdat al-shuhud* in critique of *wahdat al-wujud* (Faruqi [1940] 1989; Kartal 2013; Alam 2012).[16] This notion rejected the possibility of unification with God and although the idea of descending back to creation after reaching the heights of mystical attainment (whether unitive or not) was present since the very beginning of Sufism (e.g., Junayd, cf. Abdel-Kader 1962, pp. 88–93) and can even be perceived in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi, such as with his emphasis on the doctrine of *al-insan al-kamal* (mentioned below), Sirhindi placed a special emphasis on the descent portion of the path. Significantly here, he actually used the term *nisbat* (and the related *munasaba*) to denote both the relationship of affinity that the mystic seeks with God, as well as the relationship with one's *shaykh* which helps lead to such relationship with God (ter Haar 1992, pp. 78–80; Buehler 2011, p. 146). Thus, at least as early as Sirhindi, we find the employment of *nisbat* as a Sufi technical term that is very similar to Rasool's own usage.

Subsequent Mujaddidi's, like Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (d. 1781) or notably Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762) in Rasool's own *silsila*, would also use *nisbat* as a Sufi technical term to denote the relationship of proximity with God that Sufism has sought since its very inception as well as the relationship with the *shaykh* that is believed to facilitate that relationship with God (Rizvi 1980, p. 326; Bashir 2010, pp. 49–50; Alam 2021). They would also take up various positions on the *wujudi-shuhudi* debate, sometimes attempting to transcend and reconcile the differences between these two perspectives and to pursue the ascent to God while also upholding the importance of the descent portion of the journey (Faruqi [1940] 1989, pp. 141–70; Valiuddin 1951; Rizvi 1980; Faruque 2016), which Rasool and his heirs also continue to do. So, the Sufi technical term *nisbat* in the main senses that Rasool uses it appeared no later than the early 1600s, yet the concepts that it encompasses regarding the relationship with God sought by the mystic, have been central to Sufi thought since its very beginnings. Moreover, the particularly Mujaddidi nature of this relationship, with its emphasis on going beyond the unitive state (or the perception thereof) and returning to creation, also endures.

Today, because this was a technical term used by Sirhindi, the founder-figure of the Mujaddidiyya, other contemporary Naqshbandi lines also use the technical term *nisbat* in the same ways as Sirhindi and Rasool (e.g., Ghaffari 2011a; Alam 2010a, pp. 47–50; Awan 2009, p. 13; Khanqah Naqshbandia Mujaddidia 2011), including even one universalist lineage of Hindu origin (NaqshMuMRa School of Sprituality 2009). When this particular technical term is absent, what it signifies, cultivating a profoundly deeper relationship with God (or with the *shaykh*), is usually if not always still present,[17] even central as the very aim of Sufism. But crucial to how this relationship is pursued as well as experienced for Rasool and many other Mujaddidis, past and present, are the "subtle centers of consciousness" or *lata'if*, to which we now turn.

3.2. *Lata'if*

Often the very first technical term which a new pupil is introduced to in receiving instructions for the practices is *lata'if* ("subtleties", sg. *latifa*), rendered most frequently into English by Rasool as "subtle centers of consciousness", as opposed to the mind or intellect,

but sometimes also as "centers of perception", "inner senses" or "inner faculties", as opposed to the five conventional senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. These centers of spiritual perception are seen as sources of understanding, knowledge and guidance and "means to greater awareness of the Divine Presence". They have both a cosmological significance, in that they are the microcosm of man, which is a reflection of the greater macrocosm, as well as a central role to play in the practices of the order.

Cosmologically, the ten *lata'if* are the microcosm of the human being and are a reflection of the greater macrocosm, therefore man is also divided between spiritual and physical aspects. Drawing on Sirhindi, for Rasool and his heirs, the catalyst for the creation of the universe was God's utterance of "*Kun*!" or "Be!" at which the "world of [God's] command" (*'alam-i amr*, the spiritual world) instantly came into being and the gradual evolution of the "world of creation" (*'alam-i khalq*, the physical world) was then set into motion, culminating in the creation of man, in whom both of these realms, the spiritual and the physical, are combined. In creating man, God placed the ten *lata'if* within him as a "trust", five of which being part of the *'alam-i amr*; the *qalb* ("heart"), *ruh* ("spirit"), *sirr* ("secret"), *khafi* ("hidden") and *akhfa* ("most hidden"); and the remaining five being part of the *'alam-i khalq*; the *nafs* ("self") along with the *'anasir-i arba'a* ("four elements") of *khak* ("earth"), *ma'* ("water"), *nar* ("fire") and *bad* ("wind") which comprise the physical body (Rasool 2002, pp. 86–87; 2010, p. 55). Of these ten centers and as depicted in Table 1, six are associated with particular locations within the human body while the remaining four permeate it. Five of the ten centers are each "under the feet of" a law-giving prophet, or messenger (*rasul*), and six are also associated with a particular color (Rasool 2002, p. 90).

Table 1. The *lata'if* and their associated realms, locations in the body, colors and prophets.

Latifa	Realm	Location in Body	Color	Prophet
Qalb ("heart")	*'Alam-i amr* ("word of [God's] command, "the spiritual world)	two fingers width below left nipple	golden	Adam
Ruh ("spirit")		two-fingers width below right nipple	red	Abraham
Sirr ("secret")		two-fingers width above left nipple	white	Moses
Khafi ("hidden")		two-fingers width above left nipple	black	Jesus
Akhfa ("most hidden")		center of chest between the *qalb* and *ruh*	green	Muhammad
Nafs ("self")	*'Alam-i khalq* ("world of creation", the physical world)	between eyebrows	azure blue or colorless	N/A
Khak ("earth")		The four elements permeate the entire physical body, also called the *qalab* ("mold")	N/A	
Ma' ("water")				
Nar ("fire")				
Bad ("wind")				

In order for the *lata'if* to perform their perceptive and guiding functions, their dimmed state as a result of being connected to the body must be reversed and their original luminous state restored, they must be "awakened", "illumined" or "enlightened". Another way of saying this is that they must be returned to their origins, or "their true form" in the *'alam-i amr* above the throne (*'arsh*), a necessary condition for one to achieve annihilation (*fana'*) in God (Rasool 2010, p. 55). For Rasool and his heirs, this awakening is to be accomplished largely through meditation (*muraqaba*), wherein the disciple turns their attention to each *latifa*, awakening them in a particular sequence, discussed in detail shortly with the next key term.

To summarize some of the major characteristics of the individual *lata'if*, beginning first with those of the *'alam-i amr*, we find the *qalb* as the locus of divine guidance while also being the rightful ruler of the human being, though the unrefined *nafs* and the intellect both seek to usurp its reign. Next, the term *ruh* refers to a subtle etheric animating substance within the body that is particularly connected to spiritual travel and is inherently drawn toward God. Much like the *qalb*'s function in receiving divine guidance, the *sirr* relates to the human capacity to perceive and contain a deeper kind of knowledge about God known as "secrets", with the *khafi* and *akhfa* each providing successively still deeper and deeper ineffable perspectives onto the encounter with God, all the while experiencing increasing ecstasy inwardly while manifesting complete sobriety outwardly. Turning to the *lata'if* of the *'alam-i khalq*, the untamed *nafs* seeks to challenge the rule of the heart as the rightful monarch of one's being, yet it can be purified and transformed into a loyal subject and active ally of the heart. Finally, the last four *lata'if* are the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind, which are found throughout the entire body and when they are awakened, the entire body is illuminated in remembrance of God (Rasool 2010, pp. 129–37; 2002, p. 88).

Consistent with the scientification of mysticism in the modern era,[18] Rasool explains that this arrangement was discovered over time through the spiritual insights of various earlier saints, gained through experimentation in the laboratory of the self (Rasool 2002, p. 6). Furthermore, and also in line with the experientation of mysticism, visions of the different colors are said to have been "reported" from these saints' "experiences" of *kashf* ("unveiling") (Rasool 2002, pp. 86, 89–90). Moreover, the fact that the *lata'if* are not only associated with various colors but also with different focal points in the body to which attention is directed during meditation may call to mind the pervasive *chakra*s of Yoga, thus offering some sense of familiarity for spiritual seekers in the West. This is not to mention what seem to be allusions to them as hidden inner potentials (Rasool 2010, p. 154), thus culturally translating via the language of the HPM. In the same vein and going along with the psychologization of mysticism in the modern era, the fact that they are different components of the inner constitution or psyche of the human being makes it only natural to draw parallels to concepts of the psyche from modern psychotherapy. But while Rasool argues that modern psychologists have arrived at similar conclusions to those of Sufism, he is quick to distinguish the *lata'if* as being quite different from concepts like the id, ego and superego as well as the *chakra*s (Rasool 2002, p. 90), thus illustrating the limits of how far he was willing to go to appeal to new audiences in presenting this traditional Sufi concept, which we now briefly consider the intellectual history of (Rasool 2002, pp. 86–91; 2010, pp. 54–56, 129–37).

Lata'if in Historical Perspective

Beginning in the first phase with the Qur'an, the breast (*sadr*) and particularly the heart (*qalb*) are identified as the seat of religious experience and divine guidance. After all, it was to Muhammad's heart that God revealed the Qur'an (Q 26:192–94). Notwithstanding the possibility of interpretations that posit more than one *nafs* within each person, the self (*nafs*) is described variously as inciting (to evil), being self-accusing or being tranquil. Lastly, the terms *ruh*, *sirr* and *akhfa* are used in rather ambiguous senses not necessarily related to cosmo-psychology (e.g., Q 20:7), but these terms would be the subject of speculation by later Muslim scholars and mystics.[19]

In the second period, understandings of cosmo-psychology were comparatively diverse, though having an inner aspect oriented toward God and following God's commands (*ruh*), another aspect oriented toward creation and earthly needs and desires (*nafs*) as well as another aspect that serves as the battleground for these two opposing forces (*qalb*) was beginning to emerge as a common basis. One figure, Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896), would not only include the *qalb*, *ruh* and *nafs* in his subtle anatomy, but would also introduce the *sirr*, as the locus of colloquy with God at the core of one's heart (Böwering 1980, pp. 185–86, 191–200). Also of note, Hakim al-Tirmidhi's (d. 932) detailed cosmo-psychology is largely

associated with the breast and torso generally and also includes the four Empedoclean elements (Gobillot 2006, pp. 29ff).

In the third period, the four-fold appearance of *qalb*, *ruh*, *sirr* and *nafs*, which we first saw with Tustari, would appear in the thought of multiple other thinkers, though with different understandings, nuances and sequence orders (Kamada 1983). Thus, the *sirr* became a commonly encountered *latifa* and these four subtleties became a usual fixture of Sufi cosmo-psychological models. Notably, one of these early thinkers to include *qalb* (Pers. *dil*), *ruh* (Pers. *jan*), *sirr* and *nafs*, viz., Ali b. 'Uthman Hujwiri (d. ca. 1072), also notes that the body consists of the four Empedoclean elements (Hujwiri [1911] 1953, pp. 198ff), thus providing a substantial and very early precedent for later Mujaddidi cosmo-psychology, having eight of what would eventually be ten *lata'if*.

In the fourth period, Kubrawi thinkers would place special emphasis on the *lata'if* as well as visions of colored lights. In particular, Najm al-Din Razi (d. 1256) would introduce a *latifa* even subtler than the *sirr*, the *khafi* (though also excluding the *nafs* from his list, but adding *'aql*), resulting in the following model: *'aql*, *qalb*, *ruh*, *sirr* and *khafi* (Corbin 1971, pp. 99–120; Algar 1982). In the fifth period, the abovementioned later Kubrawi, Simnani, further elaborated on the *lata'if* with a *latifa* even subtler than the *khafi*, *al-latifa al-haqqiyya*, thus setting a precedent for the later introduction of the *akhfa*. Simnani's model also included the *qalab* ("mold") to refer to the physical body and this term would later be used by Mujaddidis interchangeably with the four elements. Simnani also associated each *latifa* with a particular color as well as with a prophet, though he does not seem to have associated them all with particular locations in the body. His model includes *qalab*, *nafs*, *qalb*, *sirr*, *ruh*, *khaf* and *haqq* (Elias 1995; Corbin 1971, pp. 121–39; 1972).

Simnani's *latifa*-model would later be accepted by Muhammad Parsa (d. ca. 1420) (Tosun and Bayraktar 2014b), the chief ideologue of the first generation of Naqshbandis and a direct student of the founder-figure of the Naqshbandiyya, Baha' al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389), thus making clear the continuity of mystical doctrines and practices from the Kubrawiyya to another but newer Central Asian *tariqa*: the Naqshbandiyya. In the sixth period, some significant later Naqshbandis would also accept Simnani's *latifa*-model, namely the direct teacher of Sirhindi, Baqi Billah (d. 1603), as well as Sirhindi's rival to be Baqi Billah's heir, Taj al-Din (d. 1640) (Weismann 2007, pp. 18, 54, 61), who not only accepted Simnani's *latifa*-model, but also elaborated further on it (Tosun and Bayraktar 2014b).

But with the founder-figure of the Mujaddidiyya, Sirhindi himself, for the very first time, we find the exact same ten-fold *latifa*-model adhered to by Rasool and most other later Mujaddidi lineages who are known to practice *muraqaba* according to a guided curriculum of intentions. This model is divided into the *lata'if* of the *'alam-i amr* (*qalb*, *ruh*, *sirr*, *khafi*, *akhfa*) and those of the *'alam-i khalq* (*nafs* and the physical body comprised of the four elements) (ter Haar 1992, pp. 90, 98). It is unclear whether Sirhindi himself associated the *lata'if* with particular colors and locations in the physical body, since the first textual evidence for these appears in the writings of a later Mujaddidi, Mir Muhammad Nu'man (d. ca. 1650) (Buehler 1998, p. 235, fn 4; Tosun and Bayraktar 2014b). Nevertheless, this ten-fold structure would become more or less standard for many Mujaddidis, though alternatives have been proposed and used. Notably, Wali Allah expanded upon Sirhindi's ten-fold model by adding five more *lata'if* for a total of fifteen (Hermansen 1988; Waliullah et al. 1982), though this model does not seem to have taken root, as no lineages were encountered that adhere to it today.[20]

Out of the range of contemporary Naqshbandi and Mujaddidi mysticisms, this particular set of *lata'if* has become somewhat standard among those who are known to have an established curriculum of intentions for *muraqaba*. Others may use abbreviated versions, such as incorporating *qalb*, *ruh*, *nafs* and sometimes *sirr*, or versions that draw from or interact with other sources, such as how the Hindu lineages reconciled the Mujaddidi *lata'if* with a Yogic *chakra* arrangement with special emphasis on the *hridaya* ("heart") *chakra*, which early on was understood to contain all five *lata'if* of the *'alam-i amr* (Dahnhardt 1999, pp. 219, 195–218), how one Naqshbandi Haqqani *shaykh* describes a unique cosmo-psychological

model in what seems to claim to be the origin of the enneagram, likely in a bid to appeal to seekers with a Gurdjieffian background (Kabbani 2004a, pp. 435–40) or how some universalists engage with modern psychology and psychotherapy (e.g., Tweedie 1991; Vaughan-Lee 1991; Ali-Shah 1995). Interestingly, Idries Shah lectured on the original Mujaddidi *lata'if*, though in a quite psychologized, rationalized and de-mystified manner (Barakabee 2013). Further still, in the post-*tariqa* category, we find Fethullah Gülen expounding upon the very same five *lata'if* of the *'alam-i amr* in his writings (Seker 2015).[21] But as noted, Rasool and both of his heirs, as well as other contemporary Islamic Naqshbandi lines with set curricula of intentions for meditation, generally use Sirhindi's ten-fold *latifa*-model (though sometimes described as seven-fold, counting the four elements of the *qalab* as just one) along with usually similar associations with colors, law-giving prophets and locations in the physical body (e.g., Buehler 1998, pp. 110–11; Lizzio 1998, pp. 201–33; Ghaffari 2011b; Awan 2009, pp. 1–13; An-Naqshbandi et al. 2011, pp. 228–31; Tazkiya.org 2013; Ahmed 2016).

3.3. Indiraj al-Nihayat fi al-Bidayat

Having addressed the ten *lata'if*, we now turn to the principle that guides the overall order in which they come into play in spiritual training, namely, *indiraj al-nihayat fi al-bidayat* ("inclusion of the end in the beginning", or as Rasool translates it, "where others end, there marks our beginning", henceforth *INfB*). This approach to spiritual training entails beginning with the purification of the heart before proceeding to the purification of the self, or stated differently, purifying the five *lata'if* of the *'alam-i amr* prior to those of the *'alam-i khalq*. Still another way of describing it is by saying that it is characterized by *jadhba* ("attraction [to God]") rather than *suluk* ("wayfaring"), here meaning to engage in "austerities" with the aim of "conquering the self" (Rasool 2002, pp. 92–93), which is also described as taking a "detailed outward journey" through the ten stations (*maqamat*) (Rasool 2002, p. 48). This principle of beginning with the heart and attraction to God (*jadhba*) is presented as a point of divergence that separates the methodology of Naqshbandi *shaykh*s from the Sufi teachers of earlier times as well as of other contemporary *tariqa*s, who it is explained begin with the difficult and time-consuming task of subduing and wresting control over the *nafs* through *suluk*.

As opposed to an emphasis on *suluk*, the single most important aspect of the inner journey for Rasool is *jadhba*, which we might equate with what Sedgwick has called "emanative pull" (Sedgwick 2017, p. 8). It is the driving force for spiritual travel toward and in God and it is because of *jadhba* that the arduous "detailed outward journey" of purifying the self, that is *suluk*, is shortened and is actually accomplished during the purification of the heart so that "the seeker obtains a general overview of the ten stations as a whole because the blessings have absorbed him or her in love [...]" (Rasool 2010, p. 48). In other words, "in the process of pursuing [...*sayr-i anfusi*, or inner travel, the student is...] simultaneously advancing in [...*sayr-i afaqi*, or outer travel]" (Rasool 2002, p. 93).

The idea centers on the view that purifying the self is a lengthy process which many aspirants might never finish within their lifetime, and thus they would never even be able to begin with purifying the heart. With the assistance of a *shaykh*, however, who has himself already reached the end of this journey, it is held that one may be granted a taste of what awaits them at their destination, by way of the accompaniment (*suhbat*) and non-physical transmission of *baraka* from the *shaykh* (*tawajjuh*). This taste serves to motivate and support the disciple so that while they are purifying their heart, the task of purifying the self becomes easier and is done concurrently with the former, thus the need for such austerities is eliminated and all is accomplished primarily through assigned meditations and recitations.[22] This approach is thus said to have the benefits of being easier and faster in addition to providing greater incentive for the student by offering a taste of the end of the path at the very beginning.

Let us now consider some further implications of the narrative surrounding this late medieval to early modern concept, particularly with regard to the arrival of this lineage of

the Naqshbandiyya to the globalized late twentieth and early twenty-first century context. First, *INfB*, along with other technical terms and practices that did not exist at the time of the Prophet, are considered to have evolved later in response to a particular need. Relying on the narrative of the "corruption of time" (*fasad al-zaman*) (van Gelder 2017), the argument goes that they were not needed during the lifetime of Muhammad and his companions because just being in the Prophet's company or being that temporally close to him was sufficient for bringing about the same levels of spiritual advancement that Sufis have sought through history with the various methods that evolved over time. In one place, after mentioning *INfB*, Rasool alludes to the culmination of this developmental process by saying, again with a scientific framing, that "From the experiments and tests carried out previously by others, it has been revealed that the Naqshbandi Mujaddidi way is nearer in its approach, and that students of this Order reach their destination in less time" (Abdur Rashid and Rasool [1989] 2015, p. 1).

Thus, *INfB* serves as a major selling point for this lineage, in terms of the incentive taste of the end in the beginning and the resulting speed and ease of progress *vis-à-vis* the harsh, rigorous and time-consuming training methods attributed to preceding saints and other *tariqa*s. This narrative, in its interpretation and presentation of history, not only presents the method as more effective, faster and easier, but it also simultaneously guards against accusations of innovation (*bid'a*) from Islamic reformists and modernists while also being appealing to a contemporary educated and largely urban audience in pursuit of authentic *tradition* and personal spiritual experience but also that values the refinement of ideas and spiritual technologies through the empiricism of the scientific method, though not necessarily its materialist insistence on objective rational or physical evidence.

These two aspects of this narrative converge in a discussion of the need for this new approach wherein Rasool quotes Baha' al-Din Naqshband from an unidentified source as saying: "In contrast to seekers of the past, today's students are subject to constant distractions that diminish their yearning, intention, and will power" (Rasool 2002, pp. 93–94). Whether or not we can confirm the attribution of this statement to the fourteenth century eponym of the Naqshbandiyya, living fully seven centuries after the time of the Prophet but just a century before the beginnings of early modernity, it can mean different things to different people, or the same thing to the same person. It might refer to a state of deterioration due to temporal distance from the idealized time of the Prophet, yet to another reader, it might speak to their own busy life in a post-industrial society in the information age. The two are not mutually exclusive understandings and it seems very unlikely that this would have been lost on Rasool and it has clearly not eluded his son who, as seen in his interviews, short videos and low-key public appearances, takes this into account in making the path understandable and personally meaningful for, and thus resonating with, a largely urban, educated and professional constituency in the West as well as globally (Sufi School of Sufi Teaching 2017; Rasool 2002, pp. 92–94; 2010, pp. 47–52).

