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WHAT'S AMERICAN ABOUT AMERICAN SUFİ MOVEMENTS?

Marcia Hermansen

What's American about American Sufi movements? On initial consideration, this question seems most likely to be posed from a European comparativist perspective. After all, someone from the Muslim world, say Egypt or South Asia, would be likely to think of the West as an undifferentiated whole. At the same time, Sufi movements that are essentially 'transplants' of orders active in Muslim countries and retain the same clientele and language among immigrants in the United States or Europe might not be thought of as significantly 'Western' at all. However, other Sufi movements that have made substantial adjustments to a new context and attract larger numbers of Europeans or North Americans are more likely to be seen as generically 'Western'. Once one starts to consider these Western Sufi movements more closely, a category of specifically 'American' Sufi movements emerges as both informative and inadequate. It is informative in the sense that movements with significant activities based in the United States do adapt styles and practices resonant with American ways of doing things. It is inadequate with respect to the impossibility of drawing a line between the United States and Europe and imagining no cross-fertilisation and circulation of leaders, members and publications of particular groups, even more so in an age of electronic communication and Internet linkages. Therefore, in viewing the situation of contemporary American Sufi movements, we need to consider both

transnational theory and activity and those factors which exhibit local, regional and particular contextual influences.

In the following discussion I will consider American Sufism as contrasted with 'Euro-Sufism' under a set of broad issues and categories.

The role of religion in American culture

Distinctively American elements of Sufi movements in the United States may be broadly related to aspects of American religious and cultural practice and identity. In his social and political study of the United States, *Democracy in America* (1961 edn), Alexis de Tocqueville who visited in 1831 wrote, 'the religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me on arrival in the United States' (p. 295). Tocqueville was impressed by the number of American denominations, by their mutual toleration, and by the focus on morality pervading American religion.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the focus of American religion shifted from the doctrinal particulars of the various denominations to the moral character of the believer. While nineteenth-century America contained a large number of Protestant sects and denominations, all with different doctrines, practices and organisational forms, by the 1830s almost all of these bodies had developed a deeply evangelical emphasis. According to historian David Scott, Protestantism has always contained an important evangelical strain, but it was in the nineteenth century that a particular style of evangelicalism became the dominant form of spiritual expression. What above all else characterised this evangelicalism was its dynamism and the pervasive sense of activist energy it released. A major element of nineteenth-century evangelicalism in America became the experience of conversion as a dynamic religious awakening motivating to activism.

Scholars of American religion have also noted the importance and effect in the nineteenth century of movements that incorporated experiential and esoteric dimensions of the sacred, including Christian Science, theosophy and transcendentalism. Transcendentalism questioned established cultural forms, and called for a reintegration of spirit and matter. It desired to turn ideas into

concrete action and spread from the original arenas of religion and education to literature, philosophy and social reform. By the twentieth century, typical Protestant concern with mastery and control was challenged and in some cases supplanted in the United States by mystical strands of letting go, feeling and experiencing. While this experiential drive was in some cases channelled back by Protestant (or Catholic) denominations into revitalising movements within the church, an increasing number of Americans became unaffiliated or rejected mainline Christianity as too being dull.

The popularity of Sufi movements in the late twentieth century represents one consequence of the attraction of Americans to experiential modes of spirituality, and indicates a new readiness to cross boundaries and abandon previous affiliations.

According to an expert on American Protestantism, Martin Marty, traditional denominations and congregations hold the loyalty of about 40 per cent of Americans actively and 60 per cent passively year in year out. What has changed over the last half century is the fluidity of boundaries as multi-culturalism and pluralism prevail as the national consensus. Another acute observer of contemporary religious life in America, Wade Clark Roof, sees American religious style as increasingly embracing the spiritual. In a survey conducted by him, more than 60 per cent of younger American respondents indicated that other religious teachings should be explored. This sets out another broad context for the receptivity, although limited, to Sufism among the American population at large.

Roof summarises some characteristics of what he calls the 'seekers' among American 'baby boomers', as opposed to other individuals in this same cohort who remain connected to a community of memory and retain their childhood religious affiliations. This 'seeker' baby boomer cohort, the most important one represented in American Sufi movements, is characterised by Roof as individualistic and knowledge-oriented. Such individuals are mentally mobile and lack rootedness leading to their 'metaphysical loss of home'. In response, 'seekers' often move from one religious practice or group to another. Many participants in American Sufi movements from this cohort have already experimented with other spiritual movements and many remain comfortable with a degree of

spiritual eclecticism. In religion, Wade observes, the seekers' drive for experience is more important than the epistemological cogency of teachings with which they may experiment.

Americans are said to be the most religious among the Western industrialised nations on the basis of responses to survey items such as reporting belief in God or religious experiences. Religion in America is characterised as being individual rather than institutional, and shaped by voluntarism, individual choices of loyalty and allegiance. American civil values that translate into religious attitudes are love of liberty, democratic equality and the separation of church and state. Resonant with the spirit of liberty and voluntarism is individualism, so that religion becomes a choice, a personal therapy, something attained by 'design' which may be encountered and selected on the basis of promotion, leading to its association with consumption, commodification and advertising.

Catherine Albanese, a noted historian of American religion, uses the idea of American activism to elicit distinctive cultural features of American religiosity. She theorises that American activism translates into a religious style that puts a premium on public and expressive behaviour, and in addition encourages simplification of doctrine and practice. She observes that contemporary Americans are very busy, they generally have little time for thought, and they want quick results achieved through practical technologies. The energetic style typical of American culture is expressed in the love of the automobile and speeding, in the prevalence of fast food outlets, and in a preference for all things 'lite', including religious demands. Rootlessness and rebelliousness typify religion and culture in this land of immigrants. A 'New World' country born out of 'revolution' often leads to ahistorical perceptions of religion. The following observations on American Sufism will reprise some of these themes.

