



Sufism in the West

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This chapter raises the question of what constitutes the “West”. For the purposes of this article the “West” will be understood as a geographic entity consisting of Europe and North America, but with an awareness that the term implies some kind of cultural terrain containing commonality, and in its construction standing distinct from the “East”. Sufism’s origins in Islam place its study firmly in the terrain of Western constructions of the “East”, but this chapter will show that Sufism exists in the in-between spaces and always in transition. In parts of Europe, especially Britain and Germany, Sufism should be understood in the context of Romantic orientalist reconstructions of Islam and an appropriation of Sufism as a form of universal mysticism which removed the tradition from its Islamic roots. In the USA this reconstruction has led Marcia Hermansen to categorize various Sufi movements as “theirs” and “ours”.¹ However, in addition to nineteenth and early twentieth-century Romantic interest in mysticism, Sufism also needs to be understood in the context of post-colonial Muslim migrations into Western Europe, the presence of indigenous Muslim communities in Eastern Europe left behind by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and finally Western conversion to Islam.²

Contact between Sufism and European orientalism can be dated back as far as the translations of Sa’di’s *Gulistān* into German in the early decades of the seventeenth century, reaching its pinnacle in Germany in the nineteenth century.³ Gritt Klinkhammer informs us that Johann-Wolfgang von Goethe

¹ See Marcia Hermansen, “Global Sufism: Theirs and Ours”, in *Sufis in Western Society*, eds Geaves, Ron, Dressler, Markus, Klinkhammer, Gritt (London: Routledge, 2009), 26–45.

² Sufism is considered by some authors to be the main route to conversion to Islam. See Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam* (London: Kegan Paul, 1996) and Kate Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2007).

³ Sa’di was first introduced to the West in a French translation by André du Ryer (1634) on which Friedrich Ochsenbach based his German translation (1636). Georgius Gentius

praised the writings of the Muslim mystics Rumi and Hafiz, and the writings of the Sufis were known to Friedrich Rückert, who translated the first poetic version of the Qu'ran into German.⁴ In the eighteenth century, Sir William Jones, the British orientalist, initiated his project to translate classical Persian texts at the Asiatic Society founded in Calcutta in 1784.⁵ German scholarship arose out of an interest in the Orient that led to travellers, orientalists, and artists visiting various parts of the East and creating a body of literature consisting of travelogues, oriental fiction, and translations of mystical poetry. In the main the German reception of the Orient differed from that of Britain and France, in that Germany had no colonial encounter.⁶ Consequently, the orientalism involved in the European study of Sufism was of a different kind to that of the classical discourse of colonization framed by Edward Said. Hourani criticizes Said for ignoring the German tradition of orientalism and the philosophy of history that was central to their work. He is more specific when he states that Said carries his criticism of the orientalists too far, when he claimed that they all "delivered the Orient bound to the imperial powers".⁷ Sadiq al-Azm argues that Said had rendered a disservice to those who desired to study other cultures from a "libertarian perspective".⁸ All these critiques of Said are pertinent to the Western study of Sufism.

produced a Latin version accompanied by the Persian text in 1651. Adam Olearius also made the first direct and complete German translation in 1651 (Franklin Lewis, "Golestān e Sa'di" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* Vol. XI, Fasc. 1, 2001, 79–86). The *Gulistan* has been translated into English many times: Stephen Sullivan (London, 1774, selections), James Dumoulin (Calcutta: 1807), Francis Gladwin (Calcutta, 1808, preface by Ralph Waldo Emerson), James Ross (London, 1823), S. Lee (London: 1827), Edward Backhouse Eastwick (Hartford: 1852; republished by Octagon Press, 1979), Johnson (London, 1863), John T. Platts (London, 1867), Edward Henry Whinfield (London: 1880), Edward Rehatsek (Banaras, 1888, in some later editions incorrectly attributed to Sir Richard Burton), Sir Edwin Arnold (London: 1899), Launcelot Alfred Cranmer Byng (London, 1905), Celwyn E. Hampton (New York: 1913), and Arthur John Arberry (London: 1945, the first two chapters). More recent English translations have been published by Omar Ali Shah (1997) and by Wheeler M. Thackston (2008).

⁴ Gritt Klinkhammer (2009) "The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany: From Mysticism to Authenticity", in *Sufis in Western Society*, eds Geaves et al., 130–147.

⁵ Hafez's first ode and now familiar quatrains of 'Omar Kayyam appeared in Latin as early as Sir Thomas Hyde's *Syntagma Dissertationum* (1700). Both William Jones and Edward Fitzgerald translated from Persian into Latin. William Jones' most famous English translation was the ghazal of Hafez, which he entitled "A Persian Song" and published twice, first in his *Grammar of the Persian Language* (1771), in conjunction with a prose translation, and a year later in his *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages* (Michael Beard "Translations Of Classical Persian Literature" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* Vol. VIII, Fasc. 4, 1998, 443–447).

⁶ Klinkhammer, "The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany", 130.

⁷ Interview with Albert Hourani in *Approaches to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher (London: Ithaca Press, 1994), 30, quoted in Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007), 52.

⁸ Sadiq al Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse" in *Forbidden Agendas: Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East*, ed. Jon Rothschild (London: Al Saqi Books, 1988), 350 ff.

The British history of scholarship is more complex in that many of the first translators of Sufi works were associated with the colonial enterprise, arriving in parts of the expanding Eastern territories as administrators or missionaries. In general, the perception of Islam was negative, arguably framed in an older discourse in which Islam was Christendom's hostile "other". However, the reception of Sufism was far more ambivalent. The early history of comparative religion is marked by a quest for origins. The translations of classical Sufi texts, especially those written by exponents of mysticism and poetically describing experiences of intimacy with God, appeared to the orientalists as something markedly different from the practices and teachings of Muhammad. This would lead to immense speculation on the origins of Sufism. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European orientalists would develop the thesis that Sufism and Islam were separate religious phenomena, formed from diverse origins but coming together historically to create a new syncretism in the Muslim world. According to such theories, Sufism's origins are variously found in Syrian Christian monasticism, Greek neo-Platonism, Zoroastrianism, and Indian religious traditions. Sufism is assumed to have emerged as the Arab conquerors made contact with these older religious worldviews. There is never any mention of the Sufi understandings of their origins in the exemplary ethical and religious life of the Prophet and his companions or even of developments in the Muslim world after the death of Muhammad.

A number of prominent orientalists, including Adalbert Merx (1838–1909), Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921), Theodore Noeldeke (1836–1930), Miguel Asín Palacios (1871–1944), Tor Andrae (1885–1947), and Reynold Nicholson (1868–1945), have all suggested that Sufism emerged out of Islamic contact with Eastern Christianity's traditions of asceticism.⁹ Some prominent Muslim religious scholars were even unsure about Sufism's origins. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1127), the Hanbali critic of Sufism, argued that Sufis were attracted to poverty and dependence on a spiritual guide as a result of contact with Christian monasticism.¹⁰ If some were to see Sufi practices demonstrating links with Christian monasticism, others such as E.H. Whinfield (1835–1922), E.G. Browne (1862–1926), and Louis Massignon (1883–1962) sought the origins of Sufi theosophy in the neo-Platonic writings of Plotinus, Gnostic and Dionysian cults encountered in Egypt and through translation of Greek

⁹ Rida Suliyman Hishmat, "Sufism and Orientalism" in *Sufism: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam*, eds Gholamali Haddad Adel, Mohammad Jafar Elmi, Hassan Taromi Rad (London: EWI Press, 2012), 205–206.