Indiraj al-Nihayat fi al-Bidayat in Historical Perspective

Considering *INfB* in historical perspective, in the first period, the Prophet Muhammad advocated some degree of self-denial, such as fasting during Ramadan as one of the very pillars of Islam, but clearly denounced complete renunciation from the world (Q 57:27). Nevertheless, as mentioned, many early Muslim mystics practiced asceticism and withdrawal from the world, though toward the end of this phase, we find an inward shift. For instance, for Shaqiq al-Balkhi (d. 810), the path begins with asceticism and taming the lower soul (*nafs*) but culminates in love for God (Nwyia 1991, pp. 213–31). In the second and third periods, it would become increasingly common for Muslim mystics to follow this pattern in enumerating stages of the mystical path, placing the need to subdue the *nafs*, such as through repentance and poverty, at the beginning of the path and proximity and love of God, associated with the heart, at the later stages (e.g., Nicholson [1914] 2002, p, 21; Knysh 2000, p. 97; Schimmel 1975, pp. 109–48). This laid the groundwork for a reversal (centuries later) of this approach of *nafs* first, heart last with the principle of *INfB*, which

would propose the opposite: starting with the heart first (hence, including the end in the beginning).

In the fourth period, we look again to the Kubrawiyya for precursors to later developments in the Mujaddidiyya. The founder-figure of the Kubrawiyya, Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 1221) himself, appears to have been the first person to begin articulating the concept of *INfB*. He addresses the problem of spending one's entire life in the lower stages of the path, never advancing to higher levels, and describes how the Kubrawis rely on attraction to God (*jadhba*) as a faster method for making progress on the path (Meier 1957, p. 285; Buehler 1998, p. 121, fns 81 and 82). This very same description, along with further elements added later on, is found centuries later in the writings of Sirhindi as well as of course Rasool and his two heirs. Still, also in the fourth period, another previously mentioned Kubrawi *shaykh*, Razi, describes what seems to be *INfB* from a different perspective, one also used later by Sirhindi, Rasool and his heirs, as well as other contemporary Mujaddidis. Rather than the *jadhba* mentioned by Kubra, he explains the asserted greater efficacy and speed of Kubrawi *shaykh*s' methods by saying that they begin with the heart in contrast to others who begin work on the *nafs* (Algar 1982, p. 213).

Pertaining to the fourth period, as already mentioned, scholarship on Naqshbandi mystical doctrines and practices could stand to be in a more developed state. So the evolution of the concept of *INfB* during this period, if any occurred at all, is presently a significant knowledge gap. Later generations (viz., at least from Sirhindi onwards) attributed this doctrine to Baha' al-Din Naqshband himself, though since he wrote no works of his own, we cannot know this for certain. A consultation of Parsa's *Qudsiyya* by a skilled Persian linguist might reveal something, but what we do know for certain is that, congruent with the principle of *INfB*'s prioritizing the heart, there was a substantial and undeniable emphasis on the heart in early pre-Mujaddidi Naqshbandi mysticism, as notably evinced in the *Rashahat 'Ayn al-Hayat*'s description of the eleven Naqshbandi principles (Safi 2001, pp. 16–26).

After the early and pre-Mujaddidi phase of the Naqshbandiyya, Sirhindi discusses the concept of *INfB*, he uses the name *INfB* to describe it and he attributes its origin to Baha' al-Din Naqshband. Like Kubra, he refers to emphasizing attraction to God, using the same term *jadhba*, over *suluk* (here referring to arduous practices), as an easier and faster method for making progress on the Sufi path. Yet like Daya, Sirhindi also describes it as prioritizing working on the heart over purifying the *nafs*, and he speaks of *sayr-i afaqi* (wayfaring in the external world, or literally, "wayfaring to the horizon") and *sayr-i anfusi* ("inner wayfaring") in this regard. He also describes it as beginning in the *'alam-i amr* rather than in the *'alam-i khalq* (ter Haar 1992, pp. 31, 79, 108, 138; Buehler 2011, e.g., pp. 139, 181, 233, 246, 267 but esp. 208–12; Alam 2009; 2010a, p. 51).

These are the exact same main elements that Rasool uses in his descriptions of *INfB* as examined above. He and his heirs have passed on the concept of *INfB* and described it in the same way Sirhindi has. But they have also taken advantage of the idea of it being a faster and easier path to appeal to contemporary spiritual seekers with busy lives as well as used the narrative of the development of this concept to present their teachings as the result of a rational, scientific, experience-based and empirical process. Such a presentational or marketing strategy takes advantage of the doctrine as it is without substantially changing the doctrine itself, just while pointing out aspects thereof that could make it appealing to a new audience with new concerns.

Other contemporary Islamic Mujaddidi lineages that make reference to *INfB* usually describe it in similar ways to Sirhindi (and by extension, to Rasool and his heirs as well), using some or all of the above elements (cf. e.g., Ghaffari 2011b; Alam 2009; 2010b, pp. 51–56; Buehler 1998, pp. 120–22, 242–43; Lizzio 1998, p. 202). Enduring key aspects of this doctrine can also be found in the post-*tariqa* category, such as discussions pertaining to *jadhba* and *suluk* (not to mention *nisbat* as well) in the writings of the famed Deobandi scholar, Ashraf Ali Thanwi (d. 1943) (Bashir 2010, pp. 203–5). Even among universalist Hindu-derived lines, major facets of this doctrine remain. Dahnhardt notes that prioritizing *jadhba* over *suluk* "is

particularly evident" and they stress the ease of their approach (Dahnhardt 1999, pp. 203–4). Today, for instance, Shri Ram Chandra Mission (SRCM) refers to their teachings as *sahaj marg*, which they normally translate as the "natural path" (SahajMarg.org), but it can also be rendered as the "easy path".[23] Moreover, a particular emphasis on the heart, which is inherent in the concept of *INfB*, can be found across all four categories of Naqshbandi-related articulations today, including SRCM's "heartfulness meditation" (Heartfulness.org), which leads us to mystical practices as well as the next key term that denotes a particularly Mujaddidi, heart-focused form of meditation.

4. Mystical Practices with the Guidance and Support of the *Shaykh*

After having covered the cosmo-psychological foundation of the especially practice-oriented mysticism of Rasool and his heirs, we now turn to consider the actual mystical practices that they teach. These consist primarily of a meditative method known as *muraqaba* supplemented by the performance of silent recitations of sacred formulae, including *dhikr* as well as other elements of their litany (*wazifa*). Yet for them, the performance of such practices must be accompanied by the guidance and spiritual support of the shaykh, including a relationship of affinity (*nisbat*) with him as well as his non-physical transmission of blessings (*tawajjuh*). Although these seemingly focus on that which leads up to the encounter with God in our definition of mysticism, due to the broader senses of the first two terms (discussed below), they could also be considered as part of the encounter itself as well as that which results from it.

4.1. Muraqaba

Muraqaba ("watchfulness"); which Rasool translates as "meditation" but notes other meanings as being to "wait", "guard" or "protect" as well as "vigilance" and "attentiveness"; is the first practice taught to a new student and it is considered the most important component of this lineage's practices. *Muraqaba* also plays a part of in the narrative wherein the Naqshnandiyya Mujaddidiyya is held to be a comparatively faster and easier path as well as one that is especially suited to modern times. While explaining that past Sufis might have engaged in harsh and austere practices like extended periods of fasting and seclusion; Rasool notes that today all that is required is for the students to devote the necessary time out of their daily schedule, making a temporary renunciation of the world, to simply sit in *muraqaba* and "wait to receive the blessings [*baraka*]" (Rasool 2002, p. 31). In addition to Baha' al-Din Naqshband and the introduction of *INfB*, Rasool credits Sirhindi with having developed the specific methods that rendered "prolonged renunciation unnecessary" and notes that Sayyid 'Abdul Bari Shah (d. 1900), another monumental figure in this particular Mujaddidi line, systematized these even further so that they were "better suited to conditions in the modern world" and "fully compatible with today's lifestyles" (Rasool 2002, pp. 98–99).

To perform *muraqaba*, the student is to cease all physical and mental activity, sit with closed eyes, mentally pronounce an assigned *niyya* ("intention"), direct his or her attention to one or more of the *lata'if* as instructed by the *shaykh*, and then passively wait. As observed at retreats and local meetings, the room is darkened and utterly silent and practitioners typically drape a blanket or shawl over their heads, with some leaving the face exposed while others leave only a small opening for air, seeming to facilitate turning away from the outside world. The student is expected to consistently and punctually perform this temporary seclusion, waiting on a daily basis at the same appointed times (which are associated with Islamic prayer times) and for the prescribed duration (at least thirty to forty-five minutes per sitting). The *shaykh* is understood to provide his *tawajjuh* (the non-physical transmission of blessings [*baraka*] discussed below) to assist in the disciple's spiritual progress while the blessings involved are said to ultimately originate from God and it is for these blessings that the meditator waits. In stating the *niyya*, one turns one's attention to the heart, and later when instructed to do so, the other *lata'if*. In the second part of the intention, that *latifa* or those *lata'if*, as suprasensory organs, are then turned

("*mutawajjih*") so as to be oriented toward "the Holy Essence" in anticipation of the flow of blessings. Later intentions have an additional component of spiritual travel in specific locations in Mujaddidi cosmology and stages on the path (School of Sufi Teaching 2020).

The curriculum of practices said to have been standardized by 'Abdul Bari Shah consists of a series of such intentions for *muraqaba*. These intentions are divided into a set of ten preliminary exercises for awakening each of the ten *lata'if* (School of Sufi Teaching 2016b) followed by the curriculum proper, whose intentions (or transmissions) are divided into groupings known as "circles" (School of Sufi Teaching 2016a). The preliminary practices are assigned prior to becoming an oath-bound student of the *shaykh* and, as an adaptation for the introduction of this lineage to the West and indeed the global stage, they can also be performed by non-Muslims. After these, it is necessary to pledge allegiance (*bay'a*) to the *shaykh* and accept Islam before proceeding to the circles. In South Asia since at least the eighteenth century, Sufi cosmology has often been graphically depicted with complex diagrams consisting of multiple interconnected circles (Hermansen 1992; Zauqi Shah 2010, pp. 130–31). In Rasool's Mujaddidi curriculum, these circles are first, the "circle of possibility" (three transmissions), followed by the "circle of shadows" (seven transmissions), the "circle of lesser intimacy" (two transmissions) and finally, the "circle of greater intimacy" (one transmission) (Rasool 2010, pp. 65–67).

In line with Rasool's strong emphasis on practice over theosophical speculation, the issue of such circles is only briefly discussed (Rasool 2010, pp. 65–67). Nevertheless, the names and content of the circles clearly reflect and draw from preceding Sufi, and specifically Mujaddidi, cosmology and conceptualizations of the path (see below), which might be described as emanationist, thus offering great resonance potential for those with backgrounds in other mystical traditions that are emanationist or share other fundamental similarities, whether Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Kabbalistic, Christian, Vedantic, Taoist, etc. (e.g., Izutsu 1983; Albanese 2007; Sedgwick 2017; Zarrabi-Zadeh 2021). But displaying continuity with preceding Sufi and especially Mujaddidi cosmologies, examining the names of the circles as well as the individual transmissions within them, one can discern a journey that begins with activating the ten *lata'if* and then continues with travel in the sphere of contingent existence, proceeding through the shadows and then the attributes toward the Divine Essence before the return or descent back to the created world (School of Sufi Teaching 2016a).

Returning to resonance, this lineage's strong focus on practice over theory fits well with the experientation of mysticism, and the invitation to simply try the practices and experience them for oneself, without first having to embrace Islam or pledge allegiance to the *shaykh*, is congruent with the rationalization of mysticism in the modern era, not simply performing them because told to do so by a religious authority, as well as its scientification, by a kind of empirical testing of the methods oneself. This is of course compatible with the tendency toward "questing", involving trying out various traditions, so prevalent among Western spiritual seekers (Roof 1999, pp. 9, 82–83), though Rasool notes this trend and criticizes dabbling and then presuming oneself as competent to judge based on such limited experience (Rasool 2002, p. 55). Also quite rational is the fact that there is a set curriculum of intentions, which Abdur Rashid has described as a "spiritual roadmap" based on the cosmo-psychological insights of generations of past Sufis (Abdur Rashid 2013).

The practice-orientation can also appeal to the many seekers in search of concrete spiritual techniques or "technologies" and can also resonate with those who are disenchanted with the New Age lecture circuit. This is also true of the facts that the teachings are provided free of charge, with very clear, consistent and matter of fact explanations that do not seek to "mystify" the audience (Rasool 2002, p. 8) and that, although there is a clear drive to spread the teachings and to present them in ways that are understandable and appealing to prospective students in the West, this is not at the expense of making fundamental modifications to the teachings to pander to new audiences. There is an acceptance of the fact that they will likely attract smaller numbers as a result, but this is done to ensure the integrity of their teachings. Such features contrast with the efforts of some other Sufi

groups to expand to the West[24] as well as more broadly with the commodification and even "McDonaldization"[25] of spirituality (e.g., Milani and Possamai 2013; Ritzer 2018).

But back to inherent resonance, the particular technique of *muraqaba* itself, bears similarity to, and thus potential resonance with, the now highly popular "mindfulness meditation". Not to make light of the actual and significant differences, such as the absence or presence of God, like *muraqaba*, mindfulness meditation usually involves directing one's attention to a particular focal point (like the breath), not becoming involved with passing thoughts and gently returning to the focal point after any noted wandering thoughts (as was instructed at retreats and local meetings of SOST in Germany), though Rasool is clear to point out that it is not the mind that is used in *muraqaba*, but the heart (Rasool 2002, p. 100). On a final note, while visions have been associated with such silent contemplative practice across religious traditions (Rouget 1985, p. 11) and these are not discounted in this lineage, they are also not emphasized, as Rasool states: "If a person sees colors, well and good. If a person does not, that is fine too. The object is to remember God, not to have visions" (Rasool 2002, p. 90; 2010, p. 59), a position that is congruent with the rationalization and de-mystification of mysticism in the modern era (Rasool 2002, pp. 98–102; 2010, pp. 58–59, 64–67, 78–80, 95–105, 114–15, etc.).

Muraqaba in Historical Perspective

In the first period, though without using the word itself, *muraqaba* as turning one's attention away from the mundane world and toward God might be seen as pre-figured in the fundamental Islamic practice of prayer introduced by the Prophet, wherein at least five times a day, Muslims temporarily cease their mundane activities and direct their attention toward God. The simple act of directing one's attention to God was already described with the term *muraqaba* by Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857) (Smith [1935] 1974, pp. 207–11) in the second period and centuries later in the fifth period, it was still used in the same way among the first generation of Naqshbandis (Tosun and Bayraktar 2014a). Moreover, later also in the fifth period, the eleven Naqshbandi principles, as described in the *Rashahat*, place an enormous emphasis on developing a deeply profound awareness of God and maintaining this continuously in daily life while still engaged in one's worldly responsibilities. The heart is given a central role in such awareness (Safi 2001, pp. 16–26).

As for the practice of using a standardized curriculum of intentions for *muraqaba* intended to lead step-by-step through various levels of Sufi cosmology, this may be a late modern development. There is no textual evidence for this before the emergence of the *ma'mulat* genre, which included committing such curricula to writing around the turn of the nineteenth century (Buehler 1998, pp. 234–40; Giordani 2012; Ziad 2016). Yet the cosmological structure the intentions are intended to navigate through is much older and is based on the emanationism and cosmological speculations of early Arab philosophers as well as Sufis. For instance, the idea of dividing existence into the necessary (*wajib*) and the contingent (*mumkin*), thus the circle of possibility (*da'ira-yi imkani*) from which Rasool's first Mujaddidi circle takes its name, can be found as early as Ibn Sina (or Avicenna, d. 1037). Such speculation began in the second period (e.g., Nasr 1964, 1997) and is often understood to have reached its pinnacle in the fourth period, often considered the "golden age" of Sufism or Sufi theosophy, with the likes of Ibn 'Arabi, who had a tremendous impact across the Muslim world, including among the early Naqshbandis (Chittick 1991), as did Rumi (Ridgeon 2012), as well as in South Asia (Chittick 1992), where it would provide a foundation for Sirhindi's thought, such as with the doctrine of the five divine presences (Chittick 1982; Affifi 1939) being perceptible in the general structure of later Mujaddidi meditative exercises (Buehler 2011, pp. 32–36).

Yet well before being later incorporated into the standardized curricula of practices found in the *ma'mulat* genre at the turn of the nineteenth century, such cosmology would continue to be developed and refined upon by later thinkers in the late medieval and early modern eras, notably with the abovementioned concept of *wahdat al-shuhud* ("unity of witnessing", as opposed to the notion of *wahdat al-wujud*, or "unity of existence", that has

become associated with Ibn 'Arabi) in the thought of Simnani in phase five and Sirhindi in phase six, placing particular emphasis on going beyond perceived unity with God to re-realizing differentiation and returning to creation to serve one's fellow man as a moral exemplar (Buehler 1998, pp. 122–25; 2011, pp. 36–39). The notions of *zilliyyat* ("shadowism") as well as *wilayat-i sughra* ("lesser intimacy") and *wilayat-i kubra* ("greater intimacy"), from which the last three circles in the Mujaddidi curriculum of Rasool and his heirs take their names, are drawn directly from Sirhindi's reformist thought in critique of *wahdat al-wujud* (ter Haar 1992; Ansari 1986, pp. 15, 211, 279, 299–300; Buehler 2011, pp. 36–37, 91, 225, 233, 238, 268; Alam 2012).

Today, among Islamic Mujaddidi branches, there seem to be two general and non-mutually exclusive trends pertaining to mystical practices: (1) those who center more around collective activities like group *dhikr* along with a private daily litany (*wazifa*), are not publicly known to have set curricula for *muraqaba* and may be characterized by a more distant allegiance and devotion to the *shaykh*, examples of which might be the Haqqaniyya (e.g., Böttcher 2011; Atay 1994) or the Ghamkol Sharif community (Werbner 2003; Ghamkol-Sharif.org), and (2) those who are known to follow some form of set curriculum for *muraqaba* leading through the various levels of Sufi cosmo-psychology, supplemented by a personal *wazifa* and which may involve the personalized guidance or direction of the *shaykh* or his[26] *khalifa* in carrying out such practice, like Rasool and his heirs or the Hakimabad Khanaqah (Hakimabad.com), Sayfiyya (Lizzio 1998, pp. 243–49; Buehler 1998, pp. 249–53), Tariqa Naqshbandiyya wa Qadiriyya (Widiyanto 2012, pp. 162–66), the extremely numerous yet very under- or un-studied lines tracing back to Fazal 'Ali Shah Qureshi (d. 1935) (e.g., Ghaffari 2011b; IslahulMuslimeen.org; Tasawwuf.co; Zikr.co.uk; Tazkiya.org; Murshid-Hussain.com; BeautyofIslam.org; Khanqah-e-Naqshband.com; IslaheNafs.org) or even the non-Mujaddidi Naqshbandi Owaisiyya (Awan 2009; see also Buehler 2015).[27] Buehler's theory of the mediating *shaykh* points to the former trend, while his label of directing *shaykh* points to the latter (Buehler 1998). Interestingly, among some Hindu-derived lines, like SRCM's abovementioned "heartfulness meditation", one finds a meditative practice that, on a very fundamental level, is similar to that taught by Islamic Mujaddidi branches, and the heart *chakra* plays a central role in this practice, though apparently without the step-by-step guided travel through Mujaddidi cosmo-psychology. This formlessness is also true among those tracing back to Irina Tweedie, such as Vaughan-Lee or Annette Kaiser, who describes her teachings as "*dem pfadlosen Pfad der Liebe*" (or "the pathless path of love") (AnnetteKaiser.ch). Similarly, although likewise without a curriculum of intentions, the passive receptivity of Subud's *latihan* also bears a fundamental similarity to *muraqaba* that might bespeak the founder's Mujaddidi (Khalidi) background (Widiyanto 2012; Geels 1997; Subud.com). While there are not known to be any set curricula for meditation in the post-*tariqa* category, the most important source for these curricula remain important, as the collected letters and other writings of Sirhindi were highly influential on the thought of Said Nursi (d. 1960) and Gülen and are also widely read by Deobandi scholars (Bashir 2010, p. 38) as well as Sulaymançis (Jonker 2006, p. 74).

4.2. Dhikr

Literally meaning "remembrance", there are two main senses in which Rasool uses the word *dhikr*. The first refers to the recitation of specific formulae, but second, it also denotes continuously maintaining God in one's awareness throughout daily life. The first sense is a technique intended to lead to the attainment of the second sense. *Dhikr* as the practice of recitation includes various methods, each of which is to be prescribed by the *shaykh* who assigns different formulae to be repeated at certain times of day and for a specific number of iterations (Rasool 2002, p. 108) which, as observed at retreats and local meetings, is often counted with the aid of a string of beads (*tasbih*) being silently passed through the fingers. While *dhikr* is considered the main practice of many Sufi lineages, for Rasool and his heirs, these and other recitations play more of a supplementary role in relation to the central practice of *muraqaba*. One particularly significant formula is the *dhikr-i nafy*

wa ithbat ("remembrance of negation and affirmation"). This involves the repetition of "*La ilaha illa Allah*" ("There is no god but God") broken up into segments, with different movements, strokes or "strikes" (sg. *darb*), which ultimately land on the heart, being visualized within the body. Another major formula is *dhikr-i ism-i dhat* ("remembrance of the name of the [divine] essence"), which consists of repeating "*Allah*" (Rasool 2002, p. 104; 2010, p. 58). Such recitations are intended to bring about a constant remembrance of God in the practitioner's life, even when not engaged in recitation and in fact, at all times no matter what one is doing. In this sense, it is explained that *dhikr* is more than a routinized ritual, it is "an exalted *psychological state* that becomes part of a human being's *consciousness* [emphases added...] and an integral part of that person's being" (Rasool 2002, pp. 106–7; 2010, pp. 56–58).