Immigration history and patterns

An important feature of American Sufi movements is their diversity. In an earlier essay I used the metaphor of a garden in which there are perennials, hybrids and transplants in order to indicate the nature of this variety. The perennial and hybrid Sufi movements are ones which have made more adjustments to the American context in

terms of practice and style and whose followings are dominated by Caucasian and African Americans, rather than first-generation immigrants. At the same time, I feel that the nature of immigration and the perception of immigrants are important to the character of all American Sufi movements and thus I will commence with that category.

Since immigration is the context of much of the Muslim experience in America, some discussion of the history of the Muslim presence is appropriate to set the stage for this topic. Scholars of Muslim immigration to the United States have proposed models of stages or waves characterised by diverse concerns, ethnic backgrounds and religious attitudes. A synopsis of this model is that there have been some five stages of Muslim immigration to America. The first wave, in the late nineteenth century up to World War I, was composed mostly of uneducated and unskilled young people from the rural areas of what now constitutes Syria and Lebanon, then under Ottoman rule. According to Adair Loomis and Yvonne Haddad in *Islamic Values in the United States* (1987), opportunities such as those offered by Detroit and the automobile factories attracted both Arab Christians and Muslims. The second wave of Muslim immigrants, 1918–22, followed World War I. By the time of the third wave, 1930–8, American laws confined immigration primarily to relatives of those already in the country who were naturalised citizens. In the early years of Muslim immigration, institution-building was minimal since many Muslim immigrants perceived themselves to be temporary sojourners rather than permanent settlers.

Following World War II, Muslim immigrants included displaced groups from Eastern Europe fleeing Communism, as well as children of the educated elites in various Arab countries and South Asia who were mostly urban in background, educated and Westernised prior to their arrival in the United States. These immigrants often came in pursuit of higher education or career opportunities. It is this cohort that founded many of the more permanent Muslim institutions in America, for example the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the first chapters of the Muslim Student Association.

The change of immigration laws in the mid-1960s opened the doors to what might be considered a fifth wave, although diverse

backgrounds and causes for immigration characterise these later Muslim immigrants. The wars and upheavals of this period gave rise to their own ethnic waves of immigrant Iranians, Afghans, Somalians, Bosnians and so on.

In addition to these immigrant populations, a significant proportion of the Africans brought to the New World as slaves may have been Muslim. In any event, today the large numbers of 'indigenous' African American converts to Islam gives the broader Muslim community a distinct character in that it is both immigrant and convert-based.

The population of Muslims in the United States is more diverse than that of most individual European nations, which tend to have experienced patterns of immigration from particular regions due to linguistic, historical and legal reasons. As in Europe, most Muslim immigrants settle in urban areas and chain migration is a common pattern. The number of Muslims in the United States is a matter of some discussion, and the current estimate of roughly six million indicates that Muslims will become the largest non-Christian minority religion there sometime during the next decade.

The three major groups of Muslims in the United States are African American (indigenous) Muslims, Arab Muslims, and South Asian Muslims. One estimate puts African Americans at 42 per cent, South Asians at 24.4 per cent, and Arabs at 12.4 per cent (with smaller groups of Africans at 6.2, Iranians at 3.6, South East Asians at 2, European Americans at 1.6, and 'other' at 5.4 per cent). Another estimate puts 'Americans' at 30, Arabs at 33 and South Asians at 29 per cent.

Due to the diversity of ethnic origin, no single Muslim country has influence over the American Muslim population. While the Saudis have funded certain mosques and organisations, their institutional influence is less direct than, for example, that of Turkey on migrants in Germany. The major American Muslim organisations such as ISNA and ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) have traditionally been heavily dominated by proponents of international Muslim activist movements such as Jamaat Islami or Ikhwan al-Muslimun. This is probably due to the predominance of educated professionals among their membership who had espoused such views in their own societies in the Middle East and South Asia. The

relevance of this to our argument is the fact that, since these groups favour a more literalist interpretation of Islam and reject Sufism, mystical influences were generally kept out of their organisations.

The United States, in contrast to Britain and France, had not been a direct colonial power. Therefore the status of immigrants from Muslim societies and their educational background and language skills tended to be higher, since the immigration process was relatively selective. This means that many Muslim immigrants occupied high-status professions such as medicine or engineering within the first generation and became a 'model minority'. This affected both the type of Islamic practices approved by the main body of Muslims in the United States and their perception of popular Sufi practices and doctrines as being superstitious innovations.

A European researcher, N. Landman, noted the distinction in the Netherlands between the style of popular Islamic practices brought with them by immigrants and the more intellectual and elitist Sufism which attracts Westerners to Islam. The situation is similar in the American context. In addition, the tendency of Muslim immigrants to the United States to arrive with higher educational and class backgrounds results in their often disassociating themselves from popular Islamic religious practices. The transplantation of South Asian pirs and their disciples, as has occurred in the British midlands, is therefore absent from the American Sufi scene. It is only recently that Sufism has been allowed any profile within organisations such as ISNA, in terms of their allowing speeches which refer to Sufism in coded language such as *akhlaq* (ethical theory), *ihsan* (spiritual beautification) or *tazkiyya al-nafs* (purification of the soul), including in their annual bazaar booths sponsored by 'sober', immigrant-based Sufi organisations.

The identity of the United States as a homeland for immigrants is clear from the prominent symbolism of the inscription of the Statue of Liberty: 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door'. More recently, the earlier metaphor of America as a melting pot has been re-examined and displaced in favour of the idea of a salad bowl in which each element retains its

original flavour but contributes to a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Within this salad bowl, Muslim immigrants as a later addition to the mix are often characterised as adopting one of three principal attitudes: as contributors, assimilationists and rejectionists. Aside from this ethnic mix imagery, American Sufi movements, since they involve more indigenous Americans and second-generation immigrants, may be viewed as either hybrids or bridges between the two communities or deviants from both.