¹⁰ Hishmat, "Sufism and Orientalism", 206.

philosophy into Arabic in the eighth and ninth centuries.¹¹ One of the earliest European writers on Sufism, Friedrich Thöluck (1799–1877), claimed that Sufism had emerged from the Magian or Zoroastrian religion in ancient Persia.¹² Although Thöluck would later change his view,¹³ others such as Reinhard Dozy (1820–1883),¹⁴ Edgard Blochet (1870–1937),¹⁵ and Browne continued to endorse this viewpoint, with Blochet also speculating that Sufism had parallels with Manichaen and Mazdakite religious practices.¹⁶ The German orientalists Max Horten (1874–1945), Richard Hartmann (1881–1965), and Alfred Von Kremer (1828–1889) would go further east for the origins of Sufism and argue that there were marked parallels between the Sufi view of the relations between God, humanity and creation with Vedantic teachings found in the Upanishads.¹⁷ They would point towards various sayings of the famed mystics of Sufism – Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (c858–922), Abu Yazid al-Bastami, (804–874), and Abu’l Qasim al-Junayd of Baghdad (830–910) – linking them to discourses on Brahman/Atman unity and the illusionary nature of the world found in Vedantic philosophy. Others were to argue that Sufism contained diverse elements from all of the above. Significantly, Nicholson, previously an exponent of the view that Sufism had originated from an intermingling of neo-Platonic, Christian, and Gnostic

¹¹ Hishmat, “Sufism and Orientalism”, 207.

¹² Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 133, and Hishmat, “Sufism and Orientalism”, 209. Friedrich August Grotte Thöluck was a Protestant theologian and linguist with an interest in the Orient who published one of the earliest books on Sufism in Europe. Born at Breslau, 30 March 1799, he studied at the universities of Breslau and Berlin. He became a university lecturer (Privatdocent) at Berlin in December 1820, and extraordinary professor of Theology there in April 1823 (D.D. from Berlin in 1826). In November 1825, he was appointed ordinary professor of Theology at Halle ([http://www.hymnary.org/person/Thöluck A1](http://www.hymnary.org/person/Thöluck_A1), visited on 13 September 2012).

¹³ See Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 133.

¹⁴ Reinhard Dozy (b. Leiden, 21 February 1820; d. Leiden, 29 April 1883) was a Dutch orientalist renowned especially as a lexicographer of Arabic and a historian of Muslim Andalusia. He began his studies at Leiden University in 1834 with H.E. Weijers (1804–1840), who introduced him to Arabic philology through the Warner collection of manuscripts in the university library (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dozy>, visited 12 September 2012).

¹⁵ Edgard Blochet was a French orientalist, born at Bourges on 12 December 1870. He attended L’Ecole des Langues Orientales in Paris, where he received a diploma in Arabic; he also received a diploma from L’Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes and later lectured there (from 1895 to 1901). In 1895 he joined the manuscript department of the Bibliothèque Nationale as an assistant, subsequently becoming deputy librarian and finally, in 1929, adjunct curator (http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/blochet_gabriel_french_orientalist, visited 12 September 2012).

¹⁶ Hishmat, “Sufism and Orientalism”, 209.

¹⁷ Alwi Shihab, *Examining Islam in the West: Addressing Accusations and Correcting Misconceptions*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2011, p. 178; Hishmat, “Sufism and Orientalism”, 209.

teachings, further influenced by Hindu and Persian thought, did eventually argue that it was “categorically improper” to perceive Sufism as extraneous to Islam and defended the profound mystical truths of the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth*.¹⁸ Paul Noya and Helmut Ritter (1892–1971) also wrote that the allegorical language of the Sufi mystics was rooted in the Qur’ān¹⁹, but the damage had been done and it would be many decades into the latter half of the twentieth century before Sufism in the West was reclaimed by Muslims into the fold of traditional Islam.

Gritt Klinkhammer argues that the German orientalist sought the roots of Sufism outside of Islam until the beginning of the twentieth century, with Richard Hartmann, for example, describing Sufism as a new syncretistic mystical phenomenon that only later turned towards Islam.²⁰ Klinkhammer notes that in Weber’s analysis, Islam lacked an individual search for salvation and mysticism, and Sufism was perceived as an “orgiastic and contemplative mass movement” that prevented the “development of inner-worldly acculturation of Shari‘a Islam”.²¹ The effect on Sufism in the West was twofold. The first impacted on the academic study of Sufism and the second on the development of Sufism as a religious form in Europe and North America. The separation of Sufism from its Islamic roots led to an over-emphasis on the translation of classical Sufi mystical literature at the expense of the lived religion practised throughout the Muslim world and perceived as part and parcel of a normative Islamic worldview, even if deeply contested in the Muslim majority world. The everyday vernacular religion of saint veneration, healing practices, *shaykh/murid* transnational networks, religious disciplines and beliefs disappeared from the academic gaze, drowned out by the voices that embraced metaphysical truths associated with mystical union. Following from Weber, sociologists of religion would regard the above lived reality of Sufism in everyday Muslim life as primitive religion fit only for rural village life. Ernest Gellner would advocate a dichotomy between an intellectual urban Islam associated with compliance to the *shari‘a* and a “superstitious” religion found only in rural areas of the Islamic world.²² The focus on the

¹⁸ Hishmat, “Sufism and Orientalism”, 210.

¹⁹ Paul Noya, *Tafsir Qur’ani wa Zaban i ‘Irfani (Exegese Coranique et Langage Mystique)*, Isma’il Sa’adat, tr., (Tehran: 1994), 9–14; and Helmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farid al Din Attar* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

²⁰ Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 132.

²¹ Max Weber, “Religionssoziologie” in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972, 375–376 (original 1922) quoted in Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 132.

²² E. Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: University Press, 1981).

translation of classical Sufi prose by A.J. Arberry and R.A. Nicholson would lead Arberry to assert that the “lived religion” of Sufis throughout the Muslim world was a debased version of the Sufism that had existed in the eighth to eleventh centuries. Arberry claimed that “Sufi orders continue to attract the ignorant masses but no man of education would care to speak in their favour”.²³ With hindsight Arberry was premature, but even so, he ignores the continuous chain of Sufi adherents who have revived the *tariqas* through the centuries to the modern period and who have reformed Sufism from within, a process which the anthropologist Pnina Werbner describes as “waxing and waning”.²⁴ The overall impact of this history of oriental scholarship was that when Sufism was found to exist in everyday Muslim life, it was decried as “orgiastic collectivistic fanaticism” (Max Weber) or “primitive aimless spirituality” (F.A.G. Thöluck)²⁵ or “folk religion” (E. Gellner), but when it appeared as moral and ethical metaphysical discourse expressed in inspired poetic forms, its origins in Islam were refuted.