But to shift gears back from results to practices, while not usually referred to under the label of *dhikr*, the practices of reciting *al-Fatiha*, *durud* and *khatm*, which together with *muraqaba* and *dhikr* constitute the five main practices of this lineage (Rasool 2010, p. 100), are briefly discussed here given the fact that they involve assigned recitations and are also all part of the *wazifa*. To discuss these briefly in turn, first, *al-Fatiha* is the opening *sura* of the Qur'an, which includes praising God and asking for guidance along "the straight path". It is recited with each cycle (*rak'a*) of Islamic prayer, appears in various situations of daily life and is also very commonly encountered in Sufi litanies. Next, *durud sharif*; also called *salawat*, *tasliya* or simply *durud*; denotes supplications for blessings upon the Prophet and his family. It is considered polite to make such a supplication when mentioning the Prophet in conversation and *salawat* are also made during ritual prayer. Here such invocations for blessings are recited as a mystical practice in and of itself. Lastly, the *khatm* involves honoring the saints of the *silsila*; mentioning two of these specifically by name, Sirhindi and 'Abdul Bari Shah.

Considering resonance and damping, obviously with *mantra*s and personal affirmations as prominent fixtures of contemporary alternative spiritualities, chanting sacred formulae (often in foreign languages) is not an unfamiliar practice for many. Yet the religious, and specifically Islamic, character of such recitations may act as a source of damping in light of the trend toward the emancipation of mysticism from religion in the modern era and the anti-exotericism among many spiritual seekers in the West, not to mention prejudices about Islam, especially in the post-9/11 era. Still, the path was paved in advance for accepting Sufism as Islamic by the prevalence of Traditionalist literature, such as by Martin Lings or Seyyed Hossein Nasr,[28] which upholds the inseparability of Sufism from Islam along with a search for authenticity leading seekers curious about Sufism, or the "Sufi 'flavored' teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff" (Dickson 2015, pp. 83–86), to Muslim *shaykh*s. Even more significantly, among Rasool and his heirs, the lack of pressure to convert to Islam, gradualism in the process of conversion,[29] if one chooses to do so, and the focus on the inner meaning of the revelation over extreme literalism help to neutralize such damping potential.

But this is also specifically negotiated through framing, and for a significant example related to *durud*, in the PDF instructions provided to students, their potential apprehensions are acknowledged but, rather than emphasizing Muhammad as an historical figure, they highlight him as "the complete man, the archetype and model of your own perfection" (School of Sufi Teaching 2011, pp. 2–3). This makes use of the possibility for resonance between the classical Sufi doctrine of *al-insan al-kamal* ("the perfect [or complete] person") and the quest to actualize one's latent inner potential in the HPM and more broadly among contemporary spiritual seekers in the West, including with a seeming nod to Jungian archetypes. As learned at group meetings in Germany, while prospective students who are Muslim are often assigned both *muraqaba* and *durud*, non-Muslims are generally not instructed to perform *durud* until later. In the researcher's case, he was not assigned this practice at all during the course of the research.

But specifically on the issue of silent versus vocal *dhikr*, in Rasool's Mujaddidi line, recitations are traditionally performed silently, and sobriety is particularly emphasized.

Such sobriety over ecstatic displays,[30] which is often considered a defining characteristic of the Naqshbandiyya and also typifies *muraqaba*, has the inherent potential to appeal to more reserved and rationally oriented spiritual seekers. This is not to mention how, although the practices are performed collectively at regular gatherings and retreats, they are still mostly performed privately, thus offering inherent resonance with the individualization of mysticism in the modern era. But now we go back in time to consider the historical trajectory of *dhikr* and the remainder of the *wazifa* (Rasool 2002, pp. 104–8; 2010, pp. 56–58).

Dhikr in Historical Perspective

Beginning in the first period, the Qur'an itself often exhorts to remembering (*dh-k-r*) God (e.g., Q 13:28; 29:45; 33:41; 43:36). In the second period, with the abovementioned al-Tustari, we find the word *dhikr* ("remembrance") being used to describe the practice of silently repeating a word formula as a means of carrying out such remembrance and perhaps for the first time, connecting it with the spiritual heart (Green 2012, p. 34). Through this and the third period, various methods of *dhikr*, as the devotional practice of recitation, would develop and in the fourth period, different *tariqa*s emerged who would propagate their own particular litanies and distinctive approaches to performing *dhikr* (Trimingham 1971, pp. 194–217; Knysh 2000, pp. 317–22). In the fifth period, the Kubrawi Simnani advised a method of silent *dhikr* using an already very common formula, "*La ilaha illa Allah*", but dividing it up into different strokes, with the last of which landing on the heart (Elias 1995, pp. 126–29). The Naqshbandiyya itself also emerged in the fifth period and variations of Simnani's distinctive method would also be later adopted by early Naqshbandis, such as being described in the *Rashahat* under the Naqshbandi principle of *yad-kard* ("remembering") (Safi 2001, pp. 19–21) and also later by Taj al-Din, the abovementioned rival of Sirhindi to be the successor to their *shaykh* Baqi Billah.[31] It would also be used by Mujaddidis up to the present day.[32]

Moreover, from the emergence of the Naqshbandiyya, silent *dhikr* was ostensibly a defining characteristic, yet even in the first generation after the founder, there were differing perspectives as to whether and under what circumstances vocalized *dhikr* was permissible (e.g., Weismann 2007, pp. 25–27). Nevertheless, generally Sufi as well as early Naqshbandi and later Mujaddidi litanies up to the present, whether performed aloud or silently, privately or collectively, often include (1) standard *dhikr* formulae drawn from Qur'anic language as well as (2) recitation of verses from the Qur'an, (3) recitations to honor the saints of their *silsila* as well as other important figures and (4) supplications for blessings upon the Prophet (e.g., Meier 1994, pp. 192–98; Kabbani 2004b, pp. 158–88; Alam 2010b; Ahmad 2017). Rasool and his heirs also follow this same pattern for their litany. On a fundamental but significant level, these are the same practices performed for the same basic reasons and sometimes using even the exact same words. *Dhikr* also endures among post-*tariqa* groups, such as the *dhikr* gatherings of the Milli Gorüs and Sulaymançis (Jonker 2006, p. 73; VIKZ.de; Jonker 2014). Whether under the name of *dhikr* or not, the recitation of sacred formulae also exists in one form or another among universalists, such as how Ali-Shah prescribed Islamic *dhikr* formulae (Sedgwick 2017, p. 217) or how *dhikr* endured as the practice of *japa* (a Sanskrit term denoting recitations performed among the various Indic religions) among Hindu lines (Dahnhardt 1999, pp. 237–56), such as how Tweedie was instructed in *japa*, including the recitation of "*La-il-llillah* [sic]" (Tweedie [1979] 1988, p. 174).

4.3. Tawajjuh

We now finally turn to the last key term, namely *tawajjuh*, but alongside it we also discuss *nisbat* in its second main sense, as both relate to the student's relationship with the *shaykh*, much like how Rasool deals with them together, as two related aspects of how spiritual training is understood to be imparted (Rasool 2002, pp. 94–97; 2010, pp. 52–54). *Tawajjuh* has the literal meaning of "to turn toward" or "to face", or as Rasool translates it, "spiritual attention" or "spiritual transmission". The term *tawajjuh* can be understood

more broadly as the focusing or turning of a person's attention and/or the turning of the orientation of a particular *latifa* (or combination of *lata'if*) toward a person, place or thing, and subsequently either (1) the passive reception of *baraka* or (2) the active transmission thereof. The first passive sense would be performed by the student every time they meditate. Yet the far more common use of *tawajjuh* in Rasool's writings is to indicate the attention of the *shaykh* towards his students to actively transmit *baraka* to facilitate their spiritual progress along the path. Such transmission is understood to be non-physical and not dependent on geographical proximity.

The second meaning of *nisbat* is the affinity which develops between human beings, primarily with reference to the *shaykh*. A *nisbat* between a disciple and the *shaykh*, who is understood to have already reached an affinity with God, is seen as a means for the disciple to attain a *nisbat* with God. Rasool states that since all Sufi *shaykh*s and orders trace their lineages back to the Prophet, they received their *nisbat* from him (Rasool 2010, p. 46). Thus, the disciple who develops an affinity with the *shaykh*, is seen as the benefactor of a *nisbat* which is said to have been passed along through a chain of successor *shaykh*s leading back to the Prophet. It is this affinity with the *shaykh* that is believed to facilitate the pupil's training through *tawajjuh* and the awakening of the *lata'if* and to allow the disciple to "realize their full potential and [be] transformed" (Rasool 2010, p. 50).

Rasool includes the concepts of *tawajjuh* and *nisbat* (in its second sense), in spite of their damping potential with respect to rationalization as well as the apprehensions of some spiritual seekers in the West toward religious authority, because they are indispensable in this lineage's mysticism and have thus not been abandoned in the Western setting. This too is likely possible due to not only inertial perpetuation and the crystallization of tradition, such as especially in the teachings of Sirhindi, but also to intrinsic compatibilities as well as successful negotiation. The notion of *baraka*, for instance, could naturally seem familiar to Western spiritual seekers with a background in Qi Gong or Yoga, perhaps seeing parallels to the concepts of *chi* or *prana*. Also, the non-physical transmission of *baraka* between individuals could appeal to those with an interest in "psi phenomena", yet Rasool expresses concern with those who view Sufism "through an occultist lens" and are drawn to it in search of such phenomena (Rasool 2002, p. 2).

Moreover, not only does the trend of following Eastern spiritual teachers in the West, which became especially popular in the 1960s (e.g., the Beatles and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, d. 2008), help make it more normal to follow the guidance of a *shaykh*, but in this lineage, he is seen not as an utterly distant and unquestioned authority figure. Seeming to refer to Buehler's mediating *shaykh*, Rasool laments how the role of the Sufi *shaykh* has sometimes "received undue emphasis" and become "more of a hindrance than a help" (Rasool 2002, p. 78). Instead, while upholding the necessity of the *shaykh*'s *tawajjuh* and having a *nisbat* with him, he highlights the *shaykh*'s role as a teacher, who provides "a full course of structured study and training" which the student should follow just as they would at a university (Rasool 2002, p. 75). He is seen as one who has travelled the path before and who now acts as a teacher and guide for students travelling that same path, but one who also serves as a connection to the *silsila* of saints leading back to the Prophet and ultimately to God. He furthermore makes certain to point out, however, that while the student "takes direction from a shaykh, [...] he or she submits to God, not to a human being" (Rasool 2002, p. 78). Additionally, the students' relationship with this guide is more outwardly informal and toned-down as compared with some other Sufi lineages, emphasizing the inner spiritual relationship, the heart-to-heart bond (*rabita*) and attitude toward the *shaykh* over outward formalities, like initiation through the pledging of allegiance (*bay'a*) to the *shaykh* and external expressions of etiquette (*adab*) (Rasool 2002, pp. 74–82). Such a low-key approach to the place of the spiritual guide has the potential to resonate well in European and American contexts (Rasool 2002, pp. 94–98; 2010, pp. 43, 46–47 and 53–54).

Tawajjuh in Historical Perspective

The authority and intercessory power of the *shaykh* was prefigured by the Prophet Muhammad, but after the "Seal of the Prophets", a vacuum was created that needed to be filled. Actually, due to his multi-faceted character as a political, military and spiritual leader, etc., multiple vacuums were created. With regard to spiritual leadership, among his earliest heirs in this capacity, we might look to preachers like al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), who are sometimes regarded as among the predecessors of Sufism (e.g., Knysh 2000, pp. 10–13). Moving into the second period with the early development of Sufism, we find circles of thinkers who gathered loosely and informally around a teacher figure, esp. in Baghdad and Basra (Schimmel 1975, pp. 42–77; Knysh 2000, pp. 43–67; Karamustafa 2007, pp. 1–42; Green 2012, pp. 24–41), as well as the development of the notion of sainthood (Radtke and O'Kane 1996). In the third period, prefiguring the doctrine/practice of *nisbat*, the need for a teacher in one's quest to become closer to God becomes understood as a standard and necessary requirement, such as noted by al-Qushayri (Baldick [1989] 2012, p. 63). Similarly, prefiguring *tawajjuh*, tales of saintly miracles and intercession take on a greater prominence, such as those surrounding the figure of Abu al-Hassan Kharaqani (d. 1033) (Nicholson [1914] 2002, pp. 61, 96–99). In the fourth period, after the status of the *shaykh* had been increasingly elevated over the course of the preceding periods, his role became properly institutionalized with the emergence of the *tariqa*s (Malik 2006, pp. 6–8; Schimmel 1975, pp. 228–58; Knysh 2000, pp. 150–244; Baldick [1989] 2012, pp. 69–85; Karamustafa 2007, pp. 114–55; Green 2012, pp. 81–103).

The term *tawajjuh* itself was employed at least from the early Naqshbandis, who emerged in the fifth period and used *tawajjuh* and *muraqaba* nearly synonymously at this point (Tosun and Bayraktar 2014a). Yet during the sixth period, at least as early as Sirhindi himself, we find the terms *tawajjuh* and *nisbat* both being used in the very same senses (ter Haar 1992, pp. 31–32, 40, 45, 77, 84, 91, 107, 109, 111, 174, 176) they are used by later Mujaddidis as well as our case study lineage and other contemporary Mujaddidi branches who use those words (e.g., Lizzio 1998; Chodkiewicz 1990; Meier 1994). In universalist lineages, the need for a guide, whether called a *shaykh*, a guru or something else, continues and *tawajjuh* might be seen as fundamentally synonymous with the Sanskrit term found among some Hindu-derived lines, *pranahuti* (rendered as "Yogic transmission" or "transmission of life force" (Zeng 2017; SriRamChandra.org 1999; SahajMarg.org 2002). In the post-*tariqa* category, although there is no longer a living *shaykh* to provide guidance and spiritual transmission of *baraka*, past *shaykh*s may be revered, like among the Sulamançis (Jonker 2006, pp. 77–78), and there are also still individuals who hold leadership positions whose direction and spiritual guidance could be seen as analogous to that of a *shaykh*, whether that be leaders in a religio-social movement, like Gülen's Hizmet, or teachers and mentors at a *dar al-'ulum*, like Deoband or Nadwatul Ulama.

5. Conclusions

Having examined the main mystical doctrines and practices of an Islamic Sufi lineage that expanded to the West and then globally among those of both Muslim and non-Muslim background, we have demonstrated substantial continuity with the trajectory of development of its main mystical doctrines and practices in the history of Sufism as well as much common ground with other related lineages, including especially "transplants", who have been held to adhere to a Sufism that more or less resembles that in their places of origin. This seems to have been possible because, in addition to the crystallization of tradition in the teachings of such major figures as Sirhindi and the resulting inertial perpetuation, there were already in fact more areas of resonance than damping, and the former were capitalized upon and underscored, while the latter were successfully negotiated and dealt with in a manner that did not require substantial change. The mysticism Rasool had to offer was already much what his audience in the West was looking for, thus negating the need for significant modification. The fact that he and his heirs have presented it as rational, scientific, experiential and suitable for modern lifestyles, or made use of language

from the HPM, such as discovering one's inner potential, personal transformation and elevating one's consciousness, to culturally translate their teachings, highlight inherent compatibilities and make them understandable and appealing for new audiences, does not entail a fundamental alteration of their core mystical doctrines and practices.

With regard to NRMs, Clarke argues that the label of "New" need not necessarily indicate the inclusion of entirely new innovations in doctrine and practice, but may refer to breaks from traditional understandings (Clarke 2006a, p. ix). Yet as just argued, in the case of Rasool and his heirs, such breaks have not occurred and framing or presentational strategies have not entailed a substantial departure from earlier Mujaddidi tradition in terms of the major contours of their core mystical doctrines and practices. This raises the question of whether or not other Sufi lineages, or religious traditions generally, that have been transferred to new settings and among new demographics are really as new or different as preceding studies on them have declared when viewed from other perspectives, such as through the lens of mysticism. It seems necessary to acknowledge both change and continuity wherever they exist, but also to explore the dynamics behind them, understanding the complex interactions both within a transferred tradition as well as between it and its new environment.

Notes

[1]   Mark Sedgwick also uses the term neo-Sufism in a similar sense, such as in his contribution "Neo-Sufism" in *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, edited by Hammer and Rothstein (Sedgwick 2012), though he perhaps more prominently uses the label of "Western Sufism" (Sedgwick 2017). Yet the term neo-Sufism has also been used quite differently, and with lively academic discussion (O'Fahey and Radtke 1993; Radtke 1994; Hoffmann 1999; Voll 2008; Saghaee 2018; Khodamoradi 2019), to describe eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Sufi reformist currents, including significant personalities in the Mujaddidi *silsila* of our case study lineage. Thus, if both terms are accepted, some scholarship might label them as "neo-Sufi" twice, first around the turn of the nineteenth century and again around the turn of the twenty-first century.

[2]   On this point, Hammer astutely observes a trend toward personal inner experience ascending over correct practice of ritual observances (Hammer 2004, pp. 139, 141–42). Yet it must be questioned whether or not such "experientation" (discussed further below) has really resulted in significant changes to actual doctrines and practices. On the "rhetoric of experience", its intellectual geneology and a critique of its usage to shield from external critique, see Sharf (2000). See also Sharf (1995).

[3]   Such a perspective shift was inspired by Khodamoradi (2019).

[4]   This tripartite definition appears in Zarrabi-Zadeh (2008, p. 86; 2015, 2016). It is based upon the definition used by (McGinn 1999). While it may be tempting to try to divide each of the key terms examined below into only one of the three parts of this definition, the matter is not so simple, since most of the terms discussed relate to all three categories. Instead, this definition was used as a sieve to help discern what does or does not constitute mysticism while collecting the key terms.

5   Although the Mujaddidiyya is the main sub-branch of the Naqshbandiyya, Rasool and his heirs provide two different Naqshbandi *silsila*s: one Mujaddidi and one not, with the latter involving a claim to spiritual (*uwaysi*) initiation from the founder figure of the *tariqa*.

6   While this lineage has thus far eluded the attention of studies devoted specifically to the topic of Sufism in the West, two doctoral dissertations by scholar-practitioners in the fields of architecture and design were produced in conceptualizing the scheme of the *lata'if* through visual geometry and designing Rasool's tomb (Nosyreva 2014) as well as SOST's Sufi Centre in London (Nasser 2019, 2022).

7   The ethnographic research among SOST primarily took place in Germany, happenstantially coinciding with the beginning of their expansion to this country. It involved participant observation and interviews at four annual retreats in Bavaria from 2015 to 2018 when the *shaykh* visited as well as at local weekly group meetings in Munich and Nuremburg, but also remotely, such as through Zoom or WhatsApp. A special feature of this research is that it included following the approach to studying mysticism advocated by Frits Staal (Staal 1975, pp. 121ff) as well as performed, for instance, by Gustavo A. Ludueña (Ludueña 2005), with the researcher actually attempting the practices himself throughout the duration of the research under the instruction of the current *shaykh* of SOST, Hamid Hasan. This is not as unprecedented as it may seem, since other research projects on Sufism in the West have been written by oathbound members of the groups they studied (Habibis 1985; Atay 1994; Hazen 2011). While the current researcher sought to diligently perform the meditative practice assigned to him by the *shaykh* on a daily basis throughout the research, he remained in a liminal status, still being an outsider in the senses that he was a researcher and that he neither pledged *bay'a* nor converted to Islam. Moreover, to have some comparison with SOST's Sufism in its place of immediate origin, the research also incorporated an excursion to India in 2016, with travel to Delhi, Sirhind and Hyderabad, where the researcher attended a retreat presided over by the *shaykh*. The research among Abdur Rashid and his students was of a different character, involving four separate visits to the World Community in the US from 2017 to 2019 in which the main focus was on interviews, including with students but especially with the *shaykh*, who was very generous with his time. It also involved email correspondence for further clarification as well as a consultation of Abdur Rashid's vast output of lectures and other literature, which has been examined separately in another article (Asbury and Zarrabi-Zadeh 2022).

8   When asked about this difference, Hamid Hasan explained that the segregation of genders (*purdah*) was adhered to during the Hyderabad retreat because it was the norm for this particular area. At the end of the retreat, the researcher shared a taxi to the airport with two participants, one of whom was one of the two females who had been in attendance. She explained that there are other groups in India that in many ways resemble more what was encountered in Germany, including both genders interacting freely.

9   Although the options for shrine visitation in Europe and North America are limited, there are some possibilities, such as the *mazar*s of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (d. 1986) in Pennsylvania or 'Abdul Wahab Siddiqi (d. 1994) in the UK. Abdur Rashid also mentioned sanctified persons who were laid to rest at the World Community's cemetery, among whom is now another American *shaykh*, 'Abdullah Nooruddeen Durkee (d. 2020). On pilgrimage among Muslims in Europe, including to Sufi shrines, see Flaskerud and Natvig (2017).