American converts and Sufi orders

A cultural process of gradualism and hybridisation occurs when Islamically oriented Sufi movements attract significant numbers of Americans and Canadians and make adjustments such as gradualism in Islamic practice as part of broadening their appeal. Gradualism always was a factor of conversion in Muslim expansion. Some might term it Islamisation, and it clearly does not happen overnight.

The role of conversion to Islam in American society, I would suggest, is distinctive. Conversion is, on the whole, more socially acceptable in the United States than in Europe since the imagery, vocabulary and history associated with 'turning Turk' is absent. Religion in America is voluntary, a lifestyle choice, and not as directly linked with ethnicity. The African American element in society also domesticates Islam in the public sphere, and the image of the Muslim as enemy, while certainly present, especially due to the wider Middle Eastern conflicts and terrorist attacks, is complicated by Islam's association with an important strand of American culture. Islam is often portrayed as a religion of racial harmony, for example in the autobiography of Malcolm X or in the conversion of Muhammad Ali into an American hero. The idea of transcending racial identity and espousing a progressive stance on race is resonant with many converts to Islam, black and white, and thus present in American Sufi movements. Some Sufi movements such as the Guru Bawa Fellowship and the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order, are especially racially integrated, whereas the more perennial or New Age movements tend to appeal primarily to Caucasians, who adopt fewer

distinctive symbols, such as names and dress codes, of specifically Muslim identity.

During recent crises, American Sufi movements have increasingly taken on the role of representing the ‘good’ Muslims. Evidence for this would be the courting of the political establishment by Sheikh Hisham Kabbani of the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis: for example, his meeting with the Clintons featured on the cover of the *Muslim Magazine*, his participation in a State Department briefing and the copious Naqshbandi web page citations regarding such activities. The high level of interfaith participation by Sufis also indicates their place on the front line of public relations initiatives for a positive image of Islam in the United States.

American style: commodification, gradualism and advertising

One distinctive feature of America is its identification as a producer of great wealth and a consumer-oriented culture. The metaphors associated with religious diversity in America range from a spiritual smorgasbord, a ‘divine deli’, to a rational choice-based marketplace in which religions compete for market shares. The nineteenth-century French observer of American democracy and religion, Alexis de Tocqueville, observed how the importance of worldly prosperity had all but displaced concern with otherworldly salvation in American religious discourse. Thus this prominence of economic concern is nothing new.

However, we should not ignore the fact that in its traditional homelands Sufism was an important social institution as well as a set of normative beliefs and practices. Land grants, clientage, support networks, lobbying at court and the charismatic support of dynasties and the political system were all part of Sufi activities. Therefore it is not surprising that some engagement with economic factors will be part of American Sufi activities, albeit condemned by certain Sufi orders or theorists. Our task is to evoke what might be ‘American’ in style or substance.

One such element is the trend towards promotion and advertising. Sufi movements in the United States want to be visible to prospective recruits and therefore they employ vehicles such

as lectures, seminars and conferences. Unlike more aggressive new religious movements such as the Hari Krishnas, they do not proselytise in airports and other public spaces; rather they hope to attract those who are already seeking.

Some observers, such as the French writers Lisbeth Rocher and Fatima Charqaoui, have suggested that there is an 'American' quality to some Sufi activities taking place in the United States. These include fondness for public performance, extensive use of media such as computer networks, exploitation of radio and newspaper coverage, and Sufi dancing, contrasting with a more sober and retiring attitude on the part of Sufi orders operating in Western Europe.

Admiration of the thirteenth-century Sufi poet Rumi, especially for the translations of his work by Coleman Barks, have propelled his writings to best-selling status and garnered the admiration of icons of American pop culture such as the New Age doctor Deepak Chopra and the pop star Madonna. Both of these individuals were featured in a TV documentary promoting Rumi's values. In addition, American Sufi orders sponsor an annual Rumi festival in North Carolina which is attended by representatives of various American Sufi groups and other interested participants.

In particular, the followers of Sheikh Hisham have sought and attracted media attention ranging from the 'Sufi's Choice' newspaper story accompanying his appearance in Montreal, Canada, to televised coverage of his first Islamic Unity Conference on the cable television channel, C-Span, to the controversial public and widely publicised statements made by him that most American mosques were controlled by extremists.

Sufi networking

In the American context, networking and cooperation among certain orders is another prominent feature. This may in part be due to the circulation of a certain cohort among spiritual movements and the fact that seekers often shift allegiances from one movement or teacher to another. The idea of shopping for teachers or experiences may be illustrated by Sufi conferences and seminars where presenters, paid or volunteer, present themselves to an audience interested in Sufi teachings. After the more structured presentations,

opportunities are provided to meet individually or in small groups with such teachers, to 'check them out' in more detail.

Tracing such connections over time is possible through book endorsements, narratives, and oral histories of participants in Sufi movements. For example, the narrative and book endorsements from *Women Called to the Path of Rumi* (2001) by Shakina Reinhertz indicate connections among the American Mevlevi, the International Association of Sufism (Nahid Angha), the Golden Sufi Center (Irena Tweedie/Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee), the Dances of Universal Peace Movement, the poet Coleman Barks and the Inayat Khan Sufi Movement. In fact, most of these affinities date back to the 1960s and early 70s when many of Samuel Lewis's disciples agreed to follow Pir Vilayat Khan after the former's death, and many of the Sufi order initiates began to make contacts with Turkish Mevlevi and Helveti in Turkey. As a practice, the turning (whirling) of the Mevlevi resonates with the embodied nature of the 'work' or practices of some of the universal Sufi movements, for example the spiritual walks developed by Samuel Lewis.

