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May 2024

Reaction to ‘Hallaj: Iblis as Tragic Lover (The TaSin of Before Time and Ambiguity)’ by Michael Sells, Sells (ed.) *Early Islamic Mysticism. Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. Paulist Press (1995)

This article is a reflection on the ninth chapter of Michael Sells (ed.) “*Early Islamic Mysticism. Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*”, published in 1996. Essentially a compendium of translations with accompanying commentaries, Carl Ernst (in the preface) emphasises the book’s important contribution to the study of early Islamic mysticism, as offering English language versions unique in their prototypical poetic and linguistic sympathy, and some for their hitherto unavailability¹. Calling Sell’s selection “foundational”² to the understanding of Islamic revelatory development, it is of note not only that Sell’s selects the controversial Abū ‘l-Muġīth al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (Hallaj, d. 922) as one of only ten mystical authors considered; but furthermore chooses verses from Hallaj’s *Diwan* (lit. poetry or collection of poems), on the unwitnessed omnipresence of God³, as the epilogue to all.

Sell’s selection of The TaSin of Before Time and Ambiguity, (the TaSin), the sixth section of Hallaj’s “truly remarkable work of Sufi literature”⁴ the *Tawasin*, is not unpredictable. It is germane to traditional Islamic thought and academia alike, albeit contentiously so for the former; containing the infamous “I am the real”⁵ statement that created accusatory furore of *shirk* (unpardonable sin of deviating from *tawhid*, the oneness of God) and ultimately contributed to

¹ Carl Ernst, ‘Preface’, Michael Sells (ed.) *Early Islamic Mysticism. Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. Paulist Press (1995), p2

² Ibid.

³ Michael Sells ‘Epilogue’, Sells (ed.) *Early Islamic Mysticism. Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. Paulist Press (1995) “*If They Only Knew*” from the *Diwan* Attributed to al-Hallaj’, p303, ends:

“Never without him, they,
not for the blink of an eye—
if only they knew!
nor he for a moment without them”

⁴ Michael Sells, Reaction to Iblis as Tragic Lover, Sells (ed.) *Early Islamic Mysticism. Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. Paulist Press (1995), p267

⁵ Ibid., p270, and in Hallaj’s *Tasin Before Time and Ambiguity*, v23, p277

Hallaj's tortuous and gruesome death⁶, ostensibly compared to the passions of Jesus' crucifixion⁷. In 'Jesus and Hallaj', Andrew Shanks notes that the TaSin is "really the most remarkable section of the book, for here Hallaj is exploring the symbolic potential of the Qur'anic story about the fall of Iblis; that is, Satan"⁸.

Sells introduces two Qur'anic passages Q2:30-34 and Q38:71-75⁹, relating to that fall, alongside the creation of Adam (mankind) and Iblis' subsequent refusal to obey the divine command to all the angels to "bow" before him - superior to the angels having been granted the knowledge of "all the names"¹⁰ (usually aligned as divine attributes). Sell's attention to detail in expanding upon these verses is helpful, making effort throughout to transliterate and expound phrases where literal translation could be misleading or redundant. Explaining these Qur'anic verses, for example, the reader can be left in no doubt as to the provenance of *salat* (ritual worshipful prayer), and its relationship to bowing¹¹.

This commitment to being a facilitator of philological understanding is reinforced by his cross reference of several translations of the *Tawasin*¹², and a methodology he upholds leading into the TaSin, offering clarification on the multiple translations of 'ayn. According to Hallaj, Iblis "fell from" 'ayn, in contrast to Muhammed, who has the "'ayn of 'ayn" "revealed" to him¹³. As Sells illustrates 'ayn may be interpreted as "'eye," "source," "spring," or "essence" or even a "concrete manifestation" of something"¹⁴. This is not simply a vocabulary issue however, and Sells forewarns of Hallaj's literary structure as founded upon "unstable form of language"¹⁵, including switching between poetry and prose, dialogue and abstraction, discursive to dramatic¹⁶.