The orientalist understanding of Sufism as a pantheistic or monistic mystical communion with a universal Being, with origins or influences in most of the world’s major religious traditions would have another unforeseen consequence. Gritt Klinkhammer notes that the German understanding of Sufism as a “universal and positive mysticism” would feed into a rising religious narrative in Western Europe amongst some intellectuals, artists and writers, in which the idea of a universal mystical experience was perceived as the common essence of religions – a “non-institutional, individual religious feeling” that would be used in opposition to the institutionalized and cultural forms of religion already demonized in the Enlightenment and further critiqued by the Romantic movement’s sense of superiority of feeling over thought.²⁶ Thöluck had already written that the “Orient” was primarily “image and feeling” in juxtaposition to Western European Christianity and civilization, where “thought” dominated.²⁷ The idea of an “essential mysticism” that lay behind all the cultural or civilizational forms of religion would influence a number of scholars in both Germany and Britain and give birth to the stubborn notion of religion as a “*sui generis*” entity requiring its own separate arena of study – a notion that remained dominant, although not

²³ A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 122.

²⁴ Pnina Werbner “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikr and the Sacralizing of Space among British Muslims”, *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996): 319–321.

²⁵ See Markus Dressler, Ron Geaves, Gritt Klinkhammer, “Introduction” in *Sufis in Western Society*, eds Geaves et al., 1.

²⁶ Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 134.

²⁷ Ibid., 133–134.

unchallenged, until the second half of the twentieth century. The German orientalist Paul Klappstein wrote in 1919 in the preface to his translation of Sufi texts that Sufism was a form of universal mysticism and should be understood as a “psychic predisposition” in all human beings.²⁸ This understanding of Sufism was to fascinate orientalists such as Massignon, Nicholson, and scholars of comparative religion in Britain. For example, Walter Stace (1960), Geoffrey Parrinder (1976), and Ninian Smart (1978) all argue that the mystical experience has enough common features, in spite of the obvious differences arising from a multiplicity of religious traditions in which they occur, to be defined as universal.²⁹

Stace provides a seven point categorization to assert the universalism of the mystical experience: 1) a unifying vision in which the One is perceived by the senses in and through many objects; 2) the One is apprehended as the inner life, or presence in all things, so that “nothing is really dead”; 3) the experience brings a sense of reality; 4) a feeling of joy and peace resulting in fulfilment; 5) a feeling of the presence of the sacred; 6) a feeling of paradoxicality; and 7) the experience is ineffable or beyond description.³⁰ Reynold Nicholson and A.J. Arberry appear to endorse this syncretic approach to Sufism as a Muslim form of an essential religious experience at the heart of the major religions, or, at least, the theistic ones. Ian Netton notes that Nicholson, although aware of the deep doctrinal divisions between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, asserts that “the spiritual element of that common element can best be appreciated in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mysticism”, and quotes Arberry as stating, “the Way on man’s approach or return to God is in essence the same, in Christian and non-Christian teaching. It has three stages: an ethical stage, then one of knowledge and love, leading to the mystical union of the soul with God.”³¹

Perhaps the most famous scholar of Sufism to emerge from this intellectual movement was Annemarie Schimmel who argued persuasively that Sufism was a cultural form of universal mysticism, stating that “mysticism can be

²⁸ Paul Klappstein, *Vier Turkestanische Heilige: ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Islamischen Mystik* (Berlin: Mayer & Muller, 1919), cited in Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 134.

²⁹ See Walter Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: MacMillan, 1960); Ninian Smart, “Understanding Religious Experience”, in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978); Geoffrey Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World’s Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976).

³⁰ Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 131–132.

³¹ Reynard Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. v. (1975 reprint of 1914 edn)), and A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), 7, quoted in Ian Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 3–4.

defined as love of the Absolute” and that in its widest sense it may be defined as the consciousness of the One Reality.³² In Britain, this was echoed by the works of Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941).³³ Aldous Huxley had popularized the term “perennial philosophy” in his book of the same name published in 1945, and it came to encapsulate the notion that all religions share a common origin in a single, perennial, primeval, or primordial religion that had subsequently taken a number of forms. In common with each other, perennialists also shared in a cultural and intellectual critique of Western society in which it was posited that the problems of the Occident could be resolved by a return to the ancient truths discovered in the sacred texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. Some of the perennialists began to travel to the sources of the traditions that they admired in search of ancient wisdom and contemporary exponents in the Orient. Their interaction with such figures would also result in a missionary thrust from the Orient to the Occident that reversed the much more dominant infiltration of Christian missionaries following behind the European powers’ colonial ventures into the Orient. Out of this interaction Sufism as a Western religion took birth in Western Europe and North America.

SUFISM AS A WESTERN RELIGION

In his study on the popularity of Sufi literature in the West, Mark Sedgwick notes that Rumi and Hafiz can be located among the top ten best-selling poets in North America. Rumi also figures in the top ten in Britain.³⁴ Sedgwick explores the development of Sufi literature in the West, seeking the key authors and attempting to explain Sufism’s popularity. He makes the important point that Westerners read the classical texts differently from Muslims, but also read different texts on Sufism written by Western authors. He considers this difference to be so great, that he prefers to use the label

³² Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 4 and 23, also quoted in Ian Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey*, 2.

³³ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (1911), 12th edition reprinted by Dutton 1961; reprint 1999.

³⁴ Sedgwick calculated from Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk in September and October 2007. The poetry rankings were also checked in June 2007. He notes that Rumi is often referred to as America’s best selling poet, a view expressed by Marcia Nelson: “Despite the fact that Rumi has been dead for 700 years, he is commonly thought to be America’s current bestselling poet” (“Islamic Publishing”). Sedgwick notes that the Amazon data suggests that this is an exaggeration (Mark Sedgwick, “The Reception of Sufi and Neo Sufi Literature” in *Sufis in Western Society*, eds Geaves, et al., 194.

“Neo-Sufism”.³⁵ Writing in 2000, Geaves eschews this label as it has been used to describe Sufi reform movements in the Muslim world and prefers to use “universal Sufism”.³⁶ It is arguable that universal Sufism has nothing to do with Islam and can be traced to the need for some Western “truth-seekers” to reject Christianity and look for answers to their quest in the East. Sedgwick argues that nineteenth-century Deism and the Romantic Movement were influential in this quest. Deism is posited as one reason why Sufism came to be perceived as an ancient and universal mystical tradition.³⁷ The Romantic Movement, according to Sedgwick, provided an emphasis on subjectivity, manifested as experience and self-discovery, and remains free of religion. Sedgwick considers that the readers of the poetry of Rumi and Hafiz regard them as “spirituality” rather than Islamic and are also likely to read the works of Khalil Gibran, Paulo Coelho, Hermann Hesse, and Mary Oliver.³⁸ Klinkhammer also makes an association with a post-Second World War generation searching for new patterns of life. She argues that, along with the “students’ revolt” and the “sexual revolution”, German reception of Sufism entered a new phase as the influence of the established church weakened. Sufism, alongside other Eastern religions, was understood to be more compatible with a search for freedom of individualist expression. She notes that by the late 1960s and early 1970s, a more experience-based form of Sufism was introduced in Germany “by people who did not seek a new religion, but were searching for a spiritual self”. However, the roots of this quest for authenticity did not originate in the diffused and uprooted Sufism described by Klinkhammer as “New Age spirituality as therapy”,³⁹ but rather in the first half of the twentieth century when it was associated with the *angst* and *anomie* felt by the interwar generation,⁴⁰ along with a critique of Western materialism and a perceived decline of civilization, followed by an existential terror of mass destruction during the Cold War.