The seminar or workshop format is a feature of American New Age movements and could even be related to the first Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. Among Sufi conferences held recently, of note are the Unity conferences of Sheikh Hisham, the International Association of Sufism Conferences held annually since 1994, and smaller meetings such as those organised by Zia Inayat Khan as the 'Meeting of the Five Sheikhs' in 2000. The two latter are distinctively American in gathering diverse teachers, both male and female, and featuring Sufi teachers advocating a range of *sharia* adherence. The range of American Sufi networking extends as far as the Islamic conferences sponsored by the Nation of Islam under Louis Farrakhan, which have featured a large American Sufi contingent. My assessment is that this participation has resulted from an affinity of the self-development aspect of the Nation's teachings to American Sufism, personal contacts in the American Sufi community of the Chicago-based Sufi Sheikh Ahmad Tijani, a close adviser to Louis Farrakhan, and the paucity of mainstream Muslim leaders willing to publicly endorse Farrakhan's movement through presence at his meetings.

Sufi travel and globalisation

Travelling has been a perennial feature of the spiritual quest and a common motif of classical Sufi theory. Postmodern critics such as Gilles Deleuze and Zygmund Bauman suggest a movement from 'pilgrimage' to 'nomadism' to 'tourism' as emblematic of these times. The American Sufis I am focusing on do not have the same diasporic imagination as those of immigrant *tariqas*. Their sacred geography, however, is likewise shaped by postmodern realities. The trope of pilgrimage in search of the authentic is strong. While the 1960s and early 70s were times for the nomadism of Western youth searching for authenticity in Eastern spiritualities and sites, more recently this seeking has been framed as Sufi tourism. Some notable examples are the Shambhala tour of Turkey (2001) proposed by Carl Ernst and Kabir Helminski (note the confluence of publishing, travel and Sufism) and the Naqshbandi-Haqqani peace tour of Central Asia (2001).

Sufi psychologies

In terms of sheer volume, a major theme of the literature inspired by American Sufi movements is concentrated in discussions of psychological models of transformation and healing. Religious life in America, with its individualism and stress on worldly results, has long incorporated dimensions of self-help and positive thinking as a means of giving the person control over his or her experiences, if not over the environment itself.

Within this typically American 'therapeutic' approach to religion, the parallelism between the Sufi sheikh and the Western psychotherapist as noted in the literature has long been recognised, as has the usurpation of the prerogatives of traditional healers and teachers by the psychologist and psychiatrist in modern Western secular culture. American Sufis often choose to contribute to this aspect personally, by being or becoming therapists; institutionally, by sponsoring conferences and forming organisations for 'Sufi psychology'; and in written form, whether formally accredited or not. The clientele of American Sufi movements who are seekers of spirituality naturally also take a strong interest in contemporary

psychological approaches to personal growth, especially those of humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Idries Shah and Vilayat Khan are two perennialist Sufis who are conversant with psychotherapeutic discourse and who contribute to it at some level. In addition, attempts to bridge Islamic and contemporary psychological models have been made by the Western-trained and America-based psychologists Reza A. Arasteh, Muhammad Shafii and Laleh Bakhtiar.

Both temporally and spatially, transpersonal or third-wave psychology and Western Sufi movements have similar trajectories, dispersals and pilgrimage routes. The 1960s and 70s marked the rise of both phenomena, the San Francisco Bay area being especially prominent. The third-wave psychology movement accepted a plethora of approaches to human transformation and espoused general models that constructed Eastern meditative techniques and esoteric teachings within the 'Western' monotheisms as accomplishing the same results.

Among American Sufi movements, the complexities within transpersonal approaches engender a number of competing models of levels of the transpersonal and for cultivating consciousness. One may distinguish between psychologies that are directly 'inspired' by Sufi spirituality and psychologies versus holistic therapeutic techniques that have their origins outside the Sufi tradition but are made use of by American Sufi practitioners because they are viewed as consistent with or complementary to Sufi interest in personal transformation and healing. The latter would include Jungian psychology, the various transpersonal psychologies (e.g. Ken Wilbur, Charles Tart, Robert Ornstein, etc.) and the more recent 'soul' psychologies (e.g. James Hillman and Thomas Moore). All have in common the idea that human beings must find a way to be in touch with and live in harmony/union with some transcendent or transpersonal source of meaning and orientation. Where they locate and how they label this source varies (e.g. how much of it is beyond and how much it is within the person). The more explicitly spiritual psychologies that see this transpersonal reality as God or the divine are probably the closest parallels to the mystical way in various traditional forms of spirituality, including Sufism.

The psychologisation of religion is not unique to North America,

but it is particularly significant in the United States. A number of Western Sufi movements seem to espouse a sort of 'scientism' according to which their psychological understanding will ultimately be validated by scientific proofs. In fact the degree of scientism seems to be a predictive factor for how universal a movement is. Many universalist Sufi movements hold that if the basis of spiritual transformation follows the laws of physics, then it should ultimately correlate with some 'unitive' scientific model.

However, the perennialist Sufis in the tradition of Frithjof Schuon strongly reject the echoes of modernism in contemporary 'scientist' discourse and wish to 'retraditionalise' science as a sacred discipline. This approach is evident in the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, professor and notable scholar of Islam who is Schuon's spiritual successor in the American branch of the Maryamiyya *tariqa*.

A parallel to the couching of Sufi teachings in modern psychological frameworks is Donald S. Lopez's study of Western understandings of Tibetan Buddhism. Lopez states that the modern West constructed Tibetan Buddhism less as a religion than as a science. In part this is a result of the West's own requirements that esoteric knowledge conform to the expectations of regularity, predictability and control. Arguably, some Sufi psychologies follow a similar course.

The Sufi order in the West, under the direction of Pir Vilayat Khan, for a time held annual symposiums under the auspices of its Omega Institute which drew together prominent teachers in holistic healing, New Age and Eastern spirituality, and humanistic science. Each of the movements emerging from the Shah Maghsoud Angha line, the International Association of Sufism and the MTO (Maktaba Tarigha Oveysiyya) has established its own Associations for Sufi Psychology. Representatives of these movements are now teaching in American clinical psychology programmes such as the California Institute of Integral Studies and they regularly hold academic conferences under the rubric of 'Sufi psychology'.