⁶ Ibid., pp266-7

⁷ Ibid., p267

⁸ Andrew Shanks, 'Jesus and Hallaj', Andrew Shanks, *Hegel versus "Inter-Faith Dialogue": A General Theory of True Xenophilia*, CUP (2015), p177

⁹ Sells, Reaction to Iblis as Tragic Lover, this article, n4, pp268-9

¹⁰ Ibid., Q2:34, p268, and in Hallaj, the Tasin, v28, p278, see also "bowing" Q38: 72, 73, p269, the Tasin, v28, p278, "bow down" the Tasin, v2, p273, v9, p274, v13, p275, v20, p277

¹¹ Ibid., p267

¹² Sells uses additional translations by both Massignon and Nwyia - indeed his explanatory footnotes on those translations and their sources and implications are exceptionally thorough see Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, this article n1, p363

¹³ Sells, Reaction to Iblis as Tragic Lover, this article, n4, p273, and in Hallaj, the Tasin, v1, p273

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p270

¹⁶ Ibid., p270

He outlines four interpretive arguments¹⁷ prior to the reader's entry into the TaSin: (1) the "metaphysical" one that God knew of Iblis' forthcoming disobedience and therefore it was predetermined as God's will, (2) the "*ma'rifa*" (gnosis) position that Iblis as a connected servant of God also knew, (3) the "lyrical", whereby Iblis' love for God is also hampered by personal possessiveness and (4) mystical union. The last, (4) is potentially difficult to extrapolate from (2) however Sells quantifies his point by stating that in gnosis one would know what divine will is, (Iblis himself identifies the command to bow before Adam as a test¹⁸) whilst the fourth suggests the *fana* (self annihilation).

Sell's demonstrates that irrespective of how Hallaj is perceived or received, the outpourings of this Sufi mystic retain a scriptural basis, and thus constitute a contributory *ta'wil* (esoteric exegesis¹⁹). Yet despite his enthusiasm and admirable semantic and philosophic 'hand-holding' he frequently resists specific synthesis. Returning to his definitions of 'ayn', although he makes clear that variety creates implicit perplexity, he does not elaborate on the impact, e.g. 'ayn of 'ayn could be translated as 'essence of essence' or 'concrete manifestation of the source', with very different explicit metaphysical and ontological consequences.

This same argument of 'stopping short' could also be made regarding his extrapolations of the root of 'TaSin'. The fascinating possibility of pursuing the esoteric meaning of 'TaSin' as "a combination of the first term of Sura 20 [*Ta Ha*] and the second term of Sura 36 [*Ya Sin*]"²⁰, notwithstanding that *Tawasin* is actually the plural of TaSin which places perceivable emphasis on this chapter, is noted but not undertaken. Sura 20 involves, inter alia, God declaring Adam and Iblis enemies²¹ and Sura 36, inter alia, the judgement of people of the good being deemed an "evil omen"²². Reading the text produced by Hallaj (scribes²³) with these frameworks, one still may be struck by the potential ambiguities evident throughout his imaginal conversations between God, Moses, Iblis and himself, but the logical 'gaps' created by statements such as those

¹⁷ Ibid., pp270-271

¹⁸ Ibid., in Hallaj's Tasin Before Time and Ambiguity, v14, p275

¹⁹ Ibid., pp267-8

²⁰ Ibid., p268

²¹ Q20:114 - 123, Abdel Haleem, The Quran, A New Translation, OUP (2016), p201

²² Q36:13-30, ibid., p281-282

²³ Sells, Reaction to Iblis as Tragic Lover, n4, this article, p267.

on performance of vice and virtue²⁴ or pre-determinism and free will²⁵ is delineated. Examining vice and virtue when one assesses from a non-judgemental framework (vice not automatically ‘bad’ nor virtue automatically ‘good’) one is able to see their inherent knowledge as a necessary part of the the Sufi path of *fana* - one cannot destroy something if it is unknown. Applying too this same framework to the ‘perfection’ Hallaj outlines, mutual exclusivity of free-will and pre-determinism on the same plane becomes superfluous, as labelling ‘choices’ on the individual level is redundant.