10   With her background in Theosophy, Tweedie's account of her Sufi training makes clear that she was in search of and understood her teacher, Bhai Sahib, at least initially, as a representative of Blavatsky's "Great Brotherhood" (Tweedie [1979] 1988, pp. 24–25, 28, 36). Furthermore, Subud, Omar Ali-Shah, Idries Shah, Itlaq Yolu and active Sufi *tariqa*s, like our case study lineage or the Haqqaniyya or the Mevlevi branches tracing back to Suleyman Loras (d. 1985), all owe some degree of the interest in them in the West to a search for the source of Gurdjieff's teachings. For a coherent account, see Sedgwick (2017, pp. 176–85, 194–202, 208–21, 246–48). Rasool even includes a section on Gurdjieff in his *Turning Toward the Heart* (pp. 24–25). See also Pittman (2012) and Maltabarova (2022).

11   For a comprehensive survey of these and other typologies, see Zarrabi-Zadeh (2019).

12   Some of these, namely Subud and certain Hindu-derived lines, technically fall completely outside of this four-fold typology, since they neither embrace Islam nor claim Naqshbandi identify despite Naqshbandi origins. Yet rather than creating a fifth category of "universalist/post-*tariqa*", it seemed most appropriate to group these with the universalists.

13   The two categories in which Naqshbandi and Islamic identity converge, Sufism 1st and Islam 1st, relate more to the students themselves. If the lineage seeks to attract non-Muslim spiritual seekers with Sufism, then they are Sufism 1st for those students, but are simultaneously Islam 1st for their Muslim student base.

14   For some important points of clarity before proceeding, describing the internal logic of a mystical tradition, as is done here, does not constitute validating or advocating those beliefs and practices. Moreover, demonstrating continuity with the past is no more authenticating a tradition than demonstrating discontinuity is de-authenticating it. As Westerlund observes, "it is not the duty of scholars to decide which kind of Sufism is authentic or not" (Westerlund 2004, p. 12).

15   Audio recording of Hasan speaking at the 2017 SOST retreat in Poland, courtesy of Ilya Uglava.

16   It may not have been Ibn 'Arabi's actual thought that Sirhindi was criticizing, but rather his understanding of it in light of the South Asian reception of the notion of *wahdat al-wujud* as *hama ust* ("everything is He", as opposed to *hama az ust*, or "everything is from He"), in which it had come to be associated with antinomianism, heterodox beliefs and religious syncretism (Khodamoradi 2012).

17   An example where God seems to have been deemphasized in favor of psychologization and a quest for personal effectiveness is in the works of Omar Ali-Shah (e.g., Ali-Shah [1992] 1998, 1995).

18   Concerning a similar relationship with Buddhism and science, see Lopez (2008).

19   On *ruh* and *nafs*, see Macdonald (1932).

20   On the *lata'if*, see esp. Buehler (1998, pp. 103–20).

21   Also see Gülen's two-part article "Qalb (Heart)" as well as "The Spirit and What Follows", "Sir (Secret)" and "The Horizon of 'the Secret' and What Lies Beyond", available at FGulen.com.

22   Schimmel describes *INfB* as follows: "It is not the long periods of mortification but the spiritual purification, the education of the heart instead of the training of the lower soul, that are characteristic of the Naqshbandiyya method" (Schimmel 1975, p. 366).

23   Dahnhardt also notes the parallel between the Hindu notion of *sahaja* and the Mujaddidi idea of *jadhba* being easier and faster than *suluk* (Dahnhardt 1999, p. 242).

24   Consider the abovementioned apparent appropriation of the enneagram. See also Draper (2004).

25   I am thankful to Thomas K. Gugler for introducing me to this concept.

26   The use of male pronouns in relation to *shaykh*s is only meant to facilitate readability as well as to reflect the vast majority of Mujaddidi cases. This is not in any way intended to discount the many distinguished *shaykha*s or the even more numerous female Sufi practitioners, Mujaddidi or otherwise (cf. e.g., Böttcher 1998; Fonseca Chagas 2013; Buehler 2016, pp. 189–210).

27   There is no single standard curriculum of intentions for all Mujaddidi branches, though all clearly draw from the thought of Sirhindi. Those descending from Shah Ghulam 'Ali (d. 1824), however, seem to be the most common and standardized between lineages. For Bayraktar's partial translation of Ghulam 'Ali's *Risala al-Muraqaba* on this topic, see Malik (2020, pp. 352–56). For a discussion based on the broader contents of his *Durr al-Ma'arif*, see Fusfeld (1981, pp. 90–106).

28   I am grateful to Katya Nosyreva for pointing this out to me. On Traditionalism, see Sedgwick (2004).

29   A significant example of such gradualism at the collective level is the very first retreat to take place in Germany in 2017. It was held in a Catholic abbey on an island in the Chiemsee that also hosts retreats for other non-traditional forms of spirituality, like Yoga and Qi Gong, thus providing a familiar and religiously neutral environment for prospective non-Muslim students. Also of note, while the various practices follow immediately after different Islamic prayers, during the first retreat, Muslim students performed their prayers in a separate room before coming together with the non-Muslim participants to perform *muraqaba* or other practices collectively. This seems to have been a testing of the waters in this new majority non-Muslim country, so as not to frighten off or overwhelm non-Muslim participants. At subsequent retreats, prayers and *muraqaba* were performed in the same room with all present. Furthermore, the choice of venue also demonstrates how, as Hammer noted, "The success of a movement often has to do with its successful marketing strategies, and not least its ability to expand its membership by exploiting pre-existing social networks" (Hammer 2004, p. 143). Interestingly, we met a group of universalist Mujaddidis in Tweedie's line who were also at the abbey but were holding a Qi Gong seminar. Moreover, just days before this retreat, Hamid Hasan appeared for a bookreading of the German translation of *Turning Toward the Heart*. Significant for understanding his initial target audience, this was held at a Sufi center in Munich that is affiliated with the universalist Sufism of Inayat Khan.

30   On the dichotomy of sober versus intoxicated Sufism, see Mojaddedi (2003).

31   For a translated description of this *dhikr* according to Taj al-Din, see Trimingham (1971, p. 202). The original manuscript can be viewed at the Cambridge Digital Library. Islamic Manuscripts: Epistle on the Customs of the Naqshbandiyya Order. Available online: http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-01073/12 (accessed on 8 January 2018).

32   Cf. e.g., Lesson 8 of Ghaffari (2011b) or Tazkiya.org (2013).

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Article

Contemporary Art and Sufi Aesthetics in European Contexts

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Abstract: This article examines the work of seven contemporary artists whose aesthetics exemplify the "lived" experience of Islamic mysticism or Sufism (Arabic *tasawwuf*) within a European context. The work of artists born in Islamic majority countries and familiar with "traditional" Sufi idioms and discourses, but now immersed in Western culture, is often associated with "diasporic art". From this hybrid perspective some of their artistic narratives reconfigure or even subvert the "traditional" Sufi idioms, and do so in such a way as to provoke a more profound sensory experience in the viewer than traditional forms of art. Drawing upon recent methodological tendencies inspired by the "aesthetic turn", this study explores post- and decolonial ways of thinking about Sufi-inspired artworks, and the development of a transcultural Sufi-inspired aesthetic within the context of migration and displacement over the last half-century.

Keywords: Sufism; contemporary art; aesthetic turn; diasporic art; decoloniality; migration; transculturality

1. Introduction

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Islamic mysticism, or Sufism (*tasawwuf*)[1], has spread extensively throughout European society, engendering new cultural forms. Contemporary art has not only vastly extended the traditional boundaries of aesthetic culture; it is also drawing upon a far more variegated range of bodily and sensory experiences. Traditionally, Sufis have often fostered the arts within Islamic societies, whether it be music, poetry, painting, or calligraphy. Today's Sufis, whilst still practicing these traditional mediums, also express themselves through plastic and visual arts, photography performative arts, architecture, and even more exotic forms of art such as hip hop and rap (cf. Akbarnia 2018, pp. 197–217).

In this article I examine the work of seven contemporary artists who engage with the applied aesthetics of the "lived" Sufi experience (Streib et al. 2008, pp. ix–xiii), often based on immediate sensation or intuition. The approach is supported by a more "participatory" definition of "aesthetics" to present insights into works of art inspired by Sufi mysticism. Mysticism provides a religious and aesthetic framework through which to articulate subjective sense experience and feeling—internal sensations that manifest externally. Particular attention is accordingly paid to the idiom used by the artists to translate their mystical experience(s), whether it be through text, image or sound (Schmidt 2016).

The works of art are viewed as manifestations of transcultural frames of reference (Freyre 1986), as matrices where cultural elements are shared and entanglements take place. It focuses on the work of artists, many born in Islamic majority countries, who are familiar with "traditional" Sufi idioms and discourses, but are now immersed in Western culture, a milieu often associated with "diasporic art" (cf. Svašek 2012). This hybrid cultural background allows them to extend the Sufi vocabulary beyond its original confines and to develop new narratives, reconfiguring and at times even subverting the original idioms. The increasing worldwide cross-fertilization of cultures is also to be seen in the context of migration and displacement, exile and trauma, which underpin many contemporary artistic forms of expression (Bal 2008, p. 37). The influx of converts to a number of Sufi orders and the practice of some Sufi communities not to require their followers to formally convert

to Islam has also led to a degree of cultural and religious fluidity. This fluidity makes contemporary Sufism a dynamic case study within the evolving landscape of contemporary Islam.

The research builds upon current theories and previous research on Islamic art[2] and aesthetics (ancient Greek *aisthetikos*, "relating to sense perception") (e.g., Grabar 1977; Necipoğlu 2015; Tabbaa 2001). The term "aesthetics" was coined by the eighteenth-century German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) who in his work *Aesthetica* (part 1, 1750; part 2, 1758) established a new science of knowledge based on the senses. Baumgarten defined aesthetics as a "science of sense-based cognition" (*scientia cognitionis sensitivae*, §1), which was synthesized in the *Critique of Judgment* by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), hugely influential in the development of western aesthetics. By the 19th century this understanding had been narrowed and aesthetics was associated with a normative philosophy of art and beauty.

While the term "aesthetics" has no direct Arabic equivalent,[3] José Miguel Puerta Vílchez's pioneering *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe: Al-Andalus y la estética árabe clásica* (translated as *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought: From Pre-Islamic Arabia Through Al-Andalus*, see Puerta Vílchez 1997) showed that medieval Islamic thinkers' contribution to Arab humanism helped shape the field of aesthetics in the West.[4] Some scholars such as Oludamini Ogunnaike (following Seyyed Hossein Nasr 1997; and Titus Burckhardt 1985) argue that "In fact, beauty is a criterion of the authentically Islamic. There is nothing Islamic that is not beautiful", adding that "Islamic arts . . . serve as a ladder from the terrestrial to the celestial, from the sensory to the spiritual" (Ogunnaike 2017, pp. 1–15). Yet this "traditional" approach has its limitations, and other scholars have sought to apply a wider socio-cultural lens to Islamic aesthetics while at the same time drawing upon historical material to support their more contextualized approach (Gonzalez 2016; Elias 2012).

In this study I seek to present a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the role of art and aesthetics. I use aesthetics in the sense of Aristotle's (384–322 BC) notion of *aisthesis*, understood as organizing "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it" (Meyer 2009b, pp. 714–19; cf. Koch 2004, pp. 330–42; Cancik and Mohr 1988, pp. 121–22). The study focuses on mystical Islam or Sufism, and is situated within a larger interdisciplinary framework that seeks to elicit a more contextualized, embodied understanding of religious aesthetics (Cancik and Mohr 1988; Barth 2003, pp. 235–62; Meyer 2009a; Mohn 2012; Traut and Wilke 2015; Grieser and Johnston 2017). Such an aesthetic practice encompasses sensory perception in religious experience and its associated psychosomatic processes. "Sense" is taken to include not only sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell, but also the sense of time and space and kinesthetic phenomena (Hirschkind 2006; Marks 2010; Necipoğlu 2015, pp. 23–61; Gill 2017; Abenante 2017, pp. 129–48; Frembgen 2020, pp. 225–45; Akkach 2022).

A different interpretation of aesthesis has been developed in the works of decolonial thinkers such as Walter Mignolo (2007, 2011) who—in response to postcolonial ways of thinking (for instance, Edward Said's canonical *Orientalism*, see Said 1978)—deliberately rejects the idea of a single universal aesthetic traditionally posited in the Western tradition, rethinking the very concepts of aesthetics and art. In contrast to Eurocentric aesthetic ideology, decolonial aesthetics postulates a "pluriversality" of aesthetics (Mignolo 2011; Mignolo and Vázquez 2013; Tlostanova 2017, p. 29). Migration processes also entail the unfolding of an aesthetic of transcultural formation, whereby transculturation is understood as the "effects of cultural translations" (Kuortti 2015).

Drawing on such recent methodological tendencies inspired by the "aesthetic turn"[5], my transdisciplinary exploration focuses on the embodied aesthetic engagement of contemporary artists with Sufi practices, rituals, and conceptual discourses. It combines the approach of several disciplines, especially Sufi studies, visual anthropology, and (art) history, integrating both emic ("insider") insights and etic ("outsider") analysis, in order to assess the data from subjective as well as objective perspectives (Arweck and Stringer 2002). Since most artists use a figurative visual language in their works, the article also touches

upon ongoing debates in Islamic studies about the prevailing biases that portray Islam as an iconoclastic religion and Muslims as opposed to figural representation (Flood 2002; Gruber 2019).

2. Seven Case Studies

The article includes seven case studies that examine different, though interconnected, configurations which expand on the aesthetic junctures of embodied sensations (Birgit Meyer's "sensational forms", Meyer 2009b, 2009c, p. 972, n. 58; Meyer and Stordalen 2019) and the intersensorial nature of Sufi perception. Each study presents a different kind of aesthetic form of "lived" Sufi experience—"the skin of religion" to use a metaphor coined by Brent S. Plate (2012)—an artist has chosen in order to create meaning. Plate's evocative metaphor alludes to the permeable contact zones and sensory receptors that cover the surface of the entire body and serve as connective tissue, a membrane that is constantly renewed. With their aesthetic praxis the artists address both Sufi and multi-faith audiences.

The first case study discusses religio-aesthetic calligraphy of the German Naqshbandi Sufi Ahmed Peter Kreusch which embodies spiritual practice, corpothetics (a term created by Pinney 2004, pp. 8, 19), and creative imagination (Johnston 2016, p. 197).

The second study presents the Iraqi-Swedish artist Amar Dawod's allegorical works inspired by the text *The Tawasin* of the early Sufi mystic al-Hallaj. Living in exile and grappling with the harrowing experiences of a homeland devastated by war, sectarian conflict and foreign occupation, Dawod expresses the profound connection between his art and the senses by focusing on the experience of *dhawq* ("taste" or "disposition"). An act of looking not only with his eyes but also with his heart, resembling a kind of synesthesia, enables the artist to "reconnect" to the divine. Central to his work are symbolic meanings and ideas evoked by sensory experiences.[6]

In Sufism, symbols are also viewed as a sensory or aesthetic means of conveying knowledge (cf. Erzen 2007, p. 71; Pinto 2017, pp. 90–109). In this context, symbolic representations are realities inherent in the nature of things. As we move from painting to photography, sculpture, video, and installation, we encounter the Italian multidisciplinary artist and Senegalese Baye Fall Sufi, Maïmouna Guerresi (the third study), who sees her artwork as a medium that transcends the visual and embraces narrative orality and tactile experience.

The fourth study focuses on the soundscapes of the French Sufi rapper Abd Al Malik whose music directly activates sensory experience. It promotes the cultivation of certain emotions, modes of banlieue expression and aesthetic tastes, as well as social justice, emphasizing Abd Al Malik's struggle against racism and neo-colonialism.

In the work of the Iraqi-British mixed-media artist Hanaa Malallah, the fifth case study, the lived experience of war and themes of exile and trauma feature prominently. Much of her work draws inspiration from the twelfth-century Sufi classic *The Conference of the Birds* of the Persian mystic Farid al-Din 'Attar (d. ca. 1221). Malallah is known for her creation of the "ruins technique", a technique which evokes not only an aesthetic but also a "visceral" reaction in the viewer.

Finally, in the sixth and seventh studies, I will address new dynamics, especially regarding the use of media: the virtualization of Sufism, and its multi-faith engagement. Greek director, playwright, visual artist and Inayati Sufi, Elli Papakonstantinou designed and directed a live musical broadcast remotely during the pandemic (the sixth study). The seven-act play was written by Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan, who was executed in 1944 at Dachau in Germany. The digital opera was performative (theatrical and cinematographic), sensorial in its performance (combining voice, sound and vision) and aesthetic (using figures, colors, and architectural spaces).[7] It presents the spiritual quest of Noor's father, Sufi leader Hazrat Inayat Khan, a spiritually uplifting journey in symbols of the visible, sensible world, the "place of encounter" between the intelligible and phenomenal worlds: the point where they meet is the *barzakh*, the "world of image".

One of the most important projects of the Paris-based Algerian artist and Tijani Sufi Rachid Koraïchi is the newly opened *Le Jardin d'Afrique* in southern Tunisia (the seventh study). A visit to the multi-faith memorial cemetery triggers a succession of feeling, aroma, sight, sound and taste; it is an intersensory, "synesthetic" experience. The examination of the religious and aesthetic sensibilities at this shared sacred site parallels those of Koraïchi's artworks, in which creative expressions are entangled with forms of sensory perception.

Case Study 1

Dot, Circle and *Alif*

> Spiritual practice shapes all the arts in Islam.
>
> Ahmed Kreusch (2017, p. 182)

Spiritual striving and meditation lie at the heart of the work of the calligrapher and painter Ahmed Peter Kreusch (b. 1941), who studied with Hubert Berke (d. 1979) at the Technical University of Aachen and with Joseph Beuys (d. 1986) at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. Born into a Catholic family, Kreusch converted to Islam in 1980 and began following the teachings of the Egyptian Sufi Shaykh Salah al-Din Eid. Salah Eid was appointed Rifa'i Shaykh by the Cairene Shaykh Mahmud Ahmed Yasin al-Rifa'i in 1977, but became widely known as a *murshid* (senior teacher) and representative of the Burhaniyya in Germany. When Salah Eid died in a road accident in 1981, Kreusch joined the community of the Turkish-Cypriot Shaykh Nazim Adil al-Qubrusi al-Haqqani (1922–2014), the leader of the Haqqaniyya Sufi Order of the Caucasian Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya-Khalidiyya tradition. Although he still considers himself a Rifa'i today, Kreusch took this step in order, as he says, "not to be alone" (Kreusch, interview with author on 15 December 2022). In the course of studying the Arabic language and script, he developed a form of "calligraphic expressionism" from about 1987 onwards (Kreusch 2017, pp. 182–83). These calligraphic expressions, Kreusch says, require intense concentration. His "script images" arise from the oft-repeated writing of the same holy letters and words, a Sufi remembrance ritual referred to as *dhikr Allah*. This involves repetitive invocations of Allah's names (ninety-nine in all), and various religious formulas in Arabic (Al-Ghazzali 1992), a practice evoking religious experiences grounded in bodily sensations (Hirschkind 2006). The calligraphic *dhikr* (literally, "recollection") is practiced to tame and eventually purify the artist's own self, or *nafs*, in his quest to come closer to God (Kreusch, interview with author on 4 and 5 May 2019; cf. Al-Haqqani al-Rabbani 2018, p. 130).

Aesthetic contemplation, mediation, sensory awareness and breathing exercises allow him to release the physical and creative forces that guide his pen. "When writing, I try to devote myself completely to the content of the words from the holy Qur'an and I am often amazed myself at the *Gestalt* of the writing that emerges in the process. Through further "practice" everything superfluous and unclear disappears until I feel a trace of the sublime content wafting across through the calligraphic image. . . . *associations, fantasies, imaginations* that arise from these images of devotion/meditation are allowed and desired" (Kreusch 2017, p. 182, emphasis added).[8] Kreusch's account of the imagination is consistent with that of the influential thirteenth-century Sufi mystic and philosopher Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240) and other Sufi thinkers. They see spiritual imagination (*khayal*) not as something unreal, but as a creative and perceptual repository used to attain spiritual experiences that embody pure meanings and spiritual realities in sensory forms (Zargar 2011; Akkach 2022, p. 43).

The vitalizing process of breathing and the uninterrupted flow of movement are paramount in Kreusch's "bodily praxis of worship" (Meyer and Verrips 2008, p. 25). The *dhikr* begins on the exhalation with *al-*, "to empty himself of himself", and continues on the inhalation with *lah*, "to fill himself with divine presence". In this context, the word *nafas* ("breath") is connected to the wider notion of self or soul (*nafs*), which is central to the Sufi path towards "the purification of the soul" (*tadhkiyat al-nafs*).

The ritual practice is buttressed by Kreusch's long-term experience as a movement and breathing therapist trained in the school of Elsa Gindler (d. 1961) and her student Frieda

Goralewski (d. 1989), pioneers of body awareness techniques and somatic psychotherapy (Buchholz 1994, pp. 141–53; Franzen 2005). Kreusch has described this practice as enabling him to be completely present in the here and now (Kreusch, interview with author on 4 and 5 May 2019). Only by leaving the material world can he access the spiritual dimension, the inspiration for which comes (in the words of Kreusch's spiritual guide, Shaykh Nazim) from "a heavenly grant" (Al-Haqqani al-Rabbani 2000, Sohbet 115). This is underscored by the cosmological significance attributed to the pen (*al-qalam*) and "the preserved tablet" (*lawh al-mahfuz*) (Q 68; 96:1–5; 85:21–22) (Al-Haqqani al-Rabbani 2000, Sohbet 182).