A quotation from a book written by a member of the International Association of Sufism, Safa Ali Uwaysi (Michael Brill Newman), entitled *The Gift of the Robe* (2000) exemplifies an understanding of the role of science in proving spiritual truths: 'Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Sufism came into contact with contemporary

Western science and within some circles, Sufism began to be transformed into a practical school grounded in scientific principles.’

Some examples of Western Sufi ‘psychologies’ are as follows.

Jungian psychology

Jungian psychology, because it incorporates a spiritual dimension and involves a more compatible approach to dream work, has had a particular following in American Sufi movements. One of Pir Vilayat’s leading deputies, the therapist Atum O’Kane, compares the transpersonal and Sufi order approaches to development, especially in the field of spiritual guidance. These include an expanded vision of the personality as an instrument for manifesting the Universal Self or divine qualities, and the specific practices of the Sufi order including meditation, breathing practices, *wazifa* (litanies), *dhikr* (recitations), light practices, creative imagination and sacred music. The volume *Sufism, Islam and Jungian Psychology* (1991), edited by J. Marvin Spiegelman, features contributions by a range of Western Sufi teachers espousing a Jungian approach, including representatives of the Sufi order (Pir Vilayat Khan, Atum O’Kane and Tasnim Fernandez), and the Golden Sufi Center (Irina Tweedie, William Dorst and Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee – all European).

Eclectic work, body work, dance, channelling

The Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat Society stemming from the teachings of Samuel Lewis (d. 1971) is particularly eclectic in using psychological and therapeutic models, especially humanistic and third-wave ones. An important quality of their practice is embodiment or body work, from Sufi dancing (the Dances of Universal Peace) to special spiritual walks and breathing techniques.

The Sufi dance movement was inspired by Samuel Lewis based on ‘traditional practices of the Middle East’, although in its current form it seems rather more reminiscent of folk dancing or round dancing. Unlike regular folk dances, Sufi dancing incorporates meditation, periods of focusing on sound, vibration or ‘attuning’ to one’s own centre or to the moods and symbols evoked in the chants and dances. The purpose of the dances is both ‘moral development’

and 'psychic purification'. Most of the dances are performed in concentric circles with musicians and a 'caller' or leader standing in the middle. The dancers perform simple movements, turning, swaying back and forth and expanding and contracting the circles. The leader introduces the chants that accompany the dances, explaining how the symbolism of the movements corresponds to the meaning of the chants which may come from a variety of the world's religions. Examples are, 'La ilaha illa Allah' from the Islamic 'Kalima' (profession of faith) dance, 'Hare Krishna Hare Rama' from Hinduism, 'Kyrie Eleison' from Christianity and 'Shema Yisrael' from Judaism. There are supposed to have been 2,000 dances of which 200 are still commonly practised.

The Sufi dance movement has spread worldwide, far beyond the San Francisco Bay area and the initial group of 'Sufi' Sam's disciples to church groups and people who work in therapeutic and other social service organisations. Dance teacher workshops are regularly held and an individual can receive a certificate for being a 'mentor teacher'. Members of Pir Vilayat Khan's organisation, the Sufi order, also practice these dances since the Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat Society disciples of Samuel Lewis were very active in that order in the early 1970s. At that time, as his own health worsened, Lewis told his disciples to join Pir Vilayat's movement and accept his leadership, Lewis having been a student of Hazrat Inayat Khan in 1923. Lewis also created a repertoire of 'spiritual walks' which foster attunement to the planets, prophets, elements and so on, and involve the imaginative use of pacing, breath and movement in order to evoke a mood and instill permanent qualities in the practitioner.

An autobiographical reminiscence by the late successor to Samuel Lewis, Moineddin Jablonski (d. 2001), describes some types of therapeutic models and approaches used by members of this movement which are multi-religious (Sufi and Zen) and therapeutically eclectic.

Enneagram

For some time Sheikh Hisham Kabbani has claimed that his Sufi order, the Naqshbandi, had originated the Enneagram. This Enneagram movement, a sort of personality-type psychology, had become increasingly popular, particularly among groups involved in

spiritual guidance, including many Catholic organisations. Sheikh Hisham's follower, Laleh Bakhtiar, has published extensively on the Enneagram and moral healing, and she and the sheikh offer seminars to therapists and New Age conferences on Sufism and the Enneagram work.

*Traditional Islamic formulations using the idea of levels
of the soul (nafs model)*

The leader of one branch of the American Helveti-Jerrahi order, psychologist Ragip (Robert) Frager, in *Heart, Self, and Soul* (1999), makes the following comparison between Sufi and Western concepts of the person:

The three central concepts in Islamic/Sufi Psychology are the heart, the self and the soul. Each of these technical terms has a different connotation than its common English usage and meaning. The origin and basis of these terms is Quranic and they have been expounded upon by centuries of Sufic commentaries.

In Sufic psychology the heart refers to the spiritual heart or *qalb*, not the physical organ. It is this spiritual heart that contains the deeper intelligence and wisdom (p. 2).

The heart holds the divine spark or spirit within each one of us. It is the place of gnosis, or spiritual knowledge. The Sufic ideal is to develop a soft, feeling, compassionate heart, and to develop the heart's intelligence. This is a deeper and more grounded intelligence than the abstract intelligence of the head. It is said that when the eyes of the heart open, we can see beyond the superficial exterior of things, and when the ears of the heart open, we can hear the truth behind the words.

Frager expounds on the Sufi method of 'opening the heart' and details a spiritual, developmental theory of progress through seven stages of the self (*nafs*), and a further seven souls, which is drawn

from classical Sufi theory based on Quranic terminology (pp. 47–93). He criticises some of the Western psychologies for addressing only one or two aspects of the person, not the entire range of possible development (pp. 113–14).

