

8 The emergence of transethnic Sufism in Germany

From mysticism to authenticity

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Sufism has been transregional for a long time. Sufis have always travelled to non-Muslim countries for missionary reasons, as we know from the histories of Indonesia, China and other countries. Thus, transethnic Sufism is neither a modern nor a Western phenomenon. The early establishment of Sufism in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Indian Chisti Shaikh Hazrat Inayat Khan, for example, could be perceived as missionary work, but transethnic Sufism in the West has not only been a matter of establishing traditional brotherhoods with a mixed ethnic clientele. It is also a story of individual travellers and ‘converts’ who have established and transformed Sufi ideas in non-Muslim lands by publishing literary works, performing Sufi music and dance, or opening centres of Sufi healing.

The earliest European writings on Sufism are examples dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,¹ but the first serious reception and assimilation of Sufi ideas in Europe – by Orientalists, artists and travellers to Muslim lands – only began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.² The height of the early German reception was at the beginning of the nineteenth century at which time collections of oriental fiction were translated into German and travelogues were being written by German travellers.³ Famous early examples of a fascination with Islam and Sufism are found in the writings of the German poet Johann-Wolfgang von Goethe⁴ who praised the Qur’an and the Muslim poets Hafiz and Rumi. The same applies to the Orientalist Friedrich Rückert, who prepared the first poetic translation of the Qur’an, as well as to the German translation of *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* at the beginning of the eighteenth century, which found immediate popularity in Germany and in the whole of the Occident.

The German view of Islam, and Sufism in particular, is in some respects different to that of the classical European Orientalist countries, such as Great Britain and France, because of its lack of colonial engagement in the Orient. In Germany, an aesthetic turn to the Orient, imagining the Orient as positive and ethical, can be observed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.⁵ One example of the yearning and, at the same time, the unease that was provoked by images of the Orient becomes apparent in an entry in the German Brockhaus encyclopaedia from 1830:

Oriental: In the history of culture the word Orient is linked with the notion of a mysterious size, majesty and silence, which float over the grave of primeval times, out of which emerged, with priesthood and patriarchal dignity, the mental development of humankind in the middle of the most magnificent and tremendous phenomena of the life of man. At the same time the word is connected with the imagination of simplicity and marvel in persistency and steadiness, which designate likewise the character of the physical as well as the moral world of the East.⁶

In the following, I will argue that early German reception of Sufism was dominated by particular transformations of images and special readings of Sufism/Islam as a social, political, cultural or religious counter-power to Western societal developments. I will not focus on what Sufism essentially is, but on what it has been and how it has been viewed historically in Germany, from its early reception up to today. This perspective is based on the hypothesis that the perception and adoption of Sufism has been greatly affected by Germany's own societal crises, which took place between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷ When German religious thinkers first began to invent themes such as 'mysticism' and 'hermeticism', the Sufi image as a counteractant or antidotal response to secularism and rationalism prevailed, whereas the current German transethnic Sufism is dominated by the theme of 'authenticity' as an answer to religious pluralism, post-modern global relativism and hybridism.

In all of these discussions of Sufism, Islam has been assigned several roles depending on the background of the recipient's ideas. Sufism has been seen as linked to or disconnected from the Sunni and Shi'ite mainstream, and the so-called 'Orthodox' or 'Shari'a Islam'. The relationship between Sufism and Islam has, of course, also been contested in Islamic countries.⁸

Sufism as the other side of civilization: Sufism as mysticism

Whereas the early formed notions and images of Islam by Orientalists were to a large extent negative, the European perception of Sufism was from the beginning more ambivalent. The manifold phenomena of Sufism in Islamic countries as mysticism, ecstasy, the worshiping of saints, folk religion, healing practice, brotherhood, philosophy (and others) generated the basis of European observations. Judgment of these phenomena depended on the prioritization and special perspective of the observers. The idea of Sufism and Islam as separate phenomena can be found in the eighteenth-century writings of those who travelled to the East and Orientalists of various countries. American travellers such as the diplomat John P. Brown (*Oriental Spiritualism*, 1868) as well as British scholars of the East India Company such as Sir William Jones (*On the Persians*, 1807), and Sir John Malcom (*Historia of Persia*, 1815) described the Sufis as wild and free thinkers and were seen as only superficially connected to the 'Mahometans'. Sufi practices such as dancing and drinking wine would surely have had nothing to do with the strict tenets of the Arabian Prophet. Rather, it was assumed that the Sufis' behaviour was of Indian origin.⁹