Kreusch explains that the pen cannot touch the paper to create anything without first making a dot. It all begins with the perfect geometrical point, or the alphabetical dot, an important symbol in Sufism. It is seen as a "primordial dot", a symbol of divine ipseity (essence), the basis of creation (Schimmel 1987, pp. 350–56). According to Sufi teachings, the dot is not simply the origin of all letters, but an act of divine creation, the beginning and origin of everything. Husayn b. Mansur al-Hallaj (executed 922 in Baghdad), one of the most important early mystics of Islam, further explains the close connection between the circle and the dot by saying that "[t]he circle has no entrance and the dot at the center is the truth" (cf. Rasmussen 2007). As Shaykh Nazim says, "We only know a little dot of all this which makes us wonder, and we can only wonder about the Endless Greatness and the Lord's Endless Oceans of Power" (Al-Haqqani al-Rabbani 2000, Sohbet 95).

The Arabic letters also have numerical values that play a significant role in Sufi interpretations. The dot denotes zero. It then develops into a circle. The seemingly non-existent develops into the all-existent, also expressed in the divine name *Hayy*, the living God (Q 2:255; 3:2; 20:111; 25:58; 40:65), for God is the central focus of life (*al-hayat*) (Figure 1). The first of the letters arising from the dot is the *alif*, "a", written as a vertical stroke, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet and the first letter of the name of God, Allah. The *alif* is equivalent to one. A central aesthetic of the *alif*, says Kreusch, is the unobstructed breath emanating from the heart (interview, 4 and 5 May 2019). For many Sufis, the *alif* is a powerful metaphor for the purified state toward which the spiritual seeker aspires to return (Figure 2). Following a difficult eye operation, after which he did not know whether he would be able to see again, Kreusch painted a series of *alif*s with his eyes closed.

Figure 1. Ahmed Kreusch, *Hayy*, 1998. Ink on paper. 19 × 24 cm. © Ahmed Kreusch.
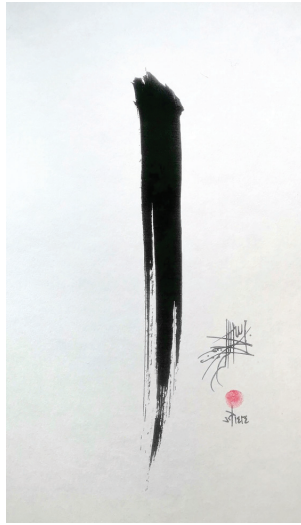
Figure 2. Ahmed Kreusch, *Alif*, 2004. Ink on paper. 12 × 24 cm. © Ahmed Kreusch.

That Kreusch's practice of "calligraphic expressionism" is reminiscent of Far Eastern calligraphy derives from his use of "Far Eastern" materials such as ink, paintbrush and bamboo pen, but also from a comparable "method of 'disciplined painting': in ever new attempts the motif is reduced to the absolutely necessary in order to convey its message as simply and as beautifully as possible to the viewer" (Kreusch 2017, pp. 182–83). He signs his works by pressing the tip of his right forefinger dipped in red seal paste onto the paper. The artist's contemplations of the sacred letters also hang on the walls of the Sufi lodge (*dargah*) of Shaykh Hassan Dyck (b. 1946) in Kall near Cologne, Germany, known as Osmanische Herberge, or Ottoman hospice. They contribute to the realization of the Islamic emanationist notion of the "unity of being", or *wahdat al-wujud*, in this Sufi community, of which Kreusch is a member (Kreusch, interview with author on 4 and 5 May 2019).

Case Study 2

Al-Hallaj's *The Tawasin*

> When I begin the act of creation, millions of imaginary birds haunt me,
>
> waiting in the distant horizon. I wait too, in the expectation
>
> of a single glimpse; they appear and then fly off again.
>
> Amar Dawod (2010)

Amar Dawod's visually allegorical account refers to birds that spring from his intuitive cognition. At the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), the artist (b. 1959 in Baghdad) left his homeland to live first in Lodz, Poland, and then in Västervik, Sweden. Unlike other refugees who experienced the suffering of war and exile, Dawod's spiritual and mystical understanding of the world enabled him to avoid focusing on calamity and instead to infuse his experimental mixed-media artwork with what he calls "a poetic energy that praises the beauty of the world". It allows him to see "[p]ainting, as . . . a kind of liberation and thrilling road, even if that road is sometimes bumpy" (Dawod 2010).

This worldview owes much to Sufi spiritual vision, which has been central to Dawod's artistic career. In the mid-1970s, while studying at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad, he began to engage with the Sufi discourse of the Persian-born Husayn b. Mansur al-Hallaj, one of the most original and charismatic figures in Islamic spirituality. His interpretations of al-Hallaj's teachings were to shape much of his later work: "[A]lthough I am a descendant of a Communist family, I came out of the cloak of al-Hallaj" (Faruqi 2011, p. 62).

The physical manifestation of al-Hallaj's influence on Dawod's artistic output increased significantly from 2010 onwards, when the artist created a series of paintings based on al-Hallaj's enigmatic *Kitab al-Tawasin* (*The Tawasin*), which was probably written in prison. The title refers to the mysterious letters *ta-sin* at the beginning of Sura 27. *The Tawasin* also contains the parable of the butterfly that plunges into the candle, reflected in one of the most popular Sufi sayings ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad, "die before you die!" (*mutu qabla an tamutu*), implying a metaphorical death to the cares and concerns of the material world (*dunya*) by reigning in the desires of the self, prior to physical death. To achieve "death before dying" was to attain spiritual union with the divine beloved (Karamustafa 1994, pp. 21, 41).

With pencil, ink, pastels, watercolor, acrylic paint, charcoal and mixed-media on paper, Dawod interprets al-Hallaj's verses by depicting a range of human figures, body parts, and various codes, symbols, and patterns to rebel against what he calls "pure painting"—an active choice he made to visualize the complexity of al-Hallaj's writing and theories (Marsoum Art Collective n.d.). In this way, he attempts to visually represent the secrets of another, higher world beyond this world of appearance. Using overlapping techniques in terms of rendering line, color, form, and collage, Dawod employs multiple levels of visual communication as well as the rhythmic repetition of verbal elements transformed into organic structures technically akin to Sufi *dhikr*. The artist refers to this articulation of the mystical moment, as "weav[ing] my carpet à la al-Hallaj":

> However, I endeavored not to make the images on my carpet *similar* to that of al-Hallaj. The images in this series are not an explanation or a visual rendering of al-Hallaj's vision established in his book of *The Tawasin*, rather, they reflect some of the communications and ambiances of his book that resonates with me and I thus created a space for them in my works. (emphasis added; Dawod et al. 2013, p. 5)

Al-Hallaj rejected a structured format for his prose because he recognized the inability of the mind to convey fundamental truths. Instead, he advocated that the mind adopts an intuitive cognition that freely expands the scope for understanding and spiritual comprehension. Such intuitive understanding requires Sufi "taste" (*dhawq*), a product of spiritual meditation and remembrance. By training this spiritual sense, a form of religious aesthetics, Dawod refines his "taste", allowing him to perceive spiritual truths in sensible forms (Dawod et al. 2013, p. 5).

After al-Hallaj began to proclaim what had been revealed to him, he is told to abandon the woolen cloak traditionally worn by the Sufis. He adopted a layman's garb to mingle freely with all social classes and encouraged everyone to find God in their own hearts. Many contemporary mystics felt threatened by his antinomian emphasis on direct personal inspiration (*ilham*). With this rejection of worldly taboos and authoritarian commands, he broke the strict vow of secrecy that was binding on Sufis: he ceased to espouse esoteric (*batin*) notions of truth (reserved for the initiated) that were by definition inaccessible to the layperson. However, along with his refusal to protect true knowledge from "desecration", he also refused to protect himself, the bearer of that knowledge.[9] Brutally executed in Baghdad as a heretic, al-Hallaj's writings and sayings were partially preserved by successive generations in spite of the official ban on the copying or sale of his works until the fall of the 'Abbasids in 1258. This fact also bears witness to the extremes of emotion his teachings inspired.

"[T]here is no way of knowing what truth is, or how to describe it", says Dawod. However, by assuming a form grasped by his sensory perception, the truth can be expressed in his work in terms of "the clear; the obscure, which requires interpretation; and the mystical, which is unintelligible" (Dawod et al. 2013, pp. 3–4). This, the artist says, is also because there is a divine trace or effect (*athar*) in everything:

> If the Divine appears through a coded language spoken by the objects of this world, there be traces left that bear witness to His presence, which makes us ponder the vastness of this world in awe, and flush with jubilation at the meaning

of these traces and the uniqueness of the emotional values that we acquire from the pondering, which are aesthetic values in the wider sense of the word. (Dawod et al. 2013, p. 4)

For Dawod, "the aesthetics of a painting lie in the vagueness and recklessness of the content and the absence of a one-dimensional purpose" (Dawod 2011, p. 38). In doing so, he follows al-Hallaj's core teaching of first finding God in the depths of himself and identifying it with his reductionist and minimalist methodology.

The creation of the Ta-Sins series is for Dawod an intuitive testimony of devotion, a ritual of transformation and transition (Figure 3). With each painting, he seeks to "open silent doors in the heart of darkness". Dawod's art creates his own reading of al-Hallaj's *The Tawasin*, alluding to the abstract symbolism, line diagrams and cabbalistic symbols contained in that book, as well as more personal objects such as the mystic's robe and animal skin. However, he also opens up the symbolic space to choreograph the Sufi notions of ego-annihilation and subsistence in God (*fana' wa baqa'*), the persistent longing for inseparable divine union. This elimination of the dichotomy between subject and object during the final stages of the mystical path took place after the brutal dismemberment of the mystic's body. Iraqi art critic Louai Hamza Abbas provides further insight into Dawod's particular style of visually "reading" al-Hallaj's text:

The body is imperfect and amputated, representing the overwhelming signs of eternal suffering, sustained by an ear that listens to the universe breathing, and a blinking eye that gently and acquiescently prolongs its gaze at the vast human inner spaces where horses without legs soar, trying to incarnate their unwilling and rebellious nature while being ridden by fond knights without hands inside the artist's vision where they '[declare their] omnipresence in the form of gestures, or in the form of a mystic, cosmic language in which all creatures—man, animals and plants—speak and express themselves, while [solidifying] its gripping and captivating presence deep into the human inner self as a timeless language that has no beginning nor end. The beginning and the end undergo osmosis through nexuses, which no mind or sensuous perception can rule or decode'. (Dawod et al. 2013, p. 16)

Figure 3. Amar Dawod, *The Tawasin* 10, 2016. Mixed media on paper. 171.5 × 169.5 × 6.5 cm. © Amar Dawod.

Dawod moreover sees al-Hallaj's discourse as "a local Arab cultural project" that has what he calls "an innovative, civilized dimension" which is worth implementing, if understood from a viewpoint which "is free from intellectual and denominational intolerance and absolutism" (Dawod et al. 2013, p. 4). In Dawod's work, embodied experience and the

visual translation of al-Hallaj's gruesome death and beginning of a new life, evoking the trauma of war in Iraq, are enacted together and flow through each other. In this context, he quotes al-Hallaj with the lines:

I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart.

I said: 'Who are You?'

He said: 'You!'

But for You, 'where' cannot have a place

And there is no 'where' when it concerns You.

The mind has no image of your existence in time

Which would permit the mind to know where you are.

You are the one who encompasses every 'where'

Up to the point of no-where.

So where are you? (Dawod et al. 2013, p. 4)

The artist further explains that a visual recognition follows intuition, because "[t]he aesthetic expression is not what we create, though we are engaged in generating it" (Dawod 2010). He calls upon the viewer, "[m]y friend, let the imaginary birds set in on your wasteland; but do not classify them. In the beginning, there never is a classification; there is no particular point where the creative experience ends" (Dawod 2010).

Case Study 3

Light, Cosmic Conception, and the Baobab of Bliss

I continued on my arduous path by seeking the representation of beauty through

my artistic sensibility, a concept that connects ethics, aesthetics and religion.

Maïmouna Guerresi (Malik 2017)

The internationally renowned multimedia artist Maïmouna Patrizia Guerresi uses various creative media, ranging from photography to sculpture, video and installation. All are interconnected in "a circular language, a dialogue between different techniques" (De Leonardis 2014). Patrizia Guerresi was born in Pove del Grappa in Vicenza, Italy, in 1951 into a religious Catholic-Italian family and converted to Islam at the age of 40. After joining the Muride Baye Fall Sufi movement,[10] to which her Senegalese husband's family also belongs, she was granted the Sufi name Maïmouna ("Blessed [by Allah]"). The influential movement, named after Ibra Fall (d. 1930), originated as part of the Muridiyya, a West African Sufi community founded in 1883 by the Senegalese Amadou Bamba Mbacké (d. 1927). Bamba's vision of Islam was one that had at its core the precepts of nonviolence and social responsibility. The prominent Sufi leader and poet is credited with overcoming French colonial subjugation in Senegal through passive activism and pacifist struggle known as the greater (spiritual and moral) *jihad* (Babou 2007).

Since her spiritual transformation, Guerresi has approached the divine through this religious practice, the constant inner struggle (*jihad*) against the self (*nafs*), a spiritual evolution that, as she explains, allows access to the unseen through a sensuous and super-sensuous state. This is where the imagistic practice of Guerresi's photographic work stops being just an aesthetic endeavor, and instead opens "a passageway seeking the representation of beauty through artistic sensibility, a concept that connects ethics, aesthetics and religion" (Malik 2017).

Guerresi sees her art as an aesthetic expression of her interiority, drawing "inspiration" from the lived reality of the Muride Baye Fall, a Sufi community that focuses on action and inner transformation rather than Muslim orthopraxy (daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan). The artist sees these African Sufis "as guides for humans to navigate life",[11] emphasizing that: "Though you may be scared, you must follow them, and you must stay open to the beauty that they provide" (Krifa et al. 2015).

"For me, starting new work is like repeating a ritual, a prayer or *dhikr*", Guerresi explains, in which "the spiritual thought prevails over materiality" (Art Africa 2017). During the collective ritual, which is performed in prayer and recitation circles or associations, Baye Fall disciples rotate in a circle one after another. They move close to each other to feel like one body, swaying back and forth to the rhythm of the litanies so as to approach the divine. They place their hands on their ears to enhance the resonance of the chanting that glorifies God, the Prophet, and the marabouts (Wolof; "spiritual guides") who guide their disciples in their quest for spiritual enlightenment, likened to a path through life that cannot be taken alone. During these moments of intense communion some participants fall into a spiritual state or trance (*hal*), accompanied by swooning, crying, convulsions, or even violent physical outbursts. The Baye Fall interpret these states as uncontrollable excesses of *light* (Krifa et al. 2015).

The symbolism of the circle appears in the video entitled *Da'irat* (from the Arabic *da'ira*, "circle"; 2003, DVD for projection, 10 min, video still) (Prearo 2006, pp. 134–35).[12] It shows a veiled woman performing body movements in a circle. Guerresi explains the meaning of the circle in Sufi ritual with words attributed to Ibn al-'Arabi: "Each thing and each being is a circle, because it returns to its Origins" (Prearo 2006, pp. 176–77).

The vertical white lines marking the face, feet and palms of the hands of the protagonist in Da'irat are just such "symbols of light and purification". Guerresi describes these as "like a white bisection marking the confines or borders between life and death, the known and the unknown" (Ori Journal 2012). The color white also refers to milk, a drink the Prophet Muhammad selected in a visionary experience from among several beverages, which, as Oludamini Ogunnaike explains, "he understood to be the sensible form of the supra-sensible reality of knowledge" (Ogunnaike 2017),[13] an action reflecting his natural disposition (*al-fitra*) to embark on the correct path. In Africa, moreover, milk is used as a purificatory and sacrificial substance.

Another photograph shows a female figure whose face is also marked by a bright white stripe that extends from the forehead to the nose and chin (Figure 4). She is dressed in a flowing white cloak (*hijab*) covering everything except the face and hands which has a large circular cavity—like a deep black hole—at the center, evoking a "doorway or threshold" (Milbourne 2018, p. 181). Bubbles of light again highlight the pivotal role of light, an aesthetics of light. These bubbles emerge from the mystical black hole as if to give birth to "many new worlds". These mystical symbols, Guerresi says, denote that "the body is no longer a prison of the soul but rather like a temple to house and glorify the Divine" (Milbourne 2018, p. 181). At the same time, the colors white and black allude to the clothing of the Bay Fall Sufis and to their "spiritual greatness" (Guerresi 2022). Guerresi explains that this work

> emphasize[s] particularly the feminine-divine, the great mother, clement and merciful, as God is like a welcoming womb. In fact, the key word of the Basmala— *Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*, which means 'In the Name of God, the Clement and Merciful'—denotes the feminine. From the root *rahima* comes *rahim* which means merciful from which derives the word for uterus, *rahm*. 'Genitilla–al-Wilada' is a character who has two names: Genitilla after an ancient pagan festival, and the other al-Wilada meaning the pregnant woman in Arabic. (Behiery 2012; cf. Behiery 2017)

With this, "Genitilla–al-Wilada" "embodies a kind of matrix impregnated by the creation of the universe" (Krifa et al. 2015, p. 12).

Figure 4. Maïmouna Guerresi, Genitilla–al-Wilada, 2007. Lambda print on aluminum. 200 × 125 cm. © Maïmouna Guerresi, courtesy Mariane Ibrahim Gallery.

By moving in the realm of sense and affect, and by communicating her personal feelings, Guerresi's artwork makes the distant, the unknown, more accessible to a Western viewer. The large photo installation "Cosmo" consists of circles in various sizes that rotate planet-like in their orbits (Figure 5). At the center is a white figure with a red headdress who, seen from above, spins counterclockwise, symbolizing the mystical dance of the Sufis, which Guerresi describes as follows:

A metaphorical representation of the many worlds and constellations where inner beauty and aesthetic appearance are joined together as the symbolic representation of infinity, in a mystical union with the divine universe expanding and contracting like a breath. This circular motion is like a never ending spiral that leads to the dissolution of the self into divine beauty as well as like the mystical knowledge that floods the heart of every seeker, leading to the search for 'interior illumination'. (Islamic Arts Magazine 2015)

Figure 5. Maïmouna Guerresi, Illumination 1, 2010. Lambda print on aluminum. 120 × 120 cm. © Maïmouna Guerresi, courtesy Mariane Ibrahim Gallery.

The body of the revolving dervish serves as a nucleus, a conduit of cosmic forces in a cosmological system. Like the video *Dikhr* (2007, DVD for projection, 5:34 min, video still),

this photograph conveys the emotion and devotion of the participants in the ritual. *Dikhr* shows a group of veiled Kenyan women, their faces, hands and feet again marked in white. They breathe their prayer in tandem with the wind, their outstretched palms facing up (the motion one makes to accept a prayer), rotating slowly as the wind ruffles their long robes (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Maïmouna Guerresi, *Dikhr*, 2007. Video. 5:34 min. © Maïmouna Guerresi, courtesy Mariane Ibrahim Gallery.

Yet another photograph, entitled *Mandala* (Figure 7), alludes to a Sufi saying stating that: "We Sufi are like compasses, we have a foot in Islam and with the other we circulate around all religions" (Prearo 2006, p. 108). The tall pointed hats are "like high antennas enabling connection with the sky". For Guerresi, their red color "recalls the color of blood, life and sacrifice" (Prearo 2006, pp. 109–10).

Figure 7. Maïmouna Guerresi, *Mandala*, 2006. Lambda print. 125 × 125 cm. © Maïmouna Guerresi, courtesy Mariane Ibrahim Gallery.

Guerresi also emphasizes "the emotions" she feels when visiting sacred places (Bower 2018, p. 31). The holy city of Touba, her spiritual home, plays a particularly important role in her artwork (Aesthetica Magazine 2022). According to tradition, whilst sitting in the shade of a large tree, Ahmadu Bamba had a mystical vision in a moment of ecstasy (*hal*). This event inspired the great shaykh to found a city in 1887 which he named Touba, later becoming the second largest city in Senegal. The city became "a symbol of Muridism". A sacred place of Senegalese spirituality, it also houses Ahmadu Bamba's tomb and that of

Ibra Fall (Guerresi, email to author, 27 November 2022; Ross 1995). The shaykh named the city Touba (from the Arabic *tuba,* or "bliss") after the tree of paradise mentioned in the Qur'an (13:29).

Guerresi is deeply inspired by the story of the sacred Tuba tree—in Senegal symbolized by the Baobab—which is believed to have "the power to heal everything around it" (Aesthetica Magazine 2022). "To me trees represent a metaphysical bridge between heaven and earth", she says (Kahl 2021). In Sufi thought, the Tuba is the "world tree", a "tree of light", rooted in the divine and illuminating the world below. Its roots are in the soil of the earth and its fruits in paradise. Standing at the center of paradise, it embodies centrality and axiality, which in turn represent the pursuit of spiritual perfection (Ross 2011).

Under one such sacred tree called "Guy Texe" (Wolof; "Baobab of Bliss"), which stood at the very center of Touba's cemetery, is the tomb of Soxna Aminata Lo, the first wife of Ahmadu Bamba. According to popular belief this baobab represents the paradisiacal Tuba on earth, and the faithful wished to be buried near it to attain eternal bliss in its shade. The baobab collapsed in 2003 and only its roots remained (Ross 2012).