Freud's description of the human being is primarily a description of the dynamics of the animal soul, in which the main motivation is to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Most of behavioral psychology focuses on the functioning of the vegetable and animal soul. Cognitive psychology deals with the mental functions of the personal soul. Humanistic psychology examines the complex activities of the human soul, such as creativity and compassion. Transpersonal psychology embraces the ego-transcending consciousness of the secret soul and the secret of secrets (soul).

This comparison of models or frameworks for transformation is congruent with Ken Wilber's model of levels of the transpersonal bands of the psyche. It should be noted that Frager is recognised as a Jerrahi sheikh and is also the director of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, a degree-granting institution in California.

Idries Shah and Omar Ali-Shah

The Sufi movements of Idries and Omar-Ali Shah have given some prominence to psychology in their teachings. In the United States, Shah's early deputy was Stanford University psychology professor Robert Ornstein. Shah met Ornstein in the 1960s and realised that he would be an ideal partner in the endeavour to propagate his teachings since Ornstein could cast Shah's Sufi materials into the idiom of the psycho-therapeutic community. Ornstein's book, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972), met with an enthusiastic reception in the academic psychology community since it coincided with the rising interest in studying bio-feedback and other techniques for shifting moods and awareness. Ornstein has continued to contribute books in this field over the years.

The reinterpretation or translation, if you will, of Sufi teachings into contemporary psychological discourses may reflect what Dale

Eickelman and Jon Anderson term a 'reintellectualisation' of Islamic discourse through presenting Islamic doctrine and discourse in accessible, vernacular terms even if this contributes to basic reconfigurations of doctrine and practice. These scholars indicate that Islamic discourse has not only moved to the vernacular and become more accessible to significantly wider publics; it has also become framed in styles of reasoning and forms of argument that draw on wider, less exclusive or erudite bodies of knowledge, including those of applied science and engineering. While this thesis was mainly formulated with respect to mass education in Muslim societies, a further dimension would include the global transformation of Sufi discourse, which is now being articulated in terms accessible to contemporary Americans.

In concluding this section on Sufi psychologies, I note that I have only been able to suggest a rather cursory outline of the frameworks and therapeutic techniques adopted by American Sufi movements. As expected, there is again a continuum from the universalist approaches to *sharia*-oriented orders. In certain orders stressing the master-sheikh interaction, the need for therapeutic models that could be generalised and applied by 'therapists as khalifas' is reduced. In other words, dispersal of charisma and limiting of personal contact with teachers encourage the construction of systematic models of transformation that can be applied irrespective of the status of the practitioner.

Sufism and American academic culture

One significant dimension of Sufism in American culture is the support it receives at the intellectual level within the academy. For one thing, religious studies as a separate field is much more common in American universities than in Europe. In the light of the constitutional separation of church and state and the pluralistic ethos of contemporary America, such departments do not promote religion *per se*. At the same time, approaches are often sympathetic to the religious compartment of human life, consider it significant, take the insider categories seriously or, in other words, take a phenomenological stance. Some academic institutions favour the model of the practitioner scholar who professes the religion he or she teaches.

This gives some sympathetic ground to scholars and scholarship on Sufism. The period of the late 1960s and 70s in the United States saw a convergence of larger numbers of young people interested in Eastern religions and philosophies and increased funding for graduate studies in the languages and cultures of areas of the world considered to be of strategic interest during the Cold War period. The result is a larger cohort of American academics qualified in the study of Islam and Sufism so that in the American academy the Sufi interpretation of Islam is more likely to be researched and taught, as opposed to law or Quranic studies.

The boundary between academic study and the profession of Sufism may be blurred, for instance in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's studies of Islamic spiritual themes and William Chittick's studies of Ibn Arabi and his school.

Female leadership and participation

To the degree that *sharia*-based ritual is incorporated, gender distinctions become visibly operative in the functioning of American Sufi movements. In the more strictly Islamic Sufi movements, such as the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, prominent women, if present, will likely be wives or relatives of leaders. In the case of American Sufi women, gender segregation and other restrictions on female participation are likely to provoke some discomfort, and this leads to a subversive quality in some Western women's reflections on Sufism. I mean subversive in the sense of challenging the traditional Islamic concepts of maleness and femininity and gender-specific roles.

Since I find the Turkish-originated movements of the Helveti-Jerrahis and Mevlevis interesting in terms of this theme, I will briefly introduce their movements. In the development of the Helveti-Jerrahi order in America we can see the challenges raised by negotiating both ethnic and gender identities. The order was brought to America by Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak (1914–93) of Istanbul. He first came to the United States in 1980, although many Western students of Sufism had previously visited his bookshop in Istanbul. Branches of his *tariqa* developed in New York under the leadership of Tosun Bayrak, Sheikh Nur (Lex Hixon) and in the San Francisco Bay Area under Ragip Frager.

One of the American Jerrahi leaders, Sheikh Nur al-Jerrahi (1941–95) was a prominent figure in a number of American spiritual movements. Nur (Lex Hixon) had a Ph.D. in religion from Columbia and specialised in comparative mysticism. He met Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak while the latter was a guest on a radio programme he hosted in New York where many spiritual teachers were featured. Nur eventually became his disciple and accepted Islam while maintaining his universalist orientation. The French researchers Rocher and Charqaoui, after interviewing Nur in the 1980s, marvelled that ‘this gentle and affable man was an orthodox priest on Monday, a Buddhist lama on Tuesday, a Khalifa on Thursday – Christian among the Christians, Muslim among the Muslims’. This type of eclectic orientation seems to have led to some friction among members of the *tariqa* which became more evident after the death of Sheikh Muzaffer Effendi, whose successor in Istanbul, Safer Effendi (d. 1999), was said to have been more strict. Ultimately one branch of the American Jerrahis, known as the Ashkijerrahis, drawn mainly from Lex Hixon’s followers, evolved separately, under a female teacher, Sheikha Fariha Fatima al-Jerrahi. One of the principal issues in the differentiation of branches among the Helvetis in America has been negotiating Islamic identity and deriving legitimacy from sheikhs based in Turkey. The branch of the Helveti-Jerrahi movement under the direction of Tosun Bayrak specifically terms itself a ‘traditional Muslim Sufi order’.