Sells does not purport that his four interpretive platforms are comprehensive, and considering alongside the burgeoning mystical language developing within Sufism²⁶ and the Sufi warnings that such experiences should not attempt to be radically expressed for risk of misapprehension²⁷ (something Hallaj repeatedly ignored), one might anticipate as such. Ultimately surprising though is that Sells does not add investigative signposts to place Hallaj as a transitional thinker between the divine love of early mystics²⁸ such as Rabi’a (d.801), to future Sufi developments such as Ibn al-Arabi’s (d.1240) posthumously titled metaphysics *Wahat al Wahjud* (Unity of Being)²⁹.

Sells’ refraining from argumentative advancement in areas he commences may be due to the complexity or multitude of interpretation(s) and/or a requirement for brevity, or that he simply wishes the reader to draw their own conclusions. I plump firmly for the last statement. I am aware in reviewing my own observations that they could be levelled as implying Sells has not ‘done his job’. On the contrary I believe my observations demonstrate that if ‘his job’ is to encourage contemplative readership, establish a level of guidance that creates the environment

²⁴ Ibid., in Hallaj’s *Tasin Before Time and Ambiguity*, v18-19, p276

²⁵ Ibid., esp., v28 - 30

²⁶ Carl Ernst, ‘Preface’, this article, n1, p3, writes “these texts belong to a period when early Sufis labored [sic] with the richly textured vocabulary of Arabic to fashion a language for the soul.... the extraordinary role of the Qur’anic revelation in forming a template for that inner language”

²⁷ Peter Awn observes that “the accomplished mystic was never to divulge to the uninitiated experiences that were beyond their comprehension: the true nature of union was only to be discussed with other adepts or not at all” something Hallaj spectacularly failed in, also see Ansari, *Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj: Ideas of an Ecstatic*, Islamic Studies 39, 2 (2000)

²⁸ Alexander Knysh, “Chapter Four The “Intoxicated” Mysticism of Al-Bisṭāmī and Al-Ḥallāj”. In *Islamic Mysticism*. Brill (2000), p68

²⁹ Yusri Mohammed Ramli, Yusri Mohamad, ‘Martyrdom of al-hallaj and unity of the existence: The condemners and the commenders’, *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 3, (Jun 2013) pp106-112

for just that and to ensure that the most obvious barriers to understanding Hallaj are removed, he has done so in an exemplary manner. Overall, I was left with the experience that Sells *cares*, and his manifest style indulges an obvious desire for his readers to care too, advocated by forthright explanations to the frequently complex mystical texts whose realms one is about to enter.

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**Reaction to ‘Global Rumi’ by Robert Irwin,
Piraino and Sedgwick (ed.s) *Global Sufism*, Hurst (2019)**

Robert Irwin’s ‘Global Rumi’ deconstructs the fantasy that surrounds this renowned mediaeval Persian-language mystic³⁰. Never again will I read anything regarding, or authored by, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (Rumi, d.1273), without cross-referencing for veracity. There is little escape from Irwin’s call to truth, and he spotlights not just the sentiments of the well-known populace such as Madonna and Chopra³¹, but also those of respected academics including Arberry and Schimmel³². His mission brings attention to many historical inaccuracies, including Rumi’s place of birth (*not* Balkh³³), falsified relationships (both in his sexual proclivities³⁴ and mythical interactions such as that with the Sufi polymath and metaphysicist Ibn al-Arabi, d.1240, that “never happened”³⁵), and “filtered” translations³⁶, all of which orbit the axial role of Coleman Barks (b.1937) in Rumi’s notoriety.