The tree also represents a materialization of the immaterial—a kind of corporeal extension, or even an actual embodiment, of Soxna Aminata Lo's spiritual power. Her "presence in absence" points to its liminal status as a medium of communication and control between human beings and other realms (Korom 2012, pp. 1–19). As such it is frequently regarded as proof of the living presence of this female saint, of her revivifying and life-giving powers. Pilgrims reverently visit the site to pay their respects to the tree roots and to offer petitionary prayers before it.

Guerresi's photographic series *Beyond the Border—A Journey to Touba* (2020–2021) is an aesthetic contemplation of this sacred tree. It is worth noting that "Touba" is also a girl's name in Senegal (Aesthetica Magazine 2022). The photograph, titled Yaye Fall, depicts a very tall woman merging sculpture-like with the roots of a baobab tree (Figure 8). In this photographic work Guerresi "connects the feminine spiritual strength to the symbolism of the Touba tree" (Guerresi, email to author, 27 November 2022). There is a powerful conflation of categories in which the complementary potentialities of tree and woman merge together to form one embodied unity.

Figure 8. Maïmouna Guerresi, Yaye Fall [Yayfall], 2009. Lambda print on aluminum. 200 × 125 cm. © Maïmouna Guerresi, courtesy Mariane Ibrahim Gallery.

Most of Guerresi's work revolves around the interconnection and interdependence between humans and nature (Guerresi 2022). In her early work, the artist speaks of "a performative process of mimesis" in which her "body becomes a tree". Under the patched

garment of the Yayfall "strong roots emerge that penetrate the sand", with "her strong cultural and spiritual roots underlining her relationship with her land" (Guerresi, email to author, 27 November 2022). In her words, "Every human being is connected to everything that exists on earth. It follows that the fate of our planet is affected by the actions of individuals. The relationship between humanity and nature reflects the relationship to oneself, to one's own interiority. Thus, the desertification of the natural environment corresponds to the spiritual devastation of man's inner life". She also notes that trees have always been a kind of intermediary between heaven and earth (Aesthetica Magazine 2022).

The tall female disciple of the Baye Fall community, who emerges from the tree roots, is wrapped in a flowing multicolored patchwork-style cloak (Wolof *niahaas*). This was handstitched from small leftover pieces by the artist herself in the ritual manner of the Muride Baye Fall community (Guerresi, email to author, 27 November 2022). An aesthetic vision transformed into a sculptural garment inspired by the humble lifestyle of Ibra Fall, it is sewn together from ninety-nine pieces of fabric (for the ninety-nine names of Allah) because, as Guerresi remarks, women bear Allah's most beautiful names (Malik 2017).

Shrouded by the sacred garment, the body of the Yayfall becomes "the temple of the soul", a sacred dwelling in continuous becoming. With this, Guerresi also reaffirms

> a universally recognizable feminine energy that translates into spiritual evolution. I try to decontextualize and decolonize the various stereotypical ideas of women in the Islamic world . . . who have contributed to the social and spiritual evolution of their country, but who history has unfortunately forgotten. (Guerresi 2019)

Guerresi thus acknowledges the vital element of female spirituality and the contribution of women to the social and spiritual development of their country and beyond.

The spirit, soul or breath of life (*ruh*) is also visualized by slender meandering wooden branches growing out of the mouth of a seated female figure, reflected in a diptych narrative on view in Guerresi's current exhibition Rûh/Soul (Guerresi 2022). The allegorical image can allude to the inner spirit that comes into play when the Baye Fall Sufis offer bundles of wood to their marabout to demonstrate their work and submission on the occasion of the Grand Magal of Touba, the annual pilgrimage of Touba (Guerresi, email to author, 25 November 2022).

Case Study 4

The Sufi Rapper

> Il travaille pour ce monde comme s'il aller vivre toujours
> et pour l'autre comme s'il aller mourir demain.
> Il corrige les défauts enfouis aux tréfonds de lui-même,
> et se détourne du voile des mystères.
> Il chemine sur cette voie qu'il discrimine, qui détermine
> celle qui était déjà là avant même qu'il ne se détermine.
>
> Abd Al Malik (2008a)[14]

The French rapper, composer, author and director Régis Fayette-Mikano (b. 1975 in Paris) came from Catholic-Congolese roots but converted to Islam at the age of sixteen, from then on calling himself Abd Al Malik ("Servant of God"). In the early 1990s, he started rapping to bring attention to the situation in the French banlieues where he had grown up, and went on to form the rap group New African Poets (NAP). His songs denounce injustice and recount traumatic memories of loss, oppression and isolation in these low-income housing estates, the world of ghettoized immigrants, "one of destitution and ostracism", through which he defines himself as a "breaker of ghettos" (Ruquier et al. 2008). Before turning to Sufism (Abd Al Malik 2009, pp. 120–26), he joined the Tablighi Jamaat, an ultraorthodox transnational Islamic Deobandi missionary movement. Since music in general and rap in particular, a form of oral storytelling, was frowned upon by

this movement, he eventually turned his back on the Tablighi Jamaat after he was asked to stop making music under his own name (Abd Al Malik 2009, pp. 57–119).

The rapper then discovered a different Islam: Sufism. His first exposure was through reading the classical works of Sufis such as Ibn al-'Arabi and Emir Abdelkader (1808–1883), an Algerian Sufi and military leader who led the struggle against the French colonial invasion of Algiers in the early 19th century fighting for what would now be called human rights, and later the writings of contemporary Sufi scholars such as Faouzi Skali (b. 1953) and Éric Geoffroy (b. 1956) (Skali 2010; Geoffroy 2010). In 1999, Abd Al Malik met the Moroccan shaykh Sidi Hamza al Qadiri al Budshishi (1922–2017), head of the Qadiri-Budshishiyya Sufi Order, who became his spiritual guide and mentor: "Sidi Hamza's gaze met mine: in a fraction of a second, I was transported by this vision of an ocean of love" (Abd Al Malik 2004a, p. 171).

After joining the Qadiri-Budshishiyya, Abd Al Malik learned about love and acceptance of the other from his spiritual teacher. Sidi Hamza lived near Madagh in the north of Morocco, so one of the songs the rapper dedicated to him and to the teachings of the Sufi order is called "Raconte-moi Madagh" ("Tell me about Madagh"), in which he presents himself as a pirate unearthing the spiritual treasure that lies buried in this Sufi tradition (Abd Al Malik 2008b). In it, he also talks about his love and fear in the face of these spiritual teachings. To obviate such reactions, Sidi Hamza had initiated a renewal process of Sufi spirituality epitomized by the transition from the majestic (*jalal*) aspect to the beautiful (*jamal*) aspect of spiritual orientation: "We are living in times of hardship [that is *jalal* in this context] so there is no need for more, we are living in age of hatred and love is needed to balance us to gain any human sanity" (Ali n.d.). Sidi Hamza explains this hardship as "social crisis that characterizes our societies today, which includes family breakdown, drugs, social distrust, hate, hypocrisy, stress and other diseases" (Ali n.d.).

From 2004 onwards, Abd Al Malik began exploring Sufism through the medium of his rap, as seen in the English translation of his autobiographical narrative *Sufi Rapper: The Spiritual Journey of Abd al Malik* (original French title: *Qu'Allah bénisse la France*).[15] Sufi aesthetics had a corresponding influence on his lyrics. In the same year, he expressed his spiritual journey by releasing his debut solo album *Le face à face des cœurs* (*The Face to Face of Hearts*), a title borrowed from the 2010 work of the charismatic Budshishi Sufi Faouzi Skali, in which he advocates respect for the plurality of thought and the diversity of paths according to the aspirations of each individual. It contains the song "Ode à l'Amour" ("Ode to Love"), which paraphrases a famous poem by Ibn al-'Arabi from his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society n.d.). It begins as follows:

> Il y eût temps où je faisais reproche à mon prochain
>
> Si sa vie n'était pas proche de la mienne
>
> Mais à présent mon cœur accueille toute forme
>
> Il est une prairie pour les gazelles
>
> Un cloître pour les moines
>
> Un temple pour les idoles
>
> Une Kaaba pour le pèlerin
>
> Les tables de la Thora et le livre du Coran
>
> Je professe la religion de l'amour et quelle que soit
>
> La direction que prend sa monture
>
> Cette religion est ma religion et ma foi. (Abd Al Malik 2004a, pp. 202–4; 2004b)

> There was a time when I reproached my neighbor
>
> If his life was not close to mine
>
> But now my heart welcomes all forms

It is a meadow for gazelles

A cloister for monks

A temple for idols

A Kaaba for the pilgrim

The tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran

I profess the religion of love, and no matter

The direction his mount takes

This is my religion and my faith.

Abd Al Malik's commitment to cultivating diversity and plurality (religious, gender, ethnic, etc.) is woven into the fabric of the verses.

Two years later, in 2006, the artist released his second solo album *Gibraltar*, which won numerous awards.[16] *Gibraltar* has an unusual aesthetic. While working on the album, Abd Al Malik deconstructed the very notion of rap as he developed a unique new sound that fuses elements of Sufi *qasida* poetry, West African Muslim griot musical storytelling (Grey 2013), chanson and jazz with slam and rap/hip-hop. The lyrics of the title song produced a "soundscape" that activates a unique sensory experience:

Faut rien dire et tout est dit, et soudain . . . soudain il s'fait derviche tourneur,

Il danse sur le bar, il danse, il n'a plus peur, enfin il hurle comme un fakir, de la vie devient disciple.

Sur le détroit de Gibraltar y'a un jeune noir qui prend vie, qui chante, dit enfin je t'aime à cette vie.

 . . .

Sur le détroit de Gibraltar, y'a un jeune noir qui n'est plus esclave, qui crie comme les braves, même la mort n'est plus entrave.

 . . .

Maintenant il pleure de joie, souffle et se rassoit.

Désormais l'Amour seul, sur lui a des droits.

 . . .

Du détroit de Gibraltar, un jeune noir vogue, vogue vers le Maroc tout proche.

(Abd Al Malik 2010)

You don't have to say anything and everything is said, and suddenly . . . suddenly he becomes a whirling dervish,

He dances on the bar, he dances, he's not afraid anymore, finally he screams like a fakir, from life becomes a disciple.

On the Straits of Gibraltar there is a young black man who comes to life, who sings, finally says "I love you" to this life.

 . . .

On the Straits of Gibraltar, there is a young black man who is no longer a slave, who shouts like the brave, even death is no longer a hindrance.

 . . .

Now he weeps with joy, breathes and sits down again.

Now Love alone has rights over him.

 . . .

From the Straits of Gibraltar, a young black man sails, sails to nearby Morocco.

Inspired by the tradition of Qadiri-Budshishi Sufis who sing *qasa'id*, or spiritual poetries, which is usually followed by a Sufi *dhikr*, Abd Al Malik creatively adapted the

Arab-Islamic tradition of Sufi *qasida* poetry within the context of French rap (Brigaglia 2019, pp. 93–116). The structure of these songs follows the tripartite cycle of classical *qasida* poetry, as defined by Andrea Brigaglia in reference to the theoretical work of Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle on this poetic genre (Sperl and Shackle 1996). The music expresses a shift in the poet's consciousness that combines elements of spiritual development, creative inspiration, performance and audience participation.

The songs on *Gibraltar* revolve around the theme of spiritual transformation. They begin with a prelude introducing the main themes of the poem, often by means of metaphorical language. There is reference to Abd Al Malik meeting his shaykh Sidi Hamza who introduces him to the core Sufi teachings of the order, the *jamal* aspects of love and compassion. In the middle section, a catharsis occurs after the rapper embraces these teachings: "Now Love alone has rights over him". The final verses take up again the images introduced at the beginning of the poem. They are placed in a new, contrasting context that expresses the final stage of the transformation achieved when a "young black man sails, sails to nearby Morocco", the abode of his spiritual teacher. The application of this cycle to Abd Al Malik's autobiographical and musical context reflects his innovative engagement with the aesthetic tradition of the Sufi *qasida*. The well-trained Sufi discerns the *batini* or inner symbolic sense of the *qasida* that goes beyond the literal meaning of words, called *zahiri*, or mundane meanings. This potential for cultivating interior (*batin*) dispositions is actively harnessed within Abd Al Malik's lyrics.

Sufi *qasa'id* also foreground acts of attentive listening. For Sufis of the Qadiri-Budshishiyya and many other Sufi orders, spiritual practice involves listening, *sama'*, whether it be spiritual *qasa'id*, or a sublimation of *tarab*, a poetic and musical emotion or exaltation. These acts of listening are performative, inducing vibrations and rhythms within the body, which are, in turn, transformative (Kapchan 2015, pp. 33–44; 2016). Through the transformative experience, listeners seeking to attain a higher sense of Islamic piety learn to dissolve their egos (*nafs*).

Characterized by rhythmic diction, repetitive rhymes and simple meters, both the *qasida* tradition and griot music in Abd Al Malik's rap help to pass on knowledge. Poetry slam, as a spoken-word art form in the tradition of West African Muslim griot musical storytelling—also engages with an ethics of social justice. The use of these elements underscores Abd Al Malik's social engagement against racism and neo-colonialism, a point I will address below.

Another song from the album *Gibraltar*, "L'Alchimiste", describes the role Abd Al Malik attributes to his Sufi shaykh Sidi Hamza. He sees him as an alchemist who transformed his heart from a state of baseness into nobility:

> Je n'étais rien, ou bien quelqu echose qui s'en rapproche,
>
> J'étais vain et c'est bien c'que contenait mes poches.
>
> J'avais la haine, un mélange de peur, d'ignorance et de gêne.
>
> Je pleuvais de peine, de l'inconsistance de ne pas être moi-même.
>
> J'étais mort et tu m'as rammené à la vie:
>
> Je disais 'j'ai, ou je n'ai pas'; tu m'a appris à dire 'je suis'.
>
> Tu m'as dit: 'le noir, l'arabe, le blanc ou le juif sont à l'homme ce que les fleurs sont à l'eau'.
>
> Oh, toi que j'aime et toi, que j'aime. (Abd Al Malik 2006; 2013, pp. 211–13)

> I was nothing, or something close to it,
>
> I was vain and that's what was in my pockets.
>
> I had hatred, a mixture of fear, ignorance and embarrassment.
>
> I was raining with sorrow, with the inconsistency of not being myself.
>
> I was dead and you brought me back to life:

I said 'I have, or I have not'; you taught me to say 'I am'.

You said to me, 'Blacks, Arabs, Whites, Jews are to man what flowers are to water'.

Oh, you whom I love and you whom I love.

The term "alchemy" is used by the Qadiri-Budshishiyya and other Sufi groups to express spiritual growth and expansion. In the process of training their *nafs*, often by disciplining the body through the recitation of *dhikr* and listening practices, followers learn how to overcome, for example, the trauma of racial prejudice ("race" figuring quite prominently in Abd Al Malik's rap lyrics as, for instance, in "L'Alchimiste"), the aim being to transform hearts. This inner transformation—initiated by the spiritual teacher or shaykh, the alchemist—is achieved through physical discipline, the corporeal transmission of knowledge, and so the embodiment of knowledge (or "alchemizing bodies"; Carter 2021, p. 64). Abd Al Malik epitomized this spiritual method in a 2016 interview: "Knowledge of Sufism does not abide in texts" but is a gateway to "something that is tasted from within" (Zéro 2016).

In *Le Dernier Français* (*The Last Frenchman*), a 2012 collection of poems/rap lyrics on the harsh conditions of the banlieue, Abd Al Malik expounds on the diversity of religions that stem from the diversity of cultures and the diversity of worldviews, the manifold human responses to God's proposition: "This divine proposal arises within the human conscience", the rapper says, "It is there, in this intimate sanctuary, that God speaks to each person and invites him/her to love him. This invitation is addressed to all human beings" (Abd Al Malik 2013, p. 21). The lyrics also precipitate new aesthetic practices in a multi-faith public: "Blacks, Arabs, Whites, Jews are to man what flowers are to water". This quote alludes to the fundamental Sufi principle repeated both in *Qu'Allah bénisse la France* and in *Le Dernier Français*, that there is but "the one human race". It presents, as David Spieser succinctly notes, a special insight, namely: "That there is a Principle bigger than man in the same way that water is bigger than the flowers; water is essential to flowers, and unites them in that they all take their beings from the same source of Being, and yet every flower is different from the others in terms of smells and colors" (Spieser 2015, p. 217).

Spieser makes an interesting observation in relating Abd Al Malik's aesthetic conceptualization of "equality" to the philosophical reflections of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière (b. 1940) (Rancière 2006; see Spieser 2015, p. 7). Rancière notes that before the French Revolution, literature as a whole could only treat subjects that were considered "noble", whereas after this turning point, in the new emerging "regime", any subject—noble or otherwise—could be portrayed. Since "aesthetic politics" are made up of different "regimes" that *determine* what is "visible", "seen", and "audible", "art forms" can never be divorced from "political forms" (Spieser 2015, pp. 11–12).

In some of his lyrics, Abd Al Malik uses language as a marker for alterity. Rejecting standardized French, he uses the "banlieue" dialect ("banlieue-speak", mostly of North African origin, and deprecated by official French language policy) and Alsatian jargon, *verlanization* (word inversions) as well as integrating Sufi idioms. The poems in *Le Dernier Français* describe the harsh milieu of the banlieue in which people are "disintegrated" instead of "integrated": "C'est la galère", "it is hellish". For Abd Al Malik "we are all on the same boat/hard-ship" whereas "[. . .] the city around was an ocean // and we rowed alone" (Spieser 2015, pp. 11–12). The imagery evolves into desperate people actually drowning, all fighting individually in a struggle against death and "[. . .] respecting each other only when one of them dies" (Spieser 2015, pp. 11–12). Elsewhere in a 2008 interview, Abd Al Malik expressed his solidarity with the plight of migrants, in the figurative sense with "boat people" by stating: "I am in solidarity with all those who suffer! Without exception. Separating families, organizing 'raids' in front of schools, is unacceptable" (Jeune Afrique 2008). By emphasizing linguistic diversity, Abd Al Malik's immigrant-inclusive aesthetic encourages the cultivation of certain emotions, modes of religio-cultural expression, as well as certain ethical values that embrace alterity and plurality.

Case Study 5

The Hoopoe Bird

> In testing the veracity of art's spiritual roots as well as the limits of abstraction,
>
> I seek knowledge in the space between abstraction and figuration.
>
> Hanaa Malallah (Faruqi 2011, p. 68)

Iraqi-British mixed-media artist Hanaa Malallah (b. 1958 in the Thi Qar province), one of Iraq's leading contemporary artists, began practicing art while growing up in an environment of conflict, sanctions, war and occupation in Baghdad. Despite the violence, lawlessness and travel restrictions in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), the Gulf War (1990–1991), and the U.S. invasion and occupation (2003–2011), Malallah remained in Iraq, where she explored themes of survival and resistance in her art. However, in 2006, after receiving death threats from militias who, following the U.S. invasion, launched a campaign of violence against intellectuals and artists, Malallah reluctantly left Iraq. After emigrating, her focus shifted to the relationship between spirituality and art.

Malallah was a favorite student of Shakir Hassan Al Said (1925–2004), one of Iraq's most influential artists, who combined medieval Sufi traditions with contemporary abstract art. He introduced her to the mysteries of Farid al-Din 'Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-Tayr*, 1177), the famous epic poem which serves as a metaphor for the Sufi quest of enlightenment. Her appreciation of 'Attar's allegorical tale deepened during long conversations with Al Said and in the letters they exchanged while Al Said lived in Amman (Malallah 2021). When Malallah emigrated from Iraq, 'Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* was one of the two books she took with her (Malallah 2022).[17]

The artist takes inspiration from the knowledgeable hoopoe (*hudhud*, a metaphor for the Sufi master), which figures as an aesthetic and visual motif in her work. As the spiritual guide on the dangerous mystical quest, the hoopoe guides the birds in search for the Simurgh, the legendary king of birds who lives somewhere at the edge of the world. The artist sees in "the iconic leader of 'Attar's avian seekers . . . a simulation of reality, which in itself is a simulation of perfection". Only "thirty birds" or *si-murgh* reach the abode of the Simurgh at the end of the arduous spiritual journey, the others having fallen victim to their own vice and perished along the way. These thirty birds recognize themselves as reflections of their own self, as mirror images of the *si-murgh* (*si*, "thirty", and *murgh*, "bird" [Simurgh], a highly ingenious pun in Persian mystical literature). They discover that the goal of their quest, the divine Simurgh, is nothing but themselves. With this they at last transcend and merge (*fana'*) into the Simurgh (or divine unity), affirming the Sufi view of the God within.

"Many of my works", Malallah says, "assimilate the idea of the hidden and the process of emergence based on awe of the unknown and the notion of transformation in the promise of the Secret" (Malallah 2010). Malallah equates the hoopoe's guidance of this journey with her own artistic journey, in which she embarks on a quest for truth in order to survive (Macmillan 2014), a theme that was also central to her teacher Al Said. In her work, the hoopoe has become a symbol of survival itself, of which she says: "Hoopoe, the sheikh or pir who leads the 30 in 'Attar, is the quintessential survivor. *I am He*" (emphasis added; Macmillan 2014).