The website biography of Sheikha Fariha notes that she was made a sheikha by Muzaffer Ozak in 1985 and is the first female leader in the Jerrahi order in over 300 years. More intriguingly, the biographical notice indicates that she moves through forbidden spaces while on Umra and Hajj pilgrimages in Mecca and Medina. I conclude that this reference alludes to the fact that she was able to transgress conventions of gender segregation and visit areas of the shrines normally off limits to females. Alternatively, the trope of ‘forbidden spaces’ resonates with escapades such as Sir Richard Burton’s trip to Mecca during the 1800s. A revealing statement about identity is found on the same Ashkijerrahi website, which states that ‘Islam is like clear water poured into different vessels. It takes the color and shape of each vessel’. Here Sheikh Muzaffer, who is being quoted, is said to be referring ‘to both personal and cultural vessels’.

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Gender issues are one measure of the adaptation of various Sufi movements to the American context. In the case of the Turkish Mevlevi order (whirling dervishes), American initiates may learn the traditional practice of 'turning' and among these disciples are American women who are set on breaking the barrier to female participation in the *dhikr*. Traditional sheikhs from Turkey may be pleased that Americans are becoming dervishes but unsettled to be asked to give permission for females to turn/whirl, at least publicly. Will different rules be negotiated for Americans?

In the book *Women Called to the Path of Rumi: The Way of the Whirling Dervish* (2001) an American female dervish reports on her experience in Turkey and her encounter with a Turkish woman (p. 172):

I had tea with her several times after that. She thought we [American women] didn't take turning seriously. She said, 'Why would you think that you could do something that a boy starts learning to do as a very young child?' She couldn't understand how, after studying for a few years, we could go to another country and do this thing. To her it was such an American, pompous, and inflated thing to do. We continued talking, and after a while she changed her mind a bit. She could see that for me, it was an important experience. However, she still thought that I ought to be content to sit up in the balcony, because it was too hard on men who might have sexual thoughts.

Another American Mevlevi woman, cited in the same book, describing gender and other forms of equality as an ideal, states (p. 115):

That the old, the young, black, white, male, female, all can be lovers of God, is the mystical way. This is a radical way, a way beyond control, a way that is frightening to political structures. The lover cannot be controlled. Love is a magic, which if it is truly ignited, melts slowly or quickly, our projected grids and boundaries of control upon one another.

Among the responses to the challenge raised by converted American women is activism. At the same time American Sufi women attempt to avoid the attitude which I term ‘passing and surpassing’, in which Euro-Americans who become Muslims receive an instant platform and prominence in Muslim contexts. In the same way that third-wave or cultural feminists try to avoid the mistake of second-wave Western white feminists who attempt to impose their agenda on women of colour, female participants in Western Sufi movements need to negotiate their understandings of gender roles to reflect both tradition and justice.

This theme is reflected in the accounts of the American Mevlevi women who were able to participate in the ritual turning or whirling in Turkey. They were sensitive to the reactions of Turkish women which were generally very positive, according to the experiences recounted in *Women Called to the Path of Rumi* (p. 114):

All of the Turkish women who saw us were so ecstatic they had tears streaming down their faces. They had never seen men and women turn together. They had never seen women recognized in a formal *sema* [turning ritual], in a public way. To have the support to do this and also to feel all the implications of that for these Turkish women was very moving.

A recent collection of articles on Muslim women’s activism in America includes pieces by two women associated with Sufi movements. Rabia Terri Harris is a member of the Helveti-Jerrahi Sufi order, the more *sharia*-oriented branch under the direction of Tohsin Bayrak. Her bio-notice says she ‘came to Islam through the Jerrahi order’. Her substantial academic credentials include a BA from Princeton in religion and a Master’s degree from Columbia in Middle Eastern languages and cultures. Harris has contributed translations of the classical Sufi writer al-Qushayri. She is involved in peace and justice movements and lectures on progressive Islam.

In her chapter published in Gisela Webb’s anthology of articles by American Muslim women, *Windows of Faith* (2000), Harris makes the following critique (p. 174):

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Islam is supposed to be the religion of truth. At least, it is in the Qur'an. It was in the words and actions of the Prophet. Is it, in the lives of Muslims today? Why does 'Islamic reality' so often seem like a smaller, poorer, and more uncomfortable space to occupy than 'regular reality'? Why is the 'islamization of knowledge' a project going nowhere? Why are so many believers so defensive, so offensive, about their faith?

This quote illustrates the activism espoused by some American Sufi women who are willing to criticise authoritarian structures and attitudes.

Lex Hixon, also a Helveti, was sensitive to gender issues as well, but somewhat more conservative, at least in his formal comments featured in the collection *American Jihad: Islam After Malcolm X* (1994: p. 197).

The Prophet, upon him be peace, was extremely sensitive to women. He had nine wives, whom he adored and whom he attended to with more care and attention than the normal husband gives to one wife. And so that we feel that following his way, the love and courtesy of men to women, is something very essential in Islam. We don't defend various cultural patterns that have sprung up in so-called Islamic countries which might be seen to be oppressive of women. But we hold basic equality of men and women.

He also states (p. 197):

In Mexico we have a woman who leads our zikr and who's the head of the community there. She has the permission from the grand sheik in Istanbul to do this. She doesn't lead the prayers. A man leads the prayers in Islam because that's the Sunnah. That was the way the Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace, did it. So we like to preserve those beautiful ancient ways of behaving.