Over forty authors and speakers gain mention, yet only Franklin Lewis and his *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West*³⁷, emerges unscathed, saluted for its faithful synopsis of Rumi’s life and aims³⁸. Irwin quotes Lewis’ observations on Rumi’s *Masnawi*;

“Rumi brings to bear a not inconsiderable erudition in his lectures, but wears it lightly, illustrating his points with entertaining, instructive and memorable tales.”³⁹

One may observe similar levity whilst undertaking a serious pursuit in Irwin’s narrative. He amusingly cites Peter Wilson’s “talks with Sufi dolphins and Sex Secrets of the Sufi Masters”⁴⁰

³⁰ Rumi wrote predominantly in Persian, but also in Arabic, produced a few verses in Greek and was believed to also speak colloquial Turkish. See further Franklin Lewis, *Rumi : Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings, and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, 2000, pp 315-317

³¹ Robert Irwin, Global Rumi, Francesco Piraino and Mark Sedgwick (ed.s), *Global Sufism*, (2019). P16, p45

³² Ibid. This is both themed throughout pp15-34 and specifically pp16, 18, 21

³³ Ibid., p16, p31. Whilst widely recorded as Balkh, present-day Afghanistan, it is now academically accepted that Rumi was born in Wakhsh (or Vakhsh), present-day Tajikistan. See also Lewis, n1, pp 47–49.

³⁴ Ibid., p24, p31

³⁵ Ibid., p18. Cf. e.g Jawad Qureshi’s Ibn Arabi and the Akbari Tradition, Ridgeon (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, (2021) p92 which states that they knew one another

³⁶ Ibid., p22

³⁷ Lewis, *Rumi Past and Present*, n1

³⁸ Irwin, Global Rumi, n2, p31

³⁹ Ibid., p24

⁴⁰ Ibid., p16

as the potential ‘endgame’ for Rumi merchandising, underscores Rumi’s transformational relationship of love and grief with Shams-e Tabrizi (1185–1248) through Bruce Wannell’s droll refutation of any homosexual element, “not a foretaste of Californian gay romance”⁴¹, and drily wonders whether Idries Shah (1924 -1996) is Rafael Lefort, making him the eponymous master of *The Teachers of Gurdieff*⁴². Irwin identifies multitudinous fiction and nonfiction that ‘creatively borrow’ from Rumi, the rallying theme is a Campbell-esque ‘hero’s journey’⁴³. Some examples are obvious, such as Paolo Coehlo’s *The Alchemist* or Reshad Field’s *The Last Barrier*, others perhaps less conspicuously so, e.g. George Lucas’ *Return of the Jedi* or Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, the latter now the subject of similar multimillion dollar cinematic hyperbole just as Lucas’ *Star Wars* franchise before.

Apropos, anything with Rumi connotations creates money, from the initial starting point of Irwin’s eclectic Amazon basket⁴⁴ to the plethora of books that take Rumi’s name or character. Such materialism can hardly be compatible with early Sufi principles of *zuhd* (detachment and asceticism), any more than the ‘self-improvement’ classification of Rumi’s books⁴⁵ can have much in common with *fana*, that Sufi essential of self-annihilation (or what in a post-Freudian manner we are apt to call ego destruction, or Jungian psychic death). For Sufis like Rumi, God effects the transformative experience⁴⁶ not the individual, self-improvement is thus the exact opposite of the self-effacement required - something Irwin exposes to an educated reader rather than overtly stating.

Further irony in the direction of Idries Shah brings links to George Gurdieff (1872-1949) and Pytor Ouspenskii (1878-1947) and their attempts to establish Sufi ‘orders’⁴⁷ without Islam in the 1950/60s. The Islamist decline and resurgence of Sufi orders which, as frequently mentioned

⁴¹ Ibid., p31

⁴² Ibid., p26

⁴³ Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (1949), created a 17 stage framework for the “hero’s journey” or monomyth, including divine intervention, psychic death and victorious return. It became a focus of activity in the US during the 1980s and 1990s under the label of the ‘Mythopoetic Men’s Movement’, of which Robert Bly (see further this article, p4) was a member.