It is argued above that the nineteenth-century orientalist had been instrumental in creating Sufism in the West as an ancient and universal mystical tradition older than Islam and grafted on to the Arab revelation when the Arabs expanded through trade and conquest to the territories of older civilizations. Sedgwick agrees, arguing that the intellectual and artistic

³⁵ Sedgwick, “The Reception of Sufi and Neo Sufi Literature”, 181.

³⁶ Ron Geaves, *Sufis of Britain* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 2000).

³⁷ Mark Sedgwick, “Quelques sources du xviii siècle du pluralisme religieux inclusif”, in *Etudes d'histoire de l'ésotérisme*, (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2007), 49–65.

³⁸ Sedgwick, “The Reception of Sufi and Neo Sufi Literature”, 182–183, and 192.

³⁹ Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 135 ff.

⁴⁰ Sedgwick, “The Reception of Sufi and Neo Sufi Literature”, 184.

European elites were in a state of obfuscation regarding Sufism and that this created an environment in which some religious innovators of the early twentieth century could locate their teachings with reference to Sufism, as in the case of Georges Gurdjieff (1866–1949).⁴¹

Gurdjieff claimed that most human beings lived in a state of hypnotic “waking sleep”, from which it was possible to reach a higher state of consciousness and achieve one’s full potential. He appeared to be aware that his teachings had parallels with the esoteric dimensions of the major world religions, but referred to them as “the Fourth Way” in that they were different to the methods of raising or transforming consciousness developed by Christian monks, Hindu Yogis or “fakirs” (Sufis). Little is known of Gurdjieff’s early life until he appeared in Moscow in 1912 where he began to collect a small group of followers around himself including the philosopher P.D. Ouspensky and the composer Thomas de Hartmann. Any earlier biography is shrouded in mystery and obtainable from Gurdjieff’s biographical work *Meetings with Remarkable Men* first written in Russian in 1927.⁴² The book describes Gurdjieff’s travels in Central Asia and his meetings with a number of esoteric “masters” and various ancient brotherhoods, including the mysterious Sarmoung Brotherhood. Gurdjieff records that he made contact with a representative of the Sarmoung through his friend, the Dervish Bogga Eddin, in Bukhara. He claims that the chief monastery of the society was located somewhere in the heart of Asia, about twelve days’ journey from Bukhara on horseback. Several prominent followers of Gurdjieff, notably J.G. Bennett, have claimed that the Sarmoung were connected to Naqshbandi Sufis and that Gurdjieff’s teachings were derived from their esoteric knowledge.⁴³ According to Ernest Scott, Ouspensky also believed that Gurdjieff’s teachings originated in the Mevlevi Sufi order.⁴⁴ Although the claims that Gurdjieff was taught by Sufis are highly contested and likely to remain disputed even amongst his many followers today, there is no doubt about the influence of his teachings on the development of Sufism in the West. Western followers of the various offshoots of the Gurdjieffian way have throughout the twentieth century arrived at the door of Muslim Sufis expecting to find parallels in the Islamic traditions and hoping to discover universal esoteric knowledge. There are also Universal Sufi teachers in the West who encourage a synthesis of Sufism

⁴¹ Mark Sedgwick, “European Neo Sufi Movements in the Interwar Period”, in *Islam in Europe in the Interwar Period: Networks, Status, Challenges*, Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain, eds (London: Hurst, 2008).

⁴² First translated into English in 1963 by A.R. Oranje.

⁴³ John G. Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making of A New World* (Bennett Pub. Co. 1992), 56–57 ff.

⁴⁴ Ernest Scott, *The People of the Secret* (London: Octagon Press, 1983), 165.

derived from Islam and Gurdjieff's teachings. Some Gurdjieff-influenced teachers will also incorporate variations of the Mevlevi "turning".

One such example of this fluidity can be found in the Study Society based in Barons Court, London, where the successors to Ouspensky, under the guidance of their teacher Wilhelm Koren, carry out a particularly faithful version of the Mevlevi "whirling" as their primary spiritual practice. The original group do not lay claim to being Muslims or even Sufis, but they are now attracting students from London's Turkish Muslim communities who are impressed with the authentic maintenance of the spiritual discipline of the Mevlevi *samāʿ*. However, it should be noted that there is no adherence to any other Islamic religious practice or belief.⁴⁵

Idries Shah (1924–1996) is more problematic than Gurdjieff. A prolific writer of over thirty five books, of which more than twenty are on the subject of Sufism, with sales estimated in excess of fifteen million,⁴⁶ and with claimed direct lineage back to Muḥammad and family connections to the Afghan branch of the Naqshbandi *tariqa*, it is not surprising that Shah became the representative of Sufism in Western intellectual and artistic circles in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet in spite of his Muslim background, a closer examination of Shah's teachings reveals little allegiance to any Islamic tenets. Shah, along with the perennialists, maintained that esoteric wisdom is independent of institutional religion but can sometimes be discovered within an exoteric religious form. Not surprisingly, he taught that Sufism is independent of Islam, although it may be possible to discover it within Islam. Shah's highly successful tales of Mullah Nasiruddin became almost obligatory reading for British and North American "truth-seekers" of the 1960s and 1970s counter-culture.⁴⁷ However, the Mullah is not presented as a devout Muslim, but rather as an innocent of God who highlights the hypocrisy of organized or institutionalized religion.⁴⁸ Shah was to teach that the truth of the Sufis was the inner essence of all religions. Doris Lessing, who studied with Shah in the 1960s, encapsulates his view when she wrote "It took 800 years to get Sufi thought accepted by orthodox Islam, and since then Muslims have claimed it for their own."⁴⁹ Shah, like Gurdjieff, was primarily concerned

⁴⁵ For a fairly detailed account of the Study Group see Ron Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain*, 168–174.

⁴⁶ Among them are *The Sufis*; *Wisdom of the Idiots*; *The Golden Caravan*; *The Spirit of the East*; *Learning how to Learn: The Commanding Self*.

⁴⁷ *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasiruddin*; *The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasiruddin*; *the Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasiruddin*.

⁴⁸ Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain*, 167.