During the 1970s, Al Said created experimental art by damaging and burning material, a technique which Malallah came to conceptualize as "ruins technique" in 2008 (Malallah 2022). These processes are reminiscent of conventions of Nouveau Réalisme (Carrick 2010) as a particular art historical mode of re/presentation and aestheticization: destroyed surfaces are combined with burnt, torn, tattered and shattered material that is reassembled, painted over, glued, layered and arranged in grids; its aesthetic characterized by pastiche, self-referentiality, fragmentation, hybridization and multiplicity. Malallah has described this technique as "writing by knife, painting by fire", a practice which provokes not only an *aesthetic*, but also a *somatic* reaction in the viewer.

Malallah's "ruins technique" reflects the lived experience of war, a powerful theme which figures prominently in her work. The images imprint themselves upon the viewer, crying out to be read in context. By using techniques that contaminate and damage the materials she works with, she gives them the appearance of ruins, rubble, the devastation of war. By creating chaos and destruction in which "anything solid can be reduced to nothing within seconds" (Malallah 2022), she aims to "engender the visceral experience of the reality of war irrespective of its geographic/political particular[s]" (Malallah 2010). Malallah further explains that:

> The physicality of war is a completely different experience. It ruins the essence of all being. Death has no meaning and everything can be reduced to nothing in a few seconds. To witness the process of extinction, the metamorphosis of material to dust, led me to conclude that the phenomenon of destruction is hidden in de facto representation. I explored the space that exists between figuration and abstraction, between life and death, a concept for me which holds a deep spiritual meaning. (Malallah 2022)

The artist alludes here to the Sufi metaphysical concept of *barzakh* or "intermediary state" (Bashier 2004; Morris 1995, pp. 42–49, 104–9), which denotes the realm located between the world of matter and spirit, the unseen in-between. The basic notion of a *barzakh* refers to the mysterious eschatological realm of imagination that lies between the two realms of purely physical and purely intelligible/noetic being. Spiritual imagination allows us to make the invisible world visible.

This notion is potently expressed in her work Portrait (HOOPOE) (2010), consisting of a neatly arranged square patchwork of canvas with burnt edges, scorch marks and mixed-media, reminiscent of the remains of a shroud (Figure 9). A small oil painting of a hoopoe crowns the top center of the composition. The hoopoe, referred to in the Qur'an (27:20) as a bird in the service of the Prophet Solomon, a messenger from the non-material world, becomes a kind of "meta-sign" which, in Malallah's artwork, commemorates and laments the looting and the burning of the libraries and the museum in Baghdad that took place shortly after U.S. forces occupied the city in 2003 (Porter 2008, pp. 132–33). Malallah further explains that, "by way of shifting the cut and scorched page, I have facilitated the possibility of multiple interpretation of a single surface, stored in my memory through repeated readings of the book by 'Attar. With this I am also able to recall scenes of ravaged manuscripts in Baghdad which took place during the war on Iraq and the subsequent occupation". The figure of the hoopoe also serves as a reference to the "bird talks" of the Sufi mystics, an allegory for the search for God, the search for a place to survive and to call a home.

The hoopoe has often been described as a leader or a king of birds due to its crown-like crest, described by 'Attar as "the crown of truth and the knowledge of both good and evil" ('Attar 1971, p. 11; cf. 'Attar 1984, lines 693–716). Malallah also uses the taxidermied remains of the hoopoe, mounting the dead animal for exhibition in a lifelike state, and provides the brutal but compelling explanation that "the shape is there but the content (life) is not" (Malallah 2014). A stuffed hoopoe also sits on the back of a broken and burnt chair, a modified found object (Figure 10). It is significant that the carcass had to be dissected and dismembered in order to mount the plumage. The artist describes this process of preparing, stuffing and mounting as an "abstraction rooted deeply in the reality of war and violence". Just as she sees herself as a hoopoe, the survivalist *par excellence*, Malallah also uses the hoopoe in her works as a "symbol of suffering and survival" (Malallah 2014). It is worth noting that she also used this symbol in a modified form in a secular context.

Figure 9. Hanaa Malallah, Portrait (HOOPOE), 2010. Folded burnt canvas, mixed media and oil color on canvas. 100 × 100 cm. © Hanaa Malallah.

Figure 10. Hanaa Malallah, Chair, 2011. Mixed media with hoopoe bird. © Hanaa Malallah.

Inspired by the biblical symbol of the dove, which Pablo Picasso transformed into the iconic symbol of peace bearing an olive branch (La Colombe de la Paix, 1949), she has replaced the dove with the hoopoe and depicts the hoopoe with an olive branch as a metaphor for the struggle for survival (see the "Survival Hoopoe". Digital Print. 40 × 31 cm; Caravan 2014).

In another work created in 2015, a red and black ink drawing entitled "I Have Learnt Something You Did Not Know", the bird stands for protest against foreign military occupiers in Iraq (Figure 11). Surrounded by smudges and splattered traces of red ink, the hoopoe is portrayed at the center of the painting. The bird is sketched in precise ornithological detail, in keeping with a Sufi distinction which emphasizes presenting things as they really are, rather than as they might be or would be in a possible world (cf. Leaman 2004,

pp. 167–68). By thus concentrating on the figure of the hoopoe, both the artist's and the observer's identity can be absorbed into the object of spiritual contemplation. The more one focuses on the bird, the more deeply one is immersed in it. The "I" is transformed, if only temporarily, into "it". In some places, the ink forms the shape of red roses. In stark contrast to the principle of representing things precisely and in detail, these flowers are smeared and blurred on the artwork. They appear next to splattered traces of red ink. Like bloodstains, they weigh down the page, the realm from which the bird is trying to escape. In this context, the poetic title of the work is not only a statement, but almost a warning and an indication of the unspoken horrors of the conflicts that live on in the heart and memory of a survivor. At the same time, it recalls the Sufi notion of the desperate and violent attempts to escape the confines of the cage (the body) and the material thoughts that must be relinquished.

Figure 11. Hanaa Malallah, I Have Learnt Something You Did Not Know, 2015. Black and red ink on paper. 60 × 100 cm. © Hanaa Malallah.

Case Study 6
The Wisdom Book[18]

> O happy wilderness,
> Far will we roam!
> Far from the world's torment,
> Far will we roam!
> Noor Inayat Khan (2018, p. 65)

During the 2020 global lockdowns, Greek director, playwright and visual artist Elli Papakonstantinou (b. 1973) co-produced, developed, designed and directed the digital cinematic opera *Aède of the Ocean and Land: A Play in Seven Acts*, written by Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan (1914–executed 1944). Lockdowns prompted Papakonstantinou, known by the Sufi name "Anwari", a "fellow traveler in the [Inayati Sufi] caravan" (Inayat-Khan 2021), to explore the new aesthetic genre of "digital theater".

The innovative production was based on the recently discovered play by Noor-un-Nisa, affectionately referred to as Noor by her followers, the first woman to be included in the canonical Inayati lineage (*silsila*). Renowned for her exploits as a clandestine radio operator and secret agent working with the Allies in occupied France during World War II, Noor was the eldest child of Indian master musician and Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan

(1882–1927) and his American wife Amina Begum (née Ora Ray Baker; 1892–1949). One of the chief figures of modern Sufism, Inayat Khan developed Indian Chishti Sufi teachings globally and founded one of the largest Sufi communities in the West, now known as Inayatiyya. An innovational aspect of his Sufi mission was that he did not require his followers to formally convert to Islam (Kuehn 2019, p. 55).

Noor's piece is a literary blend of East and West that subverts and reinterprets the spiritual journey as described in Homer's ancient epic the *Odyssey* (8th or 7th century BC; Homer 2018) and Farid al-Din 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-Tayr*), its central themes revolve around mystical quest, love (personal, transcendental and spiritual), renunciation, and sacrifice. The play contains autobiographical references, as *Aède*'s three main characters are represented by Noor's parents and herself to create a profound allegory of wandering and homecoming. In doing so, she has, in the words of her biographer Shrabani Basu, woven "a narrative that is at once an ode to her parents as well as her own interpretation of the journey of life" (Noor Inayat Khan 2018).

The live musical drama was performed only once, on 14 September 2020. The interactive live digital performance was conceived by Papakonstantinou, the Athens-based artistic director of the ODC ensemble, to explore a new genre of experimental "theater of seclusion for immaterial stages". This experimental theater was used as an alternative "stage" with an international cast of twenty-two multidisciplinary performers (from five countries and ten time zones)[19] to create, Papakonstantinou explains, exchanges leading to the generation of a new aesthetic.

With this live-streamed performance, Papakonstantinou wanted to produce what she refers to as "an audiovisual embroidery of the new age", a new format that would support the vibrant and ephemeral nature of theatrical art (Papakonstantinou 2020a). It took place in "the different homes of the artists, who joined together to create a "unique audiovisual experience, a cinematic concert in synchronicity". In Papakonstantinou's aesthetic agenda, the public space and the private living space thus merged into a single entity, which made it possible to "zoom in on the details and zoom out to the galaxies" (Papakonstantinou 2020a).

Aède was co-produced by the conductor Tarana Sara Jobin, herself an Inayati Sufi, on behalf of Astana, the North American headquarters of the Inayati Order. The play was performed simultaneously live from Athens, New York, San Francisco, The Hague and Rome via Zoom. This was possible because prior to the lockdowns the global Inayati community had developed a digital infrastructure which they used as a platform for most of their gatherings.

The mystical play itself has an interesting history. Zia Inayat-Khan (b. 1971), the present spiritual leader (Pir) of the Inayati Sufi Order, had first discovered the hitherto unknown play by Noor in the summer of 2017. "As I read and reread it", he recalls, "the play more and more powerfully impressed itself on my mind as a talisman of Noor's presence and guidance" (Inayat-Khan 2018b). In a 2019 interview, Zia Inayat-Khan shared his belief that there are

> some souls, when they leave this world, they look onward and don't look back. There are others that keep connected, they still have some service to render. I believe Noor is such a soul. I feel her present and recently this was made very tangible when I was looking through our Sufi archive and discovered a file marked by her name and opening it discovered a play she had written which I had never before read. It was a hidden treasure . . . . A wisdom book that is hidden from humanity until its time has come . . . I believe this play of Noor's is such a book. (Inayat-Khan, interview with author on 24 November 2019)

The play's title "Aède" (deriving from the Greek *aoidos*) alludes to a Greek poet or poetess, who sang or recited while accompanying him- or herself on a lyre. The notion of soundscape, the significance of music in the play, immediately brings to mind Noor's father, Hazrat Inayat Khan, who was himself an accomplished musician and who sought to communicate the divine nature of music in his concerts and his teachings. For Inayat Khan

the power of music lay in awakening the memory of the soul to its origin—God. Music was "food for the soul". Noor was a gifted harpist herself, aware of the healing effects of music on the body and the spirit. With this in mind, Papakonstantinou directed the performance and designed an ad hoc dramaturgy in which music and language were interwoven in a single narrative. The performers' bodies vibrated, were pushed in unexpected directions, and were forced to maximize the smallest structural unit of language—word, syllable, phoneme.

Papakonstantinou thus reminds us of the healing power of music and theater, "a potential", she says, "that we have lost sight of" (Papakonstantinou 2020b). This is because, just like bodies, the senses too can be trained, disciplined, instructed and refined. In the ancient Greek world, watching theater was understood to involve psychological healing to "cleanse" the psyche.[20] Accordingly, a theater or odeon was often located near Asklepieia, sacred healing temples dedicated to the god Asclepius where incubation rites took place (Hartigan 2009, pp. 3, 15–16).

Papakonstantinou's production of *Aède* invites the audience on a personal and spiritual journey, to an "immersive digital experience . . . in the fluid spaces of the mind". Papakonstantinou sees "art as fluid, non-canonized forms of expression" in which there is a "*deus ex machina*, a divine presence" (Papakonstantinou 2020b). In doing so she deploys the concept of dynamic processes of perception, inspired by psychological (Hauser 2006) and phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty 1945) theories.

In this sense, Papakonstantinou presents Homer's *Odyssey*, Noor's mystical frame narrative, in the tradition of ancient Neoplatonic allegorical reading, as the soul's descent into the sensory world epitomized by the Trojan War and its return to the world of spiritual beauty embodied by the kingdom of Ithaca (Lamberton 1989, pp. 199–200). This reading is underpinned by the fact that much of Sufi discourse is steeped in Neoplatonic emanationist readings (see Zarrabi-Zadeh 2020).

Throughout her evocative wanderings, a seamless continuity connects Noor's "numinous imaginative world" with that of her father. The journey of the Greek hero Ulys in *Aède* is an allegory for the spiritual journey of Inayat Khan to the West, while the seven acts and structure of *Aède* recall the seven stations of spiritual realization that were part of most Sufi schools. In his allegorical Sufi poem, 'Attar visualizes the seven stations as seven valleys that had to be traversed by the birds (alluding to seekers on the Sufi path). Each of the valleys corresponds to one of the seven spiritual conditions and spiritual stages (*maqamat*) on the Sufi path. The first six valleys the birds traverse are those of Quest (*talab*), Love (*'ishq*), Knowledge (*ma'rifat*), Detachment (*istighna'*), Unity (*tawhid*), Bewilderment (*hayrat*), and the final valley is Poverty (*faqr*), which leads to the mystical state of annihilation of the ego-self (*fana'*) (cf. Hazrat Inayat Khan 1989, pp. 206–13).

Noor wrote the play after Inayat Khan left his family in France on 13 September 1926, to embark on a spiritual journey to India, where he died a few months later, in 1927, at the age of 44. She was twelve years old at the time. Her mother fell into deep depression for the next few years, and Noor was left to take charge of the family, supporting her ailing mother and taking care of her three younger siblings. She nevertheless found time to write a series of short stories, such as the retelling of the Buddhist Jataka tales, which she published. These ancient stories of incredible selflessness and generosity are among the oldest texts of Buddhist literature. In an interview, Shaikh al-Mashaikh Mahmood Khan (b. 1927), the nephew of Inayat Khan and cousin of Noor, who knew Noor as a child, explained: "The impact of Murshid [Inayat Khan]'s teachings was this spirit of liberty, honor and sacrifice; the Jataka tales exactly express these and emphasize the enormous strength and power to withstand. Noor lived this" (Norton 2018, p. 14).

This idea of personal sacrifice was central early in Noor's life and is reflected in her biography. After the fall of France, she fled to England with her family, where, in late 1942, she was recruited by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) as a radio operator. In June 1943, she was flown to France to work as a secret agent for the Allies in occupied France. In October 1943, she was betrayed by a French woman and arrested by the Gestapo. A year

later, on 13 September 1944, she was executed in Dachau in southern Germany. Noor was 30 years old at the time. Having written and directed anti-totalitarian plays in 2019 and 2020 in which she explored the lived aesthetics of contemporary trauma, Papakonstantinou—implicitly following Noor's guidance—focuses on the theme of forgiveness in her creation of *Aède of the Ocean and Land*.[21]

The autobiographical dimension of Noor's play *Aède* is evident in Act 5, which takes place in the Valley of Unity and features Ulys' awkward teenage son Telemachus, who represents Noor, struggling to grow up and find his/her father (Figure 12). When news of Inayat Khan's death arrived in 1927, Noor's mother, Amina Begum, and the four children travelled to India to search for him. They hoped that he might still be alive. When they arrived in India, Amina Begum thought she heard him singing in the street and immediately sent her children to follow his voice, a scene which Noor incorporated in *Aède*. In the play, she searches for her father and believes she recognizes him in the character of the "complicated" hero Ulys who asks Telemachus: "Son, detain not the wanderer who has fled from worldly bondage. Bring not back to the world the one who is happy in his freedom" (Noor Inayat Khan 2018, p. 45).
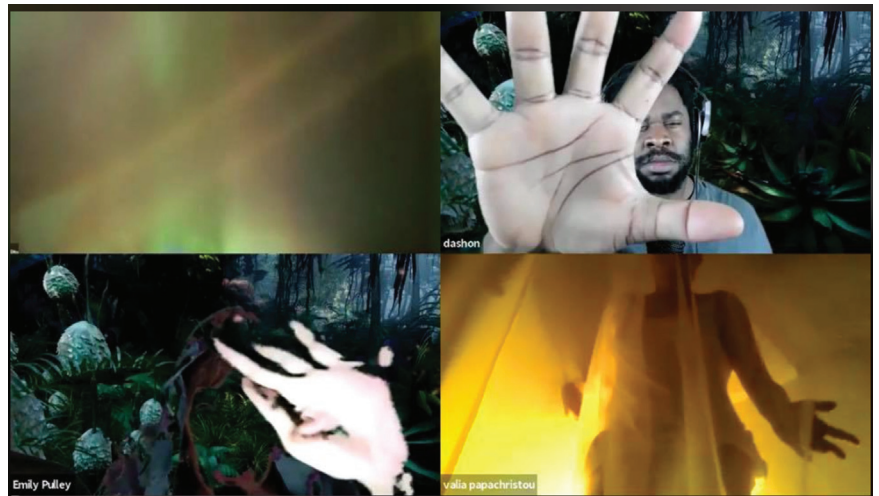

Figure 12. Noor Inayat Khan, directed by Elli Papakonstantinou, Telemachus, in *Aède of the Ocean and Land: A Play in Seven Acts*. 2020. Screenshot from the Zoom Live Music-Cinema Event. © The Inayatiyya.

Telemachus later sings the lyrics of *The Song of the Majzub* ("*majzub*" literally means "the one who is drawn upwards"), a devotional song that Noor had written to her late father when she was 15 years old.

In Act 6 of *Aède*, featuring the Valley of Bewilderment, Noor shows how Ulys' heart evolved over the course of his journey, how he became a renunciate with a Sufi vision of detachment. He is a man of many disguises and through a series of events and initiations becomes *al-insan al-kamil*, "the person who has reached perfection", a development instigated by encountering pain and the transformation effected through that encounter.

In *Aède*, Ulys is initially portrayed as rather hard-hearted, but in the course of the encounters his heart opens (Figure 13). When he finally returns to Ithaca, he does not merely vanquish his rivals to reclaim his home and family just as Homer's Odysseus must undertake another journey after reclaiming his household (cf. the prophecy of Teiresias in *Odyssey* book 11), so Noor portrays Ulys as a transfigured man who ventures onward. Both Telemachus (i.e., Noor) and his mother, the cautious and clever Penelope (i.e., Amina Begum), who somehow manages to keep her clamoring suitors at bay, pursue Ulys in the hope of sharing his seclusion. Ulys (i.e., Inayat Khan) has reached the stage of *vairagya* (dispassion, detachment, or renunciation in Sanskrit), that is, he became a renunciate. However, here a certain nuance comes into play: a distinction is drawn between the *vairagya* of Indian spirituality, which involves leaving one's family and renouncing the world, and a Sufi vision of detachment, which allows the protagonists to remain connected in love that transcends attachment (see Hub Talk 2018).

Figure 13. Noor Inayat Khan, directed by Elli Papakonstantinou, Ulys, Telemachus and Penelope, in *Aède of the Ocean and Land: A Play in Seven Acts*. 2020. Screenshot from the Zoom Live Music-Cinema Event. © The Inayatiyya.

The final act, the climax of the play, is set in the symbolic Valley of Poverty and Annihilation. It represents the stage when the mystic is at the same time someone and no one, a human being and pure formlessness. While Penelope and Telemachus are washing, Ulys, "the Aède of the Ocean and Land", appears and the family joyfully unites. They do not return to Ithaca, but in their quest to attain the final stage of annihilation (*fana'*), a metaphor for the vision of God, they wander together into the wilderness. With their decision to share their lives and to renounce worldly hindrances, they succeeded in uncovering a hidden (*batin*) truth of the universe at the end of the arduous spiritual journey. This truth is encapsulated in the ineffable state which unites personal and transcendental love.

Papakonstantinou paid particular attention to the concepts of myth and gender when she revisited the *Odyssey* in Noor's mystical retelling, *Aède*. Gender plays an important role in that, as mentioned earlier, Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan, who Papakonstantinou calls, "the Sufi prophet Noor" (Papakonstantinou 2021), was the first woman to be admitted to the Inayati spiritual and genealogical lineage (*silsila*). When Zia Inayat-Khan discovered the play or, as he put it, the play discovered him, he felt that Noor's hitherto unknown play was a dispensation from *al-ghayb* (the invisible). He said that he "was enraptured when he read the text again and again discovering more and more meaning" (Inayat-Khan, interview with author on 24 November 2019).

Prompted by this discovery, Zia Inayat-Khan issued a groundbreaking declaration on 5 February 2018, in which he said that "over the last several months I have been deeply reflecting on her [Noor's] life and legacy. It has become clearer to me than ever before that the time has come for our Order to truly claim her as an essential tradition-bearer of the Sufi Message" (Inayat-Khan 2018a). Accordingly, Noor is remembered and honored as the daughter of Inayat Khan (Pirzadi), as saint (Hazrat), as martyr (Shahida) and as Sufi master (Shaykha) in her own right.

Noor's inclusion in the Inayati *silsila* is particularly striking, given that traditionally women are spoken of merely as mothers, sisters or wives of the male spiritual leaders of the *silsila*. For this reason, many female followers of the Inyati Sufi Order no longer found the *silsila* inspiring. Zia Inayat-Khan maintains that his unprecedented decision to include Noor in the *silsila* had less to do with a policy to promote equal representation than it was inspired by the fact that, he believes, Noor reached out to him at a key moment in his life

and has guided him ever since. Noor's inclusion in the Inayati *silsila* thus occurred at a time when there was a confluence of need, desire and inspiration.