⁴⁴ Irwin, *Global Rumi*, n2, pp15-16

⁴⁵ Ibid., p17

⁴⁶ See further, Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's Mysticism of Love-Based Annihilation.' *Mawlana Rumi Review*, 5 (2014) pp43-63

⁴⁷ The word ‘order’ with its reminiscence of Christian monasteries - institutions that are outside Quranic teaching, is a poor translation for the Sufi term *tariqa* (lit., path or way)

academics Arthur Arberry (1906-1969) and Reynold Nicholson (1868-1945) erroneously predicted would disappear altogether, forms much of the focus for *Global Sufism*'s⁴⁸ remaining chapters, but not here in its first chapter. Rumi's contribution to the Mevlevi, famed for its whirling dervishes, is not advanced other than to correct that its traditional form was not set by Rumi, but his son⁴⁹, and Irwin holds main focus to Rumi's written works.

In the midst of fiction/nonfiction, de-Islamisation and falsehood, Coleman Barks is Irwin's chief protagonist. This is not really Barks' 'fault' - Barks himself loosely defines his works as, inter alia, 'renderings'⁵⁰. Yet as the man responsible for bringing Rumi's poetic quatrains and couplets to the modern eye and ear in his globally bestselling *The Essential Rumi* (1995)⁵¹, Barks is milestone and fulcrum. Prior to Barks, Irwin highlights a sneaking awareness of Rumi through Walt Whitman (1819-92), and Transcendentalism⁵²; an idealistic monadology in which Rumi's works fit comfortably, and both certainly facilitated poet and translator Robert Bly (1926-2021)⁵³ introducing Rumi to Barks⁵⁴. Leading to that pivotal moment, Irwin retraces an historical trail of 'academic nepotism', misinformation and questionable transliterations. Bly used translations of Arberry, who was influenced by Nicholson, and Muhammed Iqbal (1873-1938), the latter of inspiration to Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003) and Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch (1909-1999)⁵⁵, two other preponderant Rumi scholars. Post Barks, we have the celebrity endorsers, whose patronage is to a Rumi defined by these interlinked sources that culminated in Barks. Irwin effectively reminds that the full Rumi is perhaps hidden e.g. the *Masnavi*'s Qur'anic relation or Rumi's oft unacknowledged "misogynistic and anti-semetic"⁵⁶ passages.

⁴⁸ Irwin, *Global Rumi*, n2, p

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p18

⁵⁰ Barks states, "Working on Rumi's poetry deepened the inner companionship. My apprenticeship continues, and whatever else they are, these versions or translations or renderings or imitations are homage to a teacher", *The Essential Rumi*, HarperSanFrancisco, Harper Collins (1997) 'A Note on these Translations and a few Recipes' on p290

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p16

⁵² *Ibid.*, p20

⁵³ See n11

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p18

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp18-23. Meyerovitch was also a fellow of Louis Masisgnon (1883-1962), who has faced similar criticism over his translations of another Perisan mystic, Al-Hallaj (858-922)

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p31. See further Rumi's emphasis on "phallogocentric eroticism" in Mahdi Tourage, *The Hermeneutics of Eroticism in the Poetry of Rumi. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (2005) p613

Sometimes one also notices a thing not by reason of what it is, but what it is not. In Irwin's case he has comprehensively demonstrated Rumi's corrupted adoption, particularly in the West, both by well-meaning yet culturally misappropriating academics, the swirl of popular zeitgeist and Barks' requisite role. Yet it is the absence of *why* the works of Rumi have struck an intercontinental chord that remains untouched. Conceivably the philosophic and religious explorations that were demoted from qualification as sciences for hundreds of years through the rise of physical sense-based empiricism, are seeing their revival in works such as Rumi's that offer instead a "sixth-sense" discipline - something that was a natural part of Upanishadic training, Hellenistic wonderment and Abrahamic mysticism, that the world *feels* to be true and longs to consciously witness. Perhaps Rumi himself held the answer; whereby the opposite of the destructive megalomania we see in the world today (whether the antisocial person or genocidal nation), is a groundswell of individuals prepared to relinquish their egocentricity to live in love⁵⁷. But to comprehensively explain Rumi's ontology and metaphysics in a way that is grounded in fact such as Irwin compels...well, that would be an article for another day.