Here we see Hixon negotiating between *sharia* compliance and providing leadership opportunities for Sufi women.

An article by Gwendolyn Zohara Simmons in Webb's anthology *Windows of Faith* identifies her as 'a Sunni Muslim and a member of the Sheikh Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Mosque and fellowship in Philadelphia'. Simmons, an African American, directly confronts the oppression of women in some Muslim contexts, including the United States, in the light of her personal experiences in the American civil rights movement (p. 203):

Therefore, my relationship with my chosen religion, Islam, has been fraught with ambivalence and tension. My biggest problem has been with the traditional depiction of women and our role in both the religion and in society. You may ask how I came to be a Muslim given the above brief biographical account and given the stereotypical depiction in the West of Islam as the most misogynist of the three Abrahamic traditions.

My conversion to Sunni Islam was through the example and guidance of a Sufi teacher from Sri Lanka, Sheikh Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyuddeen. I was drawn to the religion by its mystical and spiritual aspects as taught by him. The beautiful prayer rituals, the month of fasting, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

According to Simmons, the Sufi master Guru Bawa in his teaching supported women as manifesting the feminine qualities of Allah while giving them practical recognition in participation and leadership. His was a twentieth-century Islam that adhered to the foundations and to the eternal and universal principles of the religion while it embraced the knowledge and understanding of this era.

Another remarkable work relevant to the theme of gender and American Sufism is the autobiographical study of two women from Los Angeles who grew up in the 1950s. The author of *Finding Fran* (1998), Lois Banner, is a professor of women's history at the University of Southern California, while her friend, Noura Durkee (Fran), was a participant in many spiritual movements and eventually converted to Islam through Sufism. Banner asks why their lives

took such different paths, hers to feminism and Fran's to Islam? Beyond exploring cultural trends and historical timing, Banner displays her sympathies with Fran's Muslim perspective and relates it to her own feminist awakening.

This book traces the currents operating in the life of Noura Durkee, prominent in such American Sufi movements as the Lama Foundation and the Islamic village at Abiquiu, New Mexico. Travel is a significant element of spiritual experience for Fran and other American Sufis, from her participation in the Pir Vilayat Sufi camps at Chamonix of the 1970s on to Jerusalem, then Mecca, Cairo and finally back to the United States. In Banner's tracing of some of the eclectic spiritual currents running through Fran/Noura's experience one finds: Gurdjieff groups, Pir Vilayat Khan's Sufi Order, the Lama Foundation (a Sufi-influenced spiritual centre in New Mexico), Baba Ram Das (a Harvard professor turned Yogic guru) and Shadhili Sufism. As an interesting twist, the feminist academic Banner confesses in the introduction her own involvement in universal Sufism through the Dances of Universal Peace and her taking initiation in the Sufi order of Pir Vilayat Khan. The tone of the book is set by Banner trying to appreciate Fran's path as an authentic American woman's search for spirituality. The conclusion is that smart, competent people, including American females, might find something valuable in embracing Islamic Sufism.

An incident illustrating American female Sufis rebelling or 'acting up' is one that I personally witnessed at an International Association of Sufism Conference in the Bay Area. A Rifa'i sheikh from Kuwait was leading a collective *dhikr*, in which a succession of universalist and *sharia*-oriented teachers took turns in directing the likewise mixed audience in Islamic chants. The sheikh commented that since some female participants were not covering their hair during the practices, the angels could not be present at the gathering. Some American women were outraged and protested by walking out, in a few cases provocatively tossing their heads as if shaking their cascading tresses in defiance.

In brief summary, it is clear that female members of Western Sufi movements take positions about gender along some sort of continuum from subversion and activism directed towards challenging and reforming traditional Muslim practices to acceptance of the

rationale for 'gender complementarity'. The concept that maleness and femaleness function as distinct energies is expressed not only by *sharia*-oriented movements such as the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis, but also in certain teachings of the universalist Sufi Islamia Ruhaniat Society and the Sufi order, where specific movements, dances or practices are cultivated as part of attuning to essentially different gender frequencies.

Conclusions

In summary, 'American' aspects of Sufi movements in the United States indicate that this is one manifestation of Islam that quickly adapts to the local cultural context. 'American' Sufis are noteworthy for their inroads into popular culture, for example in the realms of publishing and music. In the case of perennialist or universal Sufi groups, their identification with Islamic spirituality allows their integration into New Age and religious healing circles. Certain Sufis of the past, for example, Rumi and Ibn Arabi, are particularly amenable to this cross-over reading.

Probably the most significant impacts of American Sufi movements on 'mainstream' Islamic discourse and organisations in America occur through the lectures and Internet writings of *sharia*-oriented Sufis who minimise their identification with specific sheikhs and *tariqas* and recover acceptable terminology and interpretations of Islamic spiritual understandings.

Yet another development occurring among American Sufis who are in greater interaction with mainstream youth movements and institutions is the advocacy of indigenisation that would draw on indigenous aspects of American religion: for example, the appreciation of and response to the natural beauty of the United States, in some cases through an affinity with Native American traditions. For example, Schuon's group had an interest in Native American ritual, and one group of American Muslim converts called their annual gatherings an 'American Muslim Powwow'. Yet another attempt to fuse Islam and American religious aesthetics arises in the suggestion that mosques should be constructed in a style like that used by the quietist American movement, the Shakers, who are noted for their dignity and simplicity, rather than attempting to

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copy Middle Eastern architectural forms. In response to the Islamic monoculture promulgated by internationalist movements, some American Sufis have advocated the development of a distinctive American Muslim style of dress. I also note that progressive Muslim discussion lists have a high proportion of Euro-American converts and American Sufi participants, demonstrating the popularity of this interpretation of Islam among such groups.