Case Study 7

Tears That Taste of the Sea

> In creating this sacred place, I really think I am keeping the memories of the
>
> migrants alive. I am documenting a moment in the history of humanity where
>
> everyone has abandoned the migrants, where we let their boats sink.
>
> Rachid Koraïchi (Bishara 2019)

Migration, memory and mourning are central themes in the work of Paris-based artist and Sufi Rachid Koraïchi, one of the leading Arab artists of his generation. The tragedy of perilous migration journeys so frequent in the contemporary world occupies a central place in his work. One of his most significant projects, *Le Jardin d'Afrique* (*The Garden of Africa*) in southern Tunisia, is a burial ground created to honor and commemorate the increasing number of refugees and migrants[22] who have perished while crossing the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa, especially Libya, to Europe (see also Kuehn 2022). Fleeing extreme poverty or war, countless people of all nationalities and faiths have died on what the UN calls the world's deadliest migration route (United Nations 2017; Yousfi 2020).

Koraïchi's work is steeped in the aesthetics of Sufism. Born in 1947 in Ain Beida, Algeria, he comes from a Sufi family and is an active member of the Tijaniyya Order of Sufism, which originated in North Africa before spreading to other parts of the world (Gueritli 2021). Founded by Ahmad al-Tijani (1735–1815), the Algerian Pir of the Tijanniyya Sufi Order, who taught at the Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo and at the Al-Zaytuna Mosque in Tunisia, the members of the Brotherhood are known for their social reforms and longstanding resistance to European colonialism in Africa. To this day, members of the Tijaniyya combine mysticism with social activism, a common thread in Koraïchi's works. During the chaotic postcolonial period, when terrorist violence escalated in Algeria, Koraïchi fled to Paris at the age of 21 where he continued his studies at the École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs and the École d'urbanisme.

The Garden of Africa project is an aesthetic beacon that draws attention to the marginalization poignantly evidenced in the region's deathscape. The project began in spring 2018, when Koraïchi's daughter Aïcha heard about the large number of unidentified bodies that had washed up on a Tunisian beach near the ancient port of Zarzis, most of them left unburied. Aïcha brought this to her father's attention (Imam 2021), and together they visited the small coastal town a little later, intensely shocked by what they found. The locals refused to bury the dead in their own cemeteries, often on the grounds that the religious beliefs of the deceased were unknown—a stance the French-Algerian artist calls "open racism" (Ditmars 2021). "There were piles of bodies along a very long beach", says Koraïchi. "The bodies are carried there by the ocean currents, and they were collected by rubbish trucks and dumped in heaps infested with dogs and rats" (Imam 2021).

The artist recalls, "I immediately said that we must buy a piece of land to build a cemetery. Since they [the locals] refuse to give them [the migrants] a dignified burial, I will build them a palace" (Koraïchi 2022; telephone interview with author on 10 November, 2022). At the end of 2018, Koraïchi and his daughters Aïcha and Fatma bought a 2500 square meter field with olive trees near the small town of Zarzis to create a dignified final resting place for the hundreds of unburied bodies (Figure 14) "so that one day, the families, the fathers, the mothers, the tribes and the countries know that their children are in a heavenly place . . . ", Koraïchi explains (AP Archive 2021). In this way the Garden of Africa exemplifies the profound humanism expressed in his work and his personal dedication to the countless men, women and children who have perished in search of a better life. He believes that "the site will remain an enduring beacon of humanity in the face of suffering" (Imam 2021).

Figure 14. *Le Jardin d'Afrique*, Zarzis, Tunisia. 2021. Screenshot from the film about the shortlisted projects for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2022, Aga Khan Development Network (Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) 2022). © Rachid Koraïchi.

All religions are honored in this cemetery, all are welcome, "all died in the same sea and were taken by the same salt", Koraïchi says (AP Archive 2021). In doing so, the artist follows the time-honored Sufi viewpoint that God embraces all people regardless of race, religion or other distinctions (Gueritli 2021). When he took on the task of financing the sacred site himself, he thought of the wise words of his grandfather (who was a Tijani *muqaddam*, or spiritual leader, in Ain Beida), who reminded him on his deathbed that "[e]verything that is not given is lost [not passed on, not given in a spirit of humanity and generosity]" (Rahman 2020).

Koraïchi's project addresses the deeply embodied ways in which personal pain, emotional suffering, trauma of migration, sacrifice and loss are articulated. The ecumenical complex serves as a memorial cemetery, offering a sanctuary and a place of final rest, regardless of their faith, to those who have perished on the dangerous sea routes in search of a safe and dignified life and whose countless unclaimed bodies have washed up on the Tunisian coast. The multi-faith project creates a culturally sensitive aesthetic that embraces the peaceful coexistence of different communities in both life and death. Koraïchi has formulated a transcultural aesthetic through the fusion of elements from different cultures, creating a space of a cultural liminality that through its very in-betweenness elicits respect for and dialogue between different cultures. The cemetery's transcultural aesthetic combines local traditions with Islamic features in a new formal language that both appeals to the local population and represents the various religious communities in the region through their religio-cultural symbols, materials, and craftsmanship (Koraïchi, telephone interview with author on 10 November, 2022). All walls, domes, vaults, tombstones, and paving stones of the Garden of Africa were fabricated entirely by hand. Much of the work was performed by local artists and craftsmen. Some of them had survived the perilous crossing and were now residents of the large nearby refugee shelter run by the Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM) (idem).

Koraïchi designed the mortuary monument around the idea of "the cemetery as a primordial garden"—a recurring theme across different religious traditions—filled with the scent of fragrant flowers and the soothing sound of fresh water. Evoking a variety of scents, tastes, textures, sounds and colors, the artist intends to provide a glimpse into the garden of paradise. When approaching the Garden of Africa, visitors are greeted by a 130-year-old olive tree, a symbol of peace (Ditmars 2021). Access to this garden cemetery is via a 17th-century gate painted bright yellow, which the artist says symbolizes the blazing desert sun (Ditmars 2021). The opening of the portal is intentionally kept low so that all those who enter must stoop when crossing the threshold as a gesture of respect for the deceased within. When entering the sacred place, the visitors' sensoria attain a state of synesthesia whereby seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling enter into an interiorized pact

with spiritual contemplation and mourning. Their gaze is then guided toward the large, carefully laid out garden of paradise bounded by a tall whitewashed wall.

Inscribed with a diversity of religions, rows of bleached grave markers are set next to rows of hand-painted colorful tiles that represent an enormous rolled out prayer carpet (Gueritli 2021). Each tombstone is alike: the frictions within religious, social, gender, and other forms of empowerment and disempowerment are silently transcended. Rather than serving as a static and passive set of substances manipulated and disposed of by the local communities, the remains "provide an agency to affect the experience and actions of mourners and evoke memories of the past" (Buturović 2020, p. 103).

Set in an olive grove, the six hundred waterproofed tombs are shaded by fruit-bearing trees, flowers such as jasmine, night-blooming cacti, bougainvillea, and medicinal herbs such as agave, aloe vera, and marigold. In this symbolic landscape, many plants bear important meanings, such as the bright red bougainvillea, said to be "life-giving", representing "the blood of Christ" or "the oxygen of life" (Gueritli 2021; Ditmars 2021). Bitter oranges were planted to symbolize both the harshness of death and the sweetness of life after death (Gueritli 2021; Ditmars 2021). Pomegranates were planted for their potent Sufi symbolism as "rubies encased in each other". "The lone seed is fragile", says Koraïchi, citing an old proverb, "but together, the fruit is hard. A single person is vulnerable, but humanity is strong if we stand together in unity, are reunited" (Gueritli 2021; Ditmars 2021). The tombs are surrounded by five olive trees, representing the five pillars of Islam (the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage) as well as by twelve vines signifying the twelve apostles, the first disciples of Jesus (Gueritli 2021; Ditmars 2021). The visitors' experience at the Garden of Africa is thus rich in sensory stimuli, drawing them into an experiential world shaped by sights, sounds, smells, intense heat, and other somatic sensations and impressions.

Of central importance is the multi-faith prayer hall which provides a refuge and retreat for all (Figure 15). The entrance to the hall is through another stately 17th-century wooden gate, which gives the visitor a feeling of entering a palatial abode. Offering a space where religions can interact with each other under the same roof, it is a place of gathering, worship and solitude. Its dome is surmounted by a symbol which, Koraïchi says, represents the three religions: three superimposed spheres, signifying Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are crowned by a crescent moon opening towards the sky (Gueritli 2021).

Figure 15. View of the garden cemetery and multi-faith prayer room at the far end, *Le Jardin d'Afrique*, Zarzis, Tunisia. 2021. © Rachid Koraïchi.

The complex also contains a large morgue with facilities to help identify the bodies and a DNA database. Although these facilities are in place, the Garden of Africa is still waiting for authorization from the city of Zarzis to perform DNA analyses on site. In the meantime, these are still carried out at the Gabès hospital, 140 km away, which means

that the bodies must be transported from there to the Garden of Africa. The DNA code is recorded on each gravestone along with the date and location of the shipwreck, as well as some identifying characteristics such as age, gender and the clothing of the deceased, in the hope that this enables future identification (Ditmars 2021). Through this arrangement, Koraïchi wants grieving relatives to know that there is a dignified final resting place for their loved ones in order to help them find closure.

Le Jardin d'Afrique, this multi-faith hybrid of cemetery, garden and art installation, was inaugurated with a special ceremony on 11 June 2021 by UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay, who presented a bronze sculpture called the Tree of Peace, which was placed in the garden. Azoulay expressed her deep admiration for Koraïchi's selfless humanitarianism in creating this sepulcher as a monument to the refugees, as a symbol of their passage, and to preserve their remains in beautiful surroundings (Gueritli 2021). Hosted by Tunisian President Kais Saied, the ceremony was attended by representatives of the three major historical faith traditions, the Rabbi of Djerba, the Catholic Archbishop of Tunis and the local Imam, and so celebrated the coming together of faiths in one universal vision (Ditmars 2021).

Koraïchi's *Le Jardin d'Afrique* in Zarzis was shortlisted for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 2022. Encouraging compassion and empathy, the project takes a stand in the face of terrible suffering. Since its opening, the multi-faith memorial has been attracting visitors from far and wide and has been gaining immense momentum.

While working on *Le Jardin d'Afrique*, Koraïchi opened the exhibition *Tears That Taste of the Sea* in London, displaying works created in various media during the 2020 lockdowns (Koraïchi 2021). Like the cemetery, the exhibition also revolves around the themes of migration, memory, and mourning. These topics run like a thread through the artworks featured at the exhibition, which include a large blue and white etching, blue and white ceramic vases from the "Lachrymatoires Bleues" (Blue Lachrymatory Vases) series, white acrylic on black canvas from the "Mouchoirs d'espoir" (Handkerchiefs of Hope) series, as well as three large steel sculptures depicting vigilant guardian figures.

The central work of the exhibition is the large etching that bears the same name as the memorial cemetery in Zarzis, *Le Jardin d'Afrique*, because the etching narrates a similar migratory narrative. Koraïchi says of his work:

> Symbolically, square or rectangular figures enclose real world elements, while the circle representing infinity, reveals elements from another realm. The isolated figure caught in the centre of the circle stands at a crossroads, suggesting a traveller who arrives at that place of destiny where this earthly journey ends and another journey begins. (Koraïchi 2021, p. 12)

The sphere that encloses the nameless traveler in this separate reality floats on the waves of the ocean and eventually drifts ashore (Figure 16). It is surrounded by figures who symbolize what Koraïchi calls the praying ones, the mothers, fathers, families and friends who continue to pray anxiously for the welfare of the souls already departed.

Koraïchi's older brother Mohamed himself drowned in the Mediterranean Sea as he tried to reach Europe shortly after Algeria's independence in 1962. His body was never found, inflicting a wound that never healed. Koraïchi feels that the Garden of Africa in Zarzis was created partly as a symbolic tomb for his brother, who perished in the same salt water as those memorialized there. He also created it as a gift for his mother, although she is no longer alive (AP Archive 2021).

The vases from the "Lachrymatoires Bleues" series are also covered by Koraïchi's system of signs, having developed his own system of letters, numbers, and talismanic symbols inspired by different religious traditions. They are intended to imbue the vessels with apotropaic and talismanic powers to protect their future owners from harm. The blue ink of the inscriptions, representing infinity, also evokes the soothing colors of the sea and the sky (Koraïchi 2020).

Figure 16. Rachid Koraïchi, *The Garden of Africa—Le Jardin d'Afrique*. 2020. Edition of 70, Etching, 108.5 × 76 cm (RK5039). © Rachid Koraïchi.

While making the works, the artist kept thinking about the oceans of tears generated by the deaths of refugees and migrants. These are metaphorically collected in the large, inscribed lachrymatory vessels (Latin *lacrima*, "tear") on display in the exhibition (Koraïchi 2021, pp. 6, 16–21). Their creation was inspired by the tiny antique glass vials found in Roman and late Greek tombs, which Koraïchi first saw on display at the Bardo Museum in Tunis (Koraïchi 2021, p. 3). These fragile and intimate "tear gatherers" were believed to be receptacles to store the bitter tears of pain shed by a grieving relative. "I was inspired by people who had made such delicate, little glass containers, such as the ancient Phoenicians, also the Romans, the Greeks, the Iranians and later the Victorians in Britain, people in a multitude of places". For him, it spoke of "a history of love" (Koraïchi 2020). To reflect the scale of death in the Mediterranean and the millions of uncollected tears, Koraïchi crafted giant versions of the tiny vessels, each half a meter tall, with four handles that allude to the vessel being held by both a mother and a father (Koraïchi 2020) (Figure 17).

The inscribed handkerchiefs, entitled "Mouchoirs d'espoire" (Handkerchiefs of Hope), their black color symbolizing mourning, are likewise seen as repositories of tearful memories and, in Koraïchi's words, "chronicles of intense emotions", conveying "signs of love and joy as well as tears of loss that are inextricably linked" (Koraïchi 2021, pp. 7–8, 24–27). Each rectangle encapsulates a single intimate palimpsest telling a forgotten story. Not only has the artwork talismanic powers but it also awakens the senses. The delicate material of the handkerchiefs, for instance, is soft to the touch; often being scented in Arab world its use implicates the olfactory sense; its inscribed talismanic signs and glyphs appeal to the sense of sight.

The watchful and protective presence of the tall black openwork sculptural forms in Corten steel are called "Les Vigilants" (The Watchers). The figures represent a fusion of calligraphy and human bodies in motion (Koraïchi 2021, p. 5) (Figure 18). The aesthetics of their emotive forms evoke both sorrow and compassion. Situated at that subtle point where the senses propagate emotion, the presence of these talismanic guardians can also be found on the Blue Lachrymatory Vases and the Handkerchiefs of Hope, ensuring peace and

protection. Their talismanic presence is also meant to guard the refugees on their perilous journey.[23]

Figure 17. Rachid Koraïchi producing the series "Lachrymatoires Bleues" (Blue Lachrymatory Vases) (ii). 2020. Ceramic with cobalt oxide underglaze, 51 × 31 × 32 cm (RK5050). Screenshot from the film about the shortlisted projects for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2022, Aga Khan Development Network (Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) 2022). © Rachid Koraïchi.

Figure 18. Rachid Koraïchi, from the series "Les Vigilants" (iii), 2020. Steel, 175 × 128 × 45 cm (RK5048). Screenshot from the film about the shortlisted projects for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2022, Aga Khan Development Network (Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) 2022). © Rachid Koraïchi.

3. Conclusions

The aesthetic dimensions of Sufism and the transformative effect of Sufi-inspired artwork generate an intersensory, "synesthetic" perspective. By transposing the spiritual expressions of Sufism into the second decade of the third millennium, the works of the artists discussed here offer glimpses into the sacred in our often dehumanizing and fragmented contemporary world. Several of the artists in this article refer to the leitmotifs of transit, in-betweenness, deterritorialization, and a sense of exile and loss, out of which their artistic forms and modes of expressions are born. Even when negotiating their own personal experiences and traditions, their work has a universalism that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries.

As demonstrated in post- and decolonial studies, the boundaries that demarcate and indeed construct "Asia" and the "West" are far from fixed. Transculturality, with particular reference to its sensory-aesthetic and experiential appeal, flourishes in the transmigration of peoples and in the coalescence of cultures. An increasingly worldwide cross-fertilization and interpenetration of different cultures creates a transnational and so labile notion of "the sacred". Especially thought-provoking in this context is Hamid Dabashi's theory that in Islam, and thus also in Sufism, the sacred and the worldly become inseparably intertwined—particularly in any act of the aesthetic, as has been illustrated in the artwork discussed. Citing Max Weber, Dabashi states that "[t]hat organic link—between the worldly and the sacred—has had a crucial effect on both the aestheticization of the sacred and the sanctification of the aesthetic". He continues, "The task facing Muslims is not to retrieve *the sacred* and to posit it against *the secular* . . . , but, instead, to reimagine the sacred in the immediate vicinity of its current worldliness" (Dabashi 2013, pp. 40–41). The aesthetic pluriversality of the Sufi-inspired works of these seven contemporary artists, imbued with sensate traces of migration, exile and trauma, is distinctly characterized by an intertwining of the secular and the sacred, bought together by the "in-between".

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all words in italics are Arabic terms.
2. For recent discussions negotiating the term Islamic (art) history, see Shalem (2012, pp. 1–18); Bashir (2022, pp. 176–91).
3. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, for instance, lists the neologism *'ilm al-jamal* (literally, "science of beauty") as aesthetics, a theory of art often demonstrating commonly held ideals of beauty (cf. Nasr 1997; Behrens-Abouseif 2010–2012).
4. To this must be added several smaller and more specialized works such as: Ettinghausen (1947, pp. 160–65); Hillenbrand (1994, pp. 249–67); Gonzalez (2001); Leaman (2004); Alami (2011); Zargar (2011).
5. An example in a series of "turns", the analytical approach to the "aesthetic turn", is addressed, for instance, by Tord Larsen (1992). See also Engelke (2010).
6. Building on Sherry Ortner (1973), I refer to symbols as instruments that assist us to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas serving as vehicles for negotiating complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas.
7. By performances I refer to Judith Butler's notion of performative acts and their ritualized repetition that enable the subject through discourse, without being completely determined by it (Butler 2011, p. xxi; see also Hollywood 2002, p. 113).
8. All translations in this article are by the author, unless otherwise stated.
9. On the practice of *taqiyya*, see Kohlberg (1995, pp. 348–80); De Smet (2011, pp. 148–61).
10. Baye Fall literally means "those who claim to belong to Father Fall" (Wolof *baye/baaye*, "father") whereas Yaye Fall alludes to the (Wolof *yaye*) "mother".
11. For instance, her photographic series *Baifall* (i.e., Baye Fall) in 2007, *The Giants* in 2009; see Krifa et al. (2015), or her series *Talwin* ("change") (2015–16).
12. Cf. the installation *Bui Bui Circle*, 1999; see Prearo (2006, pp. 156, 158).
13. Alluding to the so-called "testing of the cups" in Jerusalem—a rite of Judeo-Christian heritage. See Widengren (1955, pp. 103, 114, 209–11, 221).
14. "He works for this world as if he will live forever and for the other as if he will die tomorrow./He corrects the defects buried deep within himself, and turns away from the veil of mysteries./He walks on that path that he discriminates, that determines the one that was already there before he determined himself".
15. The book went on to win the Prix Laurence-Trân in Belgium.
16. On 27 January, at Midem, an important music industry trade fair, the Minister of Culture, Christine Albanel, named Abd Al Malik "Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres"(first rank of the French "Order of Arts and Letters"), describing him as a "leading light of hip hop culture, who has embraced a socially-aware and positive brand of rap" (Denis 2008).

17 The other book she took was Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (*Logical-Philosophical Treatise*) written on the battlefields during the first World War, in which the author tried to define logic in terms of that which language shares with the world: reality.

18 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 26th ESSWE 8 Western Esotericism and Creativity: Art, Performance and Innovation, 2021 Meeting of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), University College Cork, Ireland, 5–7 July 2022.

19 The cast for the play included Dashon Burton, Jen Zetlan, Emily Pulley, Lito Messini, Gemma Carbone, Kelvin Chan, Elias Husiak, Laura Jobin-Acosta, Adrian Freiling, Katerina Papachristou, Valia Papachristou, and Julia Rabia Rahm. The music for *Aède* was composed and conducted by Shirish Korde, who drew on classical South Asian as well as contemporary American and European musical languages. It was played by the Cassatt String Quartet accompanied by Sitar player Srinivas Reddy, tabla player Amit Kavthekar, and percussionist, Jonathan Hess.

20 Already in the 4th century BC Aristotle postulated that theater, especially tragedy, has a cathartic effect on the psyche of the audience (Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1449b27-28; Halliwell 1999, pp. 44–47).

21 Before producing *Aède*, Papakonstantinou was commissioned to write and direct the anti-totalitarian play *The Kindly Ones*, performed at two major World War II memorials, the Mauthausen concentration camp in Upper Austria in 2019 and Camp des Milles in Aix-En-Provence in Southern France in 2020.

22 Although "refugees" and "migrants" are two separate legal categories, their status is not clear before they die. I therefore use the term "refugee" because the word "migrant" fails to capture the compulsion behind the horror taking place in the Mediterranean. See Malone (2015).

23 For an in-depth discussion of the socio-political aesthetics of Rachid Koraïchi's project The Garden of Africa and the local challenges it currently faces, see also Kuehn (2022).

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