⁵⁷ See further, Zarrabi-Zadeh, 'Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's Mysticism of Love-Based Annihilation.' *Mawlana Rumi Review*, 5 (2014) pp43-63

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**Reaction to Marcia Hermansen, ‘What’s American about American Sufi Movements?’
Westerlund (ed.), *Sufism in Europe and North America*, Routledge (2004)**

Hermansen faces an unenviable task with an omnipresent undercurrent: the manifest abstruseness of accurately distinguishing influence on *anything* of transnational and diasporic origin. Incorporate the subject matter being a mystical element of a world religion that is sometimes positioned outside of that religion⁵⁸, in a nation (the “North America” of the book’s title is resolutely the United States in this chapter) commonly recognised as a “melting pot” of cultures and ideologies (although Hermansen mentions this and prefers the idea of a “salad bowl” where the contents retain their character whilst in the same ‘pot’⁵⁹) and I was left pondering whether “What’s *not* Sufi about American Sufi Movements?” would elicit a simpler response.

Despite Hermansen’s authoritative status on American Sufis⁶⁰, and her valiantly addressing the question as-is, the resultant navigation is a somewhat bumpy ride through national religiosity, immigration, conversion, psychology, media, feminism, literature and the Sufi *tariqas*⁶¹. For the latter, at the outset, she distinguishes between what she calls “transplants”⁶² of *tariqas* that are an emigré scion with domestic Islamic roots, from those ‘made in America’, yet concludes the distinction inadequate⁶³. Next she contrasts “Euro-Sufism” and “American Sufism” but has to swiftly admit that the two are inexorably linked under the banner of “Western”⁶⁴. These are just two examples that quickly highlight an almost constant ambiguity in definitively reconciling where the line of anything ‘American about Sufism’ can be drawn after simple geography.

⁵⁸ Excellent consideration of the ‘de- and re-’ Islamisation of Sufism over the late 20th / early 21st Centuries can be found in *Global Sufism*, Piraino and Sedgwick (ed.s) *Global Sufism*, Hurst (2019)

⁵⁹ Marcia Hermansen, ‘What’s American about American Sufi Movements?’ Westerlund (ed.), *Sufism in Europe and North America*, Routledge (2004) p.36-37

⁶⁰ Hermansen is a prolific writer on Sufism and Islam, has authored over 20 books and countless articles, and published the “earliest academic article” on American Sufi movements, see Hermansen, Introduction, Elliott Bazzano and Marcia Hermansen (eds) *Varieties of American Sufism*, SUNY (2020), pxxxv, note 2

⁶¹ A *tariqa* (Arabic lit.path or way) is the word for Sufi “orders”, technically the plural is *turuq*, however *tariqas* is a common anglicisation and is used for ease here.

⁶² Hermansen, n2 this paper, p36

⁶³ Ibid., p36

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.36-37

Despite its difficulties, this theme differentiating American and European Sufism is deliberately pursued (not always adhered) in Hermansen's narrative⁶⁵. To support her elucidations, she selects Tocqueville's (d.1859) *Democracy in America*, curious given its age, however it underpins some of her main arguments for the 'Americanisation of Sufism'. His observation that, "worldly prosperity had all but displaced concern with other worldly salvation"⁶⁶, is used by Hermansen to position both the individualistic pursuit of self-improvement in the American psyche and American religiosity⁶⁷. Stating rather bizarrely that the "United States, in contrast to Britain and France, had not been a direct colonial power"⁶⁸, thus avoiding its establishment as a massive extension of just that, the contributions of other religions to U.S. spirituality are largely disregarded (although in her conclusion she briefly remarks upon younger American Sufi's "affinity with Native American traditions"⁶⁹). Therefore, just as *Democracy in America*, Hermansen's cultural litmus is the many and mainly Protestant denominations.