⁴⁹ Doris Lessing, "The Sufis and Idries Shah", http://www.serendipity.li/more/lessing_shah.htm, visited 21 July 2014.

with the transformation of human consciousness based on self-development, and there is little evidence that the small groups that gathered around him were taught any kind of allegiance to Islam, but rather were presented with a vision of a universal path of self-understanding. Geaves, however, argues that Shah may have presented the *malamati* tradition in which Sufis work hidden in the world and scorn any outer identity of Islam, including the practices of the *tariqas*.⁵⁰

Decades before the counter-culture of the second half of the twentieth century, Shaykh Hazrat Inayat Khan's travels in 1910 throughout America and Europe in order to promote his Sufi Message to the West were the first missionary thrust by a Muslim Sufi into Europe and North America. As an initiate of the Chishtiya, an Indian Sufi *tariqa*, it might be expected that Inayat Khan would promote an Islamic version of the tradition. Yet Khan would also contribute to forming Sufism's current image in the West as a universal spirituality separated from Islam. Inayat Khan would teach an eclectic Sufism in which he would declare that "true" Sufism is above all religions. In his view, all of the world religions have the essence of inner knowledge by direct experience. Sedgwick asserts that Khan took "Sufism and dressed it up as something other than Sufism in order to make it more palatable to modern Westerners."⁵¹ Certainly, there is no indication of any attempt to suggest that Western followers should comply in any way with the *shari'a* or even become Muslims. Sedgwick points out that the *contents* of the teachings are far closer to Sufism as found in the Muslim world than the *form* (author's italics).⁵² The actuality of Inayat Khan's attempts to promote Sufism in the West is probably more complex than merely an attempt to create a form of the tradition that was "more palatable to modern Westerners". Inayat Khan was an upper class Indian who lived through the British Raj and whose Sufi affiliation had always demonstrated both eclectic and syncretistic tendencies. He had been trained as a musician by his grandfather, who had believed in the universality of all religions. Inayat Khan travelled the length and breadth of India as a musician and questioned holy men from all religious backgrounds and, although maintaining the outer obligations of Islam, studied the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Khan's universalism can be found in the intellectual milieu of Northern India, the meetings between Yogis and Sufis, the mediaeval *bhakti* tradition and the eclectic tendencies of Chishti *tariqa*.⁵³ In addition,

⁵⁰ Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain*, 167.

⁵¹ Sedgwick, "The Reception of Sufi and Neo Sufi Literature", 185.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain*, 174–176.

the class and background of his students in North America should be taken into account. His musical talent and eclectic spirituality with its emphasis on universalism drew the same audiences who had been attracted to the theosophy of Annie Besant, the universalist expression of ancient Hindu truths presented by Vivekananda at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. In 1923 Hazrat Khan founded the Sufi Movement to promote his teachings in the West and the result was a blending of Indian ideas of a universal truth that transcended the outer forms of religion and the Western pursuit of self-development as promoted by Gurdjieff and Idries Shah.

A similar outlook can be found among the followers of Irina Tweedie (1907–1999). Tweedie was taught by Radha Mohan Lal, who claimed to be a master of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujadiddiyya Sufi Order. She visited India, where she met her teacher, in 1959 after a spiritual crisis evoked by the death of her husband in 1954. The diaries that she kept were published as *Daughter of Fire: A Diary of a Spiritual Training with a Sufi Master*. The book was first published in its abridged form as *The Chasm of Fire*, which has sold over 100,000 copies and has been translated into five languages.⁵⁴ Tweedie returned to Britain in 1966 and started a Sufi meditation group in North London. It is claimed that Tweedie became the first Western woman to be trained in this Naqshbandi system.⁵⁵ However, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Tweedie's chosen successor, writes that an unusual occurrence took place in the nineteenth century. One line of succession was passed to the Hindu disciples on Fazl Ahmed Khan's death and it has been noted that the language of Tweedie's teacher is more akin to Hindu spirituality than Islamic. In an interview with Tweedie published in 1990, the interviewer comments on the use of "*chakras, kundalini, atman*" in his discourses. Tweedie's response is typical of universal Sufism: "You see Sufism and yoga are one and the same thing. They are just words, in wisdom there is no difference. All the teachings are absolutely the same. They are only different paths to the One." Tweedie goes on to refer to Idries Shah, affirming his position that when Sufism spread, it took on the prevalent culture of the Middle East (Islam), but in India it borrowed heavily from the language of yoga. Tweedie's knowledge of Islam is summed up in the words, "I don't know what name they have for

⁵⁴ Irene Tweedie, *Daughter of Fire: A Diary of a Spiritual Training with a Sufi Master* (Golden Sufi Centre, 1971). As described at http://goldensufi.org/book_desc_DoF.html, visited 18 September 2012.

⁵⁵ Llewellyn Vaughan Lee, "Neither of the East nor of the West: The Journey of the Naqshbandiyya Mujadiddiyya from India to America", http://goldensufi.org/article_eastwest.html, visited 18 September 2012.

chakras in Arabic. I don't speak Arabic and I don't understand it. You see my training was with fire, which is *kundalini*.”⁵⁶

If the examples above demonstrate the fluidity of borders between “universal Sufism” and Islam, with the former an “invented tradition” with tenuous claims to be Muslim or Sufi, Sedgwick reminds us that even in the case of Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), where teachings and practice were closer to Sufism as found in the Muslim world, there were still significant differences.⁵⁷ However, here the traversing of borders between perennial philosophy and traditional Islam become easier to negotiate. Schuon belonged to the Traditionalist School whose teachings resurrect the idea of a common mystical core at the heart of all world religions, as expressed in the writings of René Guénon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Several of these figures would have a significant impact on the arrival of Sufism as a Western religion, in the process offering an even more flexible and fluid boundary between “universal Sufism” and traditional Islamic expressions of *tassawuf*.

The Traditionalists differed from Huxley's perennialism in that they posited that the mystical essence at the heart of all religions could only be discovered through adherence to the disciplines of one religion. Their viewpoint is perfectly encapsulated in the words of René Guénon: “initiation is essentially the transmission of a spiritual influence, a transmission that can only take place through a regular, traditional organization, so that one cannot speak of initiation outside of an affiliation with an organization of this kind”.⁵⁸ In the case of the above exponents, Islam (Sufism) was chosen as the way to pursue the “transmission of a spiritual influence”. The various branches of the Shadhiliya *tariqa* founded by Abu 'l-Ḥasan ash-Shadhili (1196–1258) and historically influential in North Africa and Egypt are important in this phase of the development of Sufism in Europe. The Swedish impressionist painter and Sufi scholar Ivan Aguéli (or Sheikh 'Abd al-Hadi Aqili; 1869–1917) was the first official *muqaddam* (representative) of the Shadhiliya in Western Europe. In 1902 Aguéli had moved to Cairo to become one of the first Western Europeans to be enrolled at al-Azhar University, where he studied Arabic and Islamic philosophy. In the same year he was also initiated into the al-'Arabiyya Shadhiliya by the Egyptian Shaykh

⁵⁶ “Daughter of Fire: An Interview with Irina Tweedie”, published in *Yoga and Life*, Vol. 5, No. 5, Autumn 1990 and reproduced at http://www.goldensufi.org/a_yoga_and_life.html, visited on 18 September 2012.

⁵⁷ Sedgwick, “The Reception of Sufi and Neo Sufi Literature”, 184.