German Orientalists searched for the roots of Sufism outside of Islam until the beginning of the twentieth century. The German Orientalist Richard Hartmann (1881–1965), for instance, was convinced of the syncretistic and non-Islamic character of Sufi ideas and practices. He stated: ‘Even if Sufism is not sufficiently understandable without considering the intellectual developments of Islam, this is no cause to exclude direct external influence. Indeed, the actual roots of the whole movement have nevertheless been found outside of Islam’.¹⁰ He identified these roots in the spiritual thinking of Manichaeism and Indian Theosophy, and defined Sufism as a new syncretistic mystical phenomenon that only later on turned towards Islam.¹¹

Subsequent German research on Sufism developed in two directions: on the one hand, a critical study of religion in the context of the social and cultural sciences emerged. The sociological criticism of Islam by Max Weber is a good example of this because Weber’s evaluations were based on the most widely known studies of Islam at the end of the nineteenth century. Weber described Islam as an essentially religious and military force of warriors, incapable of achieving inner reforms that could lead to a modern secular society, and lacking an individual search for salvation and mysticism. He assessed Sufism as a mass movement with orgiastic and contemplative aspects that hindered the development of the religion and the inner-worldly acculturation of Shari’a Islam.¹² This critical sociological view of Sufism survived until the late twentieth century when Ernest Gellner called Sufism a primitive and superstitious religion of rural regions, ‘the Opium of the People’, the opposite to the intellectual and urban Shari’a Islam.¹³

On the other hand, a study of religion emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, which searched for the roots of religions in general, either in the idea of God, as the phenomenological study of religion did, or in predispositions of the human being as in psychological approaches. An overview of historical developments of the nineteenth century is important in order to understand these efforts.

Enlightenment, and therefore secularism, which restrained the influence on society of churches and religion in general, were strong forces. At the same time, advancements in the natural sciences were on the rise and industrial cities emerged. Poverty, a growing sense of isolation and the loosening of traditional morals, especially in the cities, were some of the consequences of the industrialization and secularization of society. In the scientific field, a positivistic, rational worldview prevailed and many intellectuals perceived these developments as a crisis of enlightenment. In this context the concept of religion as universal, and an essential disposition of human beings, emerged, which could not and indeed should not lose its value.¹⁴

One of the important masterminds of this new search for true religion was the Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher who proposed to find true religion in religions other than Christianity. This meant looking for the inner essence of each religion in order to find the general and infinite religion amongst all the finite religions.¹⁵ In his quest to find the true religion, Schleiermacher emphasized the importance of religious feelings, for example, the feeling for an infinite

transcendence instead of concentrating on metaphysical truth or moral dimensions of particular religions. He himself also spoke about mysticism in this context, though it was not a central theme in his discourse.

In the nineteenth century, research on foreign and exotic religions, initially based on philological work that made old, sacred texts accessible, was often conducted in the spirit of Schleiermacher's idea of looking for the essence of the true religion. In doing so, some scholars of religion were searching for archaic resources that would renew the 'spiritual emptiness' of their own society, and the waning religious piety of its citizens. Therefore, the sciences of history and philology of religion defended imagination and sensitivity in a century of prosaic thinking and increasing atheism.¹⁶ Articles on 'mysticism' in diverse encyclopaedias from the nineteenth century give evidence of the acknowledgement of Indian, Persian, Turkish, Arabian and Greek sources.¹⁷ Mysticism, which had initially been expressed by the Christian dogmatic term 'theologia mystica', started to turn into a positively connoted universal notion. It was then found in other religions and believed to reveal a type of primordial monotheism (Urmonotheismus). The degree of vivid mysticism, perceived as the awareness of the secrets of a religion, seemed to be a measure of the validity of a religion in general and sacred texts of foreign origin seemed to give evidence of this.¹⁸