It is this spiritual heritage founded in burgeoning evangelism that Hermansen proposes as adopted and mirrored by Sufi movements taking very public engagements in music and publishing⁷⁰. Some of these observations may have exaggerated prominence to today's reader as since her time of writing (2004), American perspectives on both spirituality and Islam have been subject to upheavals of global significance. These include the birth of social media, and whilst its impact is outside the scope here, it has brought a gamut of spiritual and religious information to public awareness⁷¹, the repercussions of 9/11 and specifically the development of "post-tariqa" movements⁷². Whilst the 2020 U.S. Religion Census does not support her claim that Islam would become the largest non-Christian minority⁷³; with only a "small number of white converts"⁷⁴, it does support her estimation that a third of Muslims are African American, and states that "American Muslims have adapted... a "congregational" model of religion from Protestant

⁶⁵ Ibid., p37

⁶⁶ Ibid., p44

⁶⁷ Ibid., p37

⁶⁸ Ibid., p62

⁶⁹ Ibid., p63

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp44-5, p63

⁷¹ Facebook was started in 2004, Youtube 2005, Instagram 2010

⁷² Hermansen, Introduction, Hermansen, Introduction, Elliott Bazzano and Marcia Hermansen (eds) *Varieties of American Sufism*, SUNY (2020), pxii

⁷³ Hermansen, n2 this paper, p41

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp39-43

Christianity”⁷⁵, reinforcing the evangelical influence underscored by Hermansen earlier. She provides excellent historical resources on Islamic immigration patterns, successfully positing that from its commencement ‘American Islam’ had significant differences in settlement and dilution⁷⁶, whereby the localised immigrant clusters of the UK and Europe⁷⁷ are not repeated in the U.S.⁷⁸. This is perhaps her strongest Euro/American distinction, the former ‘enclave’ pattern reducing accessibility, and the U.S. dispersion increasing it, albeit not the strongest argument for Sufi Americanisation⁷⁹. The link from Islamic domiciliation models to Sufism per se is not wholly convincing to explain variances in Sufi *tariqas*, it is perhaps part of the puzzle as opposed to the whole. Nevertheless this U.S. reachability and inclusiveness can be seen to create opportunities for Islamic gradualism⁸⁰ and greater opportunities for female involvement.

Such involvement is set apart by Hermansen dedicating emotive first-hand experiences⁸¹ as an American benchmark for *dhikr* (remembrance) participation, as a significant deviation from accepted Islamic feminine norms. There is a long, albeit complex, female history in Sufism, from one of Sufism’s earliest mystics Rabi’a al-Adawiyya (d. 801) to Fatima bint al-Muthanna of Cordoba⁸², spiritual guide to Ibn al-Arabi (d.1137). Once more Hermansen faces up to another factor, that in light of the African American immigration patterns, and the female leadership amongst African Sufis⁸³, whilst there is undoubtedly a participatory phenomenon facilitated through American women, especially in the *sama* (dance), it becomes challenging to posit all as an exclusively ‘American’ manifestation.

Leapfrogging to America’s modern desire for healing, Hermansen solidly aligns Sufi thought with developments over the latter part of the 20th century to include psychoanalysis and

⁷⁵ See n.13 Census

⁷⁶ US 2020 Religious Census <https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/DispersionNonChristianFaith-McMullen.pdf>

⁷⁷ See further, Ron Geaves, Sufism in the West, Geaves (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, CUP (2015)

⁷⁸ Hermansen, n2 this paper, p42

⁷⁹ In the Introduction to *Varieties of American Sufism*, n3, this paper, Hermansen acknowledges the growth in research into American Sufism and notably the “earliest presence of Sufis and Sufi practices in the Americas dates back to the enslaved Africans” pxxxv, note 2