⁵⁸ René Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation (Collected Works of Rene Guenon)* (Sophia Perennis, 2004), 48.

‘Abd al-Rahman Ilaysh al-Kabir (1840–1921). In 1911 he founded a Sufi society in Paris named Al Akbariyya to promote the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi among the “scholarly, educated and freethinking classes”, drawing upon the practices of the Shadhili and Malamati Sufi paths. Among its first members was René Guénon (1886–1951).⁵⁹

The writings of René Guénon, known to Muslims as Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahid Yahya, demonstrate his perennialism. His approach to Eastern metaphysics claims a “universal character” which can be adapted to Western audiences whilst faithfully maintaining their spirit.⁶⁰ His first attempt to write on Eastern mysticism was confined to aspects of Hinduism, primarily the teachings of Advaita Vedanta.⁶¹ In 1930, Guénon left Paris for Cairo, where he remained for many years. In this period of his life, he apparently practised a more orthodox allegiance to Islam. He remained embedded in Sufism through his further initiation by Shaykh Salama Hassan ar-Radi, founder of the Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya. Guénon lived with the Shaykh until the latter’s death in 1938. In 1934 he married the daughter of Shaykh Mohammad Ibrahim.

Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) is known as the inspiration of the Traditionalists and an exponent of the perennialist school. Schuon was critical of the relativist stance of the academic study of religion, arguing that it was necessary to maintain a confessional position with regard to the existence of God. This search for the Absolute would lead him on a journey through the world’s sacred texts, including the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. He discovered the works of René Guénon and was influenced by his metaphysical position. He studied Arabic in Paris at the local mosque school and travelled to Algeria in 1932, where he met the Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi and accepted initiation, taking the name ‘Isa Nur al-Din Ahmad. In 1935, he visited Algeria and Morocco and, in 1938 and 1939, Egypt, where he finally met Guénon after correspondence with him for nearly thirty years.

Schuon’s meeting with Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi in Algeria would be instrumental in shaping Sufism in Europe and North America, and was especially influential in Britain. The Darqawiyya was a Moroccan branch of the Shadhiliya founded in the last decades of the eighteenth century by Muhammad al-‘Arabi al-Darqawi (1760–1823). The Alawiyya branch of the

⁵⁹ Axel Gauffin, *Ivan Aguéli Människan, mystikern, målaren I II* (Sveriges Allmänna Konstförenings Publikation, 1941), 188–189.

⁶⁰ René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross (Collected Works of Rene Guenon)* (Sophia Perennis, 2004), foreword.

⁶¹ René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines (Collected Works of Rene Guenon)*, (Sophia Perennis, 2004).

Darqawiyya was founded by Ahmad ibn Mustafa al-‘Alawi al-Mustaghanimi, popularly known as Shaykh al-Alawi, and one of the greatest renewers of Sufism in the Muslim world in the twentieth century. After his time with the Shaykh al-Alawi in Algeria, Schuon returned to the West to found the Maryamiya branch of the Shadhiliyya Order in Europe and North America where he promoted the teachings of the Shaykh. Sedgwick claims that of all the “neo-Sufi” groups, the Maryamiyya was the closest to Sufism as found in the Muslim world. However, he points out some key differences. He affirms that it was almost identical with other Shadhili branches with regard to practices, but it was far more relaxed in its approach to the *sharī‘a*. He also notes that Schuon’s version of the Traditionalist philosophy of René Guénon was taught alongside Sufism and included Guénon’s anti-modernist philosophy of history, which was in part influenced by theosophy. Schuon’s universalism continued to influence his spirituality and was demonstrated by travels in the 1960s among the Sioux and Crow American Indians where he participated in their sacred rites.

Schuon’s first book, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, expresses fully his perennial stance, but later he wrote several texts on Islam, including *Understanding Islam*, *Dimensions of Islam*, and *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*. However, it is the people that he attracted to his “Traditionalist” stance, often introducing them to the teachings of the Shaykh al-Alawi, that were to be most influential. Some of his most eminent students include Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984) and Martin Lings (1909–2005). Lings published a biography of the Shaykh al-Alawi under the title *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, and it remains one of the most influential books on Sufism published in the Western world. He also wrote the acclaimed *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*.

Sedgwick is convinced that all the “neo-Sufi” groups are rooted in Western spirituality, with an emphasis on the individual spiritual search that has no equivalent in the Muslim world. He also notes that although some Eastern Sufis may have displayed a more ecumenical spirit with regard to other forms of spirituality they came across, the Traditionalist version of perennialism that perceived Sufism as an outer manifestation of a universal and essential mysticism was not the Islamic interpretation of the tradition.⁶² The relationship between the Perennials and the Muslim world is succinctly described by Klinkhammer when she states:

⁶² Sedgwick, “The Reception of Sufi and Neo Sufi Literature”, 184.

Some of the Perennials found such primeval truths in Sufism, which they experienced by living among Muslims. In the end, they went back to their homelands and found some students, but did not establish a *tariqa*. Most of them, e.g. the Swede Agueli, the French Guenon, the German Fritjof Schuon and also their well known students such as Titus Burkhardt and Martin Lings, were considered intellectuals rather than practitioners. Their books on Sufism are more widely known than their practice as Sufis of the Alawiyya Order, which they brought with them to Europe.⁶³

However, Klinkhammer and Sedgwick may have overemphasized the distinction between the Traditionalist's brand of Western Sufism and Islam. The borders between these two had always been fluid and the degree to which the *shari'a* was followed, although problematic, is not a definitive test of allegiance to Islam. *Shari'a* compliance is used to critique Sufis in the arena of contestation between Islamic forms of religiosity amongst Muslims. The trajectory of individual transformation achieved by contact with Sufis in North Africa or the Middle East would appear in a number of cases to be drifting towards a gradual Islamicization. In the German case, Klinkhammer claims that the spread of "mainstream" Sufism was only marginally connected to Muslim immigration. Like Sedgwick, she argues that trans-ethnic Sufism in Germany must be "identified and investigated as a phenomenon within the scope of the 're-sacralization' of Western society beginning in the 1970s".⁶⁴ But some evidence exists in Britain that the two phenomena were not disassociated from each other. The first migrants from India and Pakistan were arriving in Britain at around the same time as counter-culture individuals were following in the footsteps of the Traditionalists. Little is known of contact between them, but anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the two groups were interconnected or, at least, fleetingly aware of the presence of each other.

A few individuals from counter-culture were influenced by the writings of Schuon and Lings and made their way to Algeria and Morocco. The orientalist scholar and novelist Robert Irwin has recently recorded his visits to the Al-Alawiya in Algeria whilst an Oxford undergraduate in the 1960s in his recently published *Memoirs of a Dervish*.⁶⁵ He attributes his conversion to Islam to meeting a fellow undergraduate Harvey Mellor (Sidi Ahmed), who had travelled to Algeria earlier and before returning to study Arabic at

⁶³ Klinkhammer, "The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany", 135.