The work of the Protestant theologian Friedrich August Gotttreu Tholuck, which was influenced by the writings of Schleiermacher, is a good example of what this means for research on Sufism. Tholuck translated Arabic, Persian and Turkish texts into Latin which were published in 1821¹⁹ and again four years later in a short German edition as 'Blüthensammlung aus der morgenländischen Mystik'. He devoted his translations to the missionary goal of 'arousing sluggish and shallow minds in order to lead them to a truth higher than domestic morality and ordinary intellect'²⁰ and accordingly added an essay on mysticism and Sufism to the translated Sufi texts. Although Tholuck was aware of the problems regarding the origin of these sources,²¹ he assures the reader that the texts would give a vivid account of Sufism. He also argues, against older images of Sufism as a pre-Islamic cult, that,

in all probability ... Sufism has been the product of an inner-personal religious arousal of the followers of Muhammad. This arousal was soon after the introduction of Muhammedanism grasped the deeper minds of the Muhammedans and received over time a more definite character.²²

At this point, I do not want to list more details about Tholuck's historical failures in his description and reconstruction of Sufism. Asking how Sufism was reinvented by its reception in Germany, it is interesting to note that Tholuck's essay focused on a comparison of the religious revitalization potential of Sufism and Christianity. He came to the conclusion that the Orient is primarily 'image and feeling' whereas Christianity and the Occident, respectively, are 'thought'. This would be the reason why only a few Occidentalists were consequent practitioners of mysticism as quietism, which Tholuck understands as the proper aim

of all mysticism. Islamic mystics, to the contrary, endeavour to attain this goal often. To attain the state of peace and 'insensibility', they would apply extraneous means: 'They are whirling in circles so long that the bodily spiralling helps to dispatch the consciousness, or they are sitting on the floor and blocking all vents of the body and soul.'²³

Tholuck bemoans the fact that, in his judgment, Christians would not be capable of such keen pursuit. However, based in the Islamic religion, Sufism could not develop its great potential, and 'today it often acts as though powerless and ignoble, because it is on the wrong track: Oriental mysticism always remains as Quietismus and ineffective contemplation and is open to mystical pantheism'.²⁴

According to Schleiermacher, Tholuck holds mysticism as a peculiar but most sacred realm of life. Therefore, the extreme emotional states of Sufis should not be assessed as pathological as Sufism needs theoretical explanation by Occidental man because 'no Oriental man is able to do that. Oriental people usually implant mysticism magically and magnetically into their adepts, since each Oriental mystic recognizes the need for learners to be well led by an elder mystic (pir)'.²⁵ The central loss of the Oriental man would be that he is unaware of the actual aim of his afforded emotions. Mysticism could conjoin with every historical religion, but not every religion would suit mysticism. In Tholuck's opinion the Qur'an hardly seems to be a work of mysticism at all: 'The being of God in the world, its living in the human soul is there (in the Qur'an) less called for than in the Old and the New Testament.'²⁶ Therefore, he recommended reflecting on the goals and religious sense of Sufism from the rational view of the Christian. In general, Sufism served as a positive example of vivid piety that is not alienated by enlightenment and rationalism, but it requires Western reflection that if provided could allow it to contribute to religious revitalization.

This German interpretation and application of Sufism as a universal and positive mysticism, which helps to justify the existence of religion after the Enlightenment, can also be observed in writings of other German thinkers. Theologians like Rudolf Otto, who published the seventh edition of Schleiermacher's book in 1899, Friedrich Heiler, who translated and wrote the preface to Evelyn Underhill's²⁷ book, and others established the notion of mysticism as a universal religious notion of non-institutional, individual religious feeling.²⁸ Religion emerged as a phenomenon 'sui generis'. The German Orientalist Paul Klappstein (1919) wrote, in the preface of his translated Sufi texts, that Sufism should be understood as mysticism and hence as a 'psychic predisposition' of human beings. This interpretation is deeply rooted in the German search for societal renewal through a process of spiritual binding in the beginning of the twentieth century. The works of Massignon, Nicholson and other early European specialists on Sufism showed similar interests. Annemarie Schimmel, a student of Friedrich Heiler, was the most famous German scholar emerging from this school and she had become convinced that the real face of Sufism was the universal phenomenon of mysticism. She defended this perspective to such an extent that along with other scholars, she criticized some developments of Sufism as being non-Sufi-like.²⁹

So far, I have focused on the early concepts of Sufism from a German point of view that was searching for a renewal of culture or religion through mysticism. If we turn our eyes to the early traces of Sufi practice in Europe, we find similarly rooted interests. The historian Mark Sedgwick exposed the genesis of the first personal network of men who were fascinated and already involved in Sufism by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁰ Their efforts to learn from ideas and practices of strange religions were inspired by the ideas of a Perennial Philosophy,³¹ which states that 'all religions shared a common origin in a single perennial, primeval or primordial religion that had subsequently taken a variety of forms, including the Zoroastrian, Pharaonic, Platonic, and Christian'.³² The 'Perennials' also believed in a cultural and intellectual crisis in Occidental civilization because it had forgotten its link to these primeval truths. Therefore, they thought it was necessary to look for pure, old Hindu, Buddhist and also Muslim traditions.