⁸⁰ Hermansen, n2 this paper, p53

⁸¹ Ibid., pp58-60

⁸² <https://ibnarabisociety.org/woman-as-human-being-and-cosmic-principle-souad-hakim/>

⁸³ For example see Coudou Bop, Roles and the Position of Women in Sufi Brotherhoods in Senegal, *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, Vol 73, No.4, pp1099-1119 (2005)

transpersonal therapies⁸⁴. Referencing Spiegelman's *Sufism, Islam and Jungian Psychology*⁸⁵, Hermansen highlights the "spiritual dimension" and "dreamwork" - both reflections of archetypal basis and shadow self processes of ego identification and reduction that so neatly assimilate with the Sufi concept of *fana* (annihilation)⁸⁶ which may have been expanded upon. In the same vein, her brief mention of the Enneagram⁸⁷, a Sufi attributed tool for analysis and development of the soul could have been elaborated to include the 'very American' development of the RHETI⁸⁸, a scientifically tested personality psychometric. Although as is the nature of this particular topic, even this is not without counter, as whilst it was undoubtedly carried into modern times by the Sufis, it may have had more ancient Abrahamic or even Pythagorean roots; therefore another cross-cultural undertone of Hellenistic/Judeo-Christian-Islamic provenance held in the American psychic drive, Mark Sedgwick's "deep roots" of a far more ancient global phenomenon of Sufism echo loudly.⁸⁹

What Hermansen does pursue, and thoroughly so, is an overview of Sufi activities in the U.S. from its modern introduction traced back to Shaykh Hazrat Inayat Khan⁹⁰, an Indian Sufi widely credited with introducing a palatable Sufism to both the U.S. and Europe⁹¹, to the immense popularisation of Sufi literature⁹², Sufi networking⁹³ and academic augmentation⁹⁴. It is an extensive array of artistic, religious, intellectual and psychological progression, yet rather than a wholesale Americanisation of Sufism, there seems a strong position to argue a Sufism that responds to the needs of its assembly, ultimately acknowledged by Hermansen in her conclusion⁹⁵. Hermansen began her work with Western Sufism when the late 20th Century had seen massive growth, after earlier Orientalists such as Reynald Nicholson (d.1945) and Arthur

⁸⁴ Ibid., p47-50

⁸⁵ Ibid., p50

⁸⁶ Ibid., p48

⁸⁷ Ibid., p51

⁸⁸ 1993, Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator, see <https://www enneagraminstitute.com/rheti/> which any search engine will confirm has spawned multiple reproductions

⁸⁹ See further Sedgwick, Mark, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age*, OUP (2016)

⁹⁰ Hermansen, n2 this paper., p51. The Al-Azhar University in Egypt would certainly have something to say about studying Sufism being an American pursuit!

⁹¹ See further Geaves, Sufism in the West, this paper, n17, p244

⁹² Coleman Barks' translations of Rumi are frequently in the bestseller lists of poetry in the United States and have been since the 1990s. See further Robert Irwin, "Global Rumi", *Global Sufism* Piraino and Sedgwick (ed.s) *Global Sufism*, Hurst (2019)

⁹³ Hermansen, n2 this paper, p45

⁹⁴ Ibid., p55

⁹⁵ Hermansen, n2, this paper, p62

Arberry (d.1969) had prophesied its demise in that period. In 2020, Hermansen informed that membership in structured Sufi movements is currently declining⁹⁶, but history suggests it unwise to predict Sufism's trajectory. As Rachid Acim observed, "to borrow al Junayd's (d.911) terms, 'Sufi's are like colourless water'. That is, they take on the hue of their surroundings and yet suffuse it"⁹⁷.

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⁹⁶ Hermansen, n3 this paper, pxii

⁹⁷ Rachid Acim, The Reception of Sufism in the West: The Mystical Experiences of American and European Converts, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol 38, No.1, pp57-72