⁶⁴ Daniel Bell, "The Return of the Sacred" in *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys 1960–1980*, ed. Daniel Bell (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁶⁵ Robert Irwin, *Memoirs of a Dervish* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

Merton College. Mellor had also been influenced by Schuon and had decided to convert to Islam as a young teenager, seeking out Pakistani factory workers in the steelworks of Sheffield in the late 1950s. He also recounts praying whilst an undergraduate in Merton College, Oxford, in the basement of an Indian curry house alongside the Muslim waiters sometime in the mid-1960s. Although also active in counter-culture life of the mid to late 1960s, these early converts did consider themselves to be Muslim and converted to Islam, either before or when accepting *bay'at*.

The proximity of North Africa, compared with India, would attract a continuous flow of counter-culture seekers of the oriental experience from Western Europe. Contact with the Shadhili or Darqawi *tariqas* was therefore inevitable. Both of these orders had been rejuvenated from time to time by charismatic shaykhs, most notably, as we have seen, the Shaykh al-Alawi. Most significant amongst European contacts with the *tariqa* is the Mirabitun movement, founded in Britain by Ian Dallas around 1976. Dallas, a writer and actor, had travelled to Morocco in 1967 where he was initiated into the Darqawiyya and took the name Abd al-Qadir. Somewhere around 1976, a group of British and North American followers gathered around Shaykh Abd al-Qadir in a row of derelict houses in London. Little study has been carried out on the group and its activities, but Köse notes that they numbered between twenty and thirty, were all former members of 1960s counter-culture, and had taken drugs prior to contact with Sufism.⁶⁶ Although the group dressed in green turbans and traditional Moroccan dress, conversion to Islam was seen as secondary to acquiring Sufism. Yet, like the earlier Traditionalists and the Oxford undergraduates, many would embrace Islam as a feature of Sufi lifestyle. Shaykh al-Qadir would become more overtly Muslim throughout 1976. He insisted that followers withdraw from a Western lifestyle, even to the extent of removing children from mainstream schools. He initiated public prayer meetings in Hyde Park and his writings began to be translated into Arabic. After visiting Libya, he announced himself as a unifying shaykh of the Shadhili and Darqawiyya. At the end of 1976 he moved his community to near Norwich in Norfolk, with the intention of establishing a fully self-sufficient village of believers. The community purchased Wood Daling Hall, a mansion with extensive grounds. At its peak, the community numbered around two hundred families, forming the Darqawi Institute. Shaykh al-Qadir would travel extensively throughout the Muslim world achieving international fame as a scholar. For a variety of reasons, the community fragmented. Shaykh al-Qadir moved to Andalucia and, in 1994, a new offshoot of the

⁶⁶ Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam* (London: Kegan Paul, 1966) 176.

movement was founded in Scotland. The original community remains in Norwich and is still active in promoting Islam.⁶⁷

I have dwelt at length on the Darqawi Institute for a number of reasons. Köse notes that the movement had two distinct phases. In the first, Abd al-Qadir attracted new followers through promoting himself as a Sufi who emphasized the esoteric teachings of the tradition. In the second, he shifted to an emphasis on the outer practices of Islam and *sharī'a* compliance. Although Sufism was perceived as the authentic version of Islamic practice, and embedded in Sunni traditionalism, the promotion of Islam in the West became the primary objective of the movement. This is significant as it confirms the fluid borders between Sufism encountered as an esoteric but universal mysticism and Islamic allegiance. Perhaps more significantly for the development of Sufism in the West, the movement would produce a number of individuals who would have an impact today, bridging the borders between convert Sufis and the British children of South Asian migrants with Sufi allegiance. Shaykh Yasin Dutton remembers that such contacts were already taking place in the 1970s, when the Sufis of the Norwich community would travel around England in order to meet with South Asian shaykhs who were beginning to teach in the inner cities where Muslims migrants had recently settled. It is also likely that the Shadhili and Darqawi British converts would have been aware that before the influx of South Asian Muslims, the Yemeni dominated seaport communities in Cardiff, Liverpool, Hull and Tyneside that had their origins in the expansion of the British merchant fleet, and the consequent mass employment of Asian sailors owed their religious and social organization to the spiritual descendents of the Shaykh al-Alawi. These British seaport Muslim communities were organized around the efforts of Shaykh Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi, a Yemeni who had discovered the Shadhili Alawi in Morocco and who arrived in Britain in 1936. These communities were the first migrant Muslim communities to organize themselves socially and politically in Britain around the *zawiya* of a prominent Sufi figure.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain*, 142–144.

⁶⁸ See Geaves, *The Sufis of Britain*, 65. The story of these Arab port communities has been told in detail by Fred Halliday, *Arabs in Exile* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992) and more recently in Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (London: Hurst, 2004). Mohammad Sedden is also researching al-Hakimi, delivering an unpublished paper entitled "Shaykh Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi, The Alawi Tariqah and British Yemenis" at the Conference *Sufis and Scholars: The Development of Sufism in Britain*, 25 and 26 May 2012, Liverpool Hope University.

SUFIS IN THE WEST

Klinkhammer has pointed out that any assessment of the Sufi presence in European nations must take into account patterns of immigration and the different situations in the countries of origin of Muslim migrants in the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries – for example, 80 percent of Muslim migrants in Germany originate from Turkey where Sufism is not widely represented or, at least, is not publicly visible. The ban on Sufi Orders in Turkey in 1925 strongly limited the public practice of Sufism and would have significance for the public representation of Sufism amongst Muslim migrants in Germany and elsewhere.⁶⁹ In Britain, where the great majority of Muslims originate from rural Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, Sufism is practised as a popular religion in the villages and towns. This is duplicated in the strongholds of South Asian migrant presence in British cities. In France, where the majority of migrants are from North Africa, Sufism, although once dominant, is now less so due to the changing formations of Algerian Islam after the struggle for independence. Other factors influencing the development of Sufism are critical mass of migration, class and ethnicity of the migrants, and the presence of individual Sufi leaders among the migrants.

Initially the appropriation of Sufism by Western orientalist and successive generations of seekers of a “mystical truth” hid the vibrant reality of millions of traditional Muslims in the Muslim world who practised the core disciplines of Sufism as an integral part of Islam based firmly on the teachings of the Qur’ān and *ḥadith*. Until the arrival of migrant populations in post World War II Western Europe, the articulate Sufi intellectuals hid the everyday life of traditional Muslims and the role of the *tariqas* and the shrines of deceased Sufis in Muslim religious life. Sufism in the West was an elitist presence with tenuous and fluid links to Islamic religiosity. The everyday religious life of traditional Muslims would not have a significant impact on Sufism in the West until the 1960s, when some nations in Western Europe began to be transformed by the arrival of various Muslim populations, in the case of Britain predominantly from Pakistan and Bangladesh, but also from Malaysia, Turkish Cyprus, Iran, Yemen, and North, West and East Africa. These are all places where, either historically or as a living faith tradition, Sufism is significant.

Although slow to organize themselves in the British Muslim diaspora, the last twenty years have seen the transplantation of several prominent Sufi

⁶⁹ Klinkhammer, “The Emergence of Transethnic Sufism in Germany”, 144.

tariqas, including various offshoots of the Naqshbandis, Chishtis, Qadiris, Mevlevis, Alawis, Shadhilis, and Tijanis. This pattern repeats itself in other nations of Western Europe, Scandinavia and North America. This significant presence of Sufis or Sufi-influenced Muslims, has done much to offset the appropriation of Sufism by Western orientalis and has to a significant degree restored the awareness of the Sufi path at the heart of traditional Islam. However, it could be argued that even with the establishment of the *tariqas*, wherever Muslim populations have settled in Western Europe and North America, Sufism remains relatively invisible both to academics and the general public as other aspects of Muslim religious life have dominated the agenda for political and security reasons.

The dominance of Muslims of South Asian origin in the British context has perpetuated custom-laden Sufism with its roots in the subcontinent and continued historic rivalries between *ṭariqas* and with other Islamic movements that have been historical competitors in the highly contested religious environment of colonial India. The subcontinent Sufis, with their custom-laden version of Islam focused on the intercession of saints and the Prophet, shrines, *baraka* (the power to bless), powers, miracles, and the performance of *dhikr* maintained within the *shaykh/murid* relationship, had never successfully organized themselves nationally in Britain in spite of their apparent numerical superiority. Even so, the arrival of a number of charismatic Sufi *pirs* and *shaykhs* from the subcontinent provided the impetus for greater cohesion as they formed powerful groups of Sufis able to construct mosques and produce promotional literature to counter the reformist movements. The traditional loyalty of each group of *murids* to their own *shaykh* undermined this push towards a stronger and more assertive national identity.

Moreover, the establishment of these *tariqas* has provided a series of organizational structures to Sufi adherents and capitalized on the strong empathy with the teachings of traditional Islam amongst British Muslim populations. The term “traditional Islam” is used in this context to distinguish a brand of Islam that acknowledges 1400 years of tradition as authoritative alongside the teachings of the Qu’ran and Sunna and recognizes the contribution of Sufi spirituality, the legal interpretations of the *‘ulama*, and the four schools of law. This label of traditional Islam has been harnessed by Sufis and Sufi sympathizers in opposition to neo-orthodoxies which have vociferously criticized Sufism, accusing it of introducing *bida’* (or innovation) into the Muslim religious arena.

Thus, in recent years the representatives of the *tariqas* have provided a unifying Islamic discourse based on practice and belief and drawing upon the traditional loyalty of the above populations to the leadership of *pirs* and

shaykhs rather than the *‘ulama*. They have also discovered a successful discourse that is able to recruit from the younger generations of British Muslims. However, unlike the USA, Sufism has made little impact on the original non-migrant non-Muslim population, and with the exception of the Haqqani Naqshbandis, led by the charismatic Shaykh Nazim, very few outside of the Muslim migrant communities have been attracted. The main contributory reason for this difference, at least, up to the end of the twentieth century, was that Sufism in Britain in particular remained associated with ethnic identity and communication in Urdu, a means of maintaining traditions and customs tightly bound with localities in the place of origin. Thus Sufism has functioned not so much as a transmission of mysticism within Islam, able to cross over to a universal mysticism sought by Western seekers, but as a boundary mechanism primarily concerned with the transmission of cultural and religious traditions. However, this is only part of the story.

In recent years, there have been signs of significant change. The British Sufi scene now demonstrates marked attempts to carve out a new cultural and religious space that creatively interacts with the new environment of Britain.⁷⁰ The *tariqas* have become more aware of the need to draw upon the transnational and trans-cultural nature of globalized memberships and to articulate the narratives of *tasawwuf* and traditional Islamic sciences in an intellectual environment, addressing both Muslims and non-Muslims in the lingua franca. The World Wide Web is an essential aspect of this globalization. The online presence of traditional Muslim *tasawwuf* does not advertise itself as Sufism or even rally behind the epithet of *ahl as-Sunna wa Jama‘at*, but rather prefers to speak of itself as representing traditional Islam and the teachings of the four *madhabs*. The Web sites originate in Spain, Britain, and North America and address themselves specifically to Muslims in the West.

Influential converts, notably Shaikh Nur Ha Nim Keller and Shaikh Abdul-Hakim Murad, are able to communicate fluently in English and are often members of academia. They are not exponents of an Islam imbedded in local tradition and are often fluent in their understanding and use of *fiqh*. These

⁷⁰ For detailed study of these developments, see a series of articles written by the author: R.A. Geaves, "Tradition, Innovation, and Authentication: Replicating the Ahl as Sunna Wa Jamaat in Britain", *Journal of Comparative Islamic Studies*, Vol. 1:1, June, 1 20, 2005; "Learning the lessons from the neo revivalist and Wahhabi movements: the Counterattack of new Sufi movements in the UK", *Sufism in the West*, Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (eds) (London: Routledge, 2006); "A Case of Cultural Binary Fission or Transglobal Sufism? The Transmigration of Sufism to Britain" in R.A. Geaves, Markus Dressler, Gritt Klinkhammer (eds), *Global Networking and Locality: Sufis in Western Society*.

Western Sufis are as scriptural as their Salafi adversaries, able to utilize the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* to great effect to put across their message on the issues that matter to them. Ethnicity is transcended to discover common cause in either a universal consciousness of *ummah* or the ideological belonging to traditional Islam. For young British Muslims of South Asian origin, inspiration is more likely to come from such figures as it is from the South Asian elders in the *tariqas*, who are still perceived to pull up drawbridges of isolation in their respective spiritual fiefdoms of Coventry, Birmingham, Bradford or Manchester. *Tasawwuf* in Britain, North America, and Western Europe is beginning to go trans-global and escape the confines of ethnicity and locality. Marcia Hermansen comments on this drawing together of “theirs” and “ours” and argues that mobility, rapid dissemination of information, and encounters of Eastern (Muslim) and Western individuals has brought about the creation of trans-global networks that to some extent override the old orientalist discrepancies of power described by Said. She asserts that “‘theirs’ and ‘ours’ ultimately converge in an age of globalism”.⁷¹ The re-emergence of the North-African-influenced Western converts operating on a global scale, but, above all, able to position themselves prominently in the struggle for Islamic authenticity and attract the British and North American children of the migrants whose forefathers belonged to traditional *tariqas* in their places of origin, begs a reassessment of Sedgwick’s differentiation of Sufism and neo-Sufism. Sedgwick’s argument that Western Sufism always emphasizes the individual spiritual search as distinguished from the Eastern approach of a guided journey may need to be reassessed as the allegiance of young European and North American children of migrants reassess their parents’ and grandparents’ Sufism in the light of their in-between status in Western society.

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⁷¹ Hermansen, “Global Sufism: Theirs and Ours”, 26.

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The Cambridge Companion to Sufism

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013 2473, USA

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107679504

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First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

The Cambridge companion to Sufism / Lloyd Ridgeon.

pages cm. (Cambridge companions to religion)

I. Ridgeon, Lloyd V. J.

BP189.C36 2015

297.4 dc23 2014034130

ISBN 978 1 107 01830 3 Hardback

ISBN 978 1 107 67950 4 Paperback

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