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, for example the Swede Agueli, the French Guenon, the German Fritjof Shuon 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.

The success of the Indian Chisti Shaikh Hazrat Inayat Khan's journey in 1910 through America and Europe in order to bring his Sufi message to the West should also be seen in this historical context. Sufism's current image in the West as a universal spirituality separated from Islam became more widespread after the Second World War. This is the second phase of the reception of Sufism, which I will turn to now.

Sufism in the context of the New Age movement: Sufi spirituality as therapy³³

After the Second World War, the German reception of Sufism entered a new phase as the post-war generation searched for new patterns of life. The churches' influence on society and citizens diminished and political and societal criticism grew as well as a search for freedom of individualist expression. The so-called 'students' revolt' and 'sexual revolution' were central expressions of this period.

Accordingly, 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. There, in particular, the spread of mainstream Sufism was only minimally related to the immigration of labourers in the 1960s.³⁴ The presence of transethnic Sufism in Germany must be identified and investigated as a phenomenon within the scope of the 're-sacralization'³⁵ of Western society, which began in the early 1970s.

In Muslim countries, the institutionalization of Islam and folk tradition was deeply influenced by Sufism. In contrast to Germany it remains a rather separate

phenomenon from orthodox Sunni Islam, even today. Sufi orders in which Germans play a significant role, have minimal contact with immigrant mosques. This can be explained by the fact that some of these groups do not require their members to become Muslim, for a time at least.³⁶ It is characteristic of the German reception and spread of Sufism that none of its representatives and publicists committed themselves exclusively and strictly to Islam until the 1980s.³⁷ Instead, the universality of Sufism's 'spiritual psychology' was stressed and mixed creatively with other doctrines. As experienced by 'seekers' between the 1960s and 1980s, Sufism had a close connection with psychotherapeutic techniques. During my survey on Sufism in Germany, Sufi followers told me that they had met their first shaiyks because of their interest in therapeutic and esoteric courses on physical and/or spiritual self-healing. Some of the younger members of different orders told me also that, even today, they came to the movement as a result of their voyage through the spiritual therapeutic market.

The dhikr ceremonies offered by the early shaiyks are reported to have worked well with the New-Age goal of 'self-transformation' via the discovery of the true self. Here it is worth mentioning Stanislav Grof, the co-founder of transpersonal psychology, who in 1978 developed the 'Holotrope Therapy' during which a trance is initiated through hyperventilation in an attempt to penetrate deeper spheres of consciousness and areas beyond individual identity. A cure is supposed to take place spontaneously as the body is reunited with these deep realms of consciousness.³⁸ Religion and spirituality are viewed as innate features of the body which need only to be activated. Today, some German Sufi followers from different orders combine their Sufi experiences with the East Asian healing methods of shiatsu and reiki or link Sufi doctrines with the therapeutic method of *Familienaufstellung* (family constellations) developed by Hellinger³⁹ and others.

Various individuals – some of whom were later to become khalifas and shaiyks of different orders – provided self-awareness seminars in the 1970s and 1980s based on humanist and transpersonal psychology combined with dhikr-exercises. Muhammad Salah Id, who later played a central role in the foundation of the German Burhaniyya Order, also integrated a (shortened) Sufi-khulwat⁴⁰ into his classes. Some of the early centres of these activities were the large, metropolitan cities of Berlin, Hamburg and Munich.

Having provided seminars combining Sufism and psychotherapy for several years, Abdul Halis Dornbrach,⁴¹ Muhammad Salah Id⁴² and Hussein Abdul Fattah,⁴³ three central figures of the emerging German Sufi scene, founded the 'Institute for Sufi Research' in Berlin in 1979.⁴⁴ The aim of the newly founded institute was

to make the exterior doctrine accessible to a wider audience ... [T]he condition of the Sufi's path is that the seeker, as the Sufis say, becomes involved in the 'Greater Holy War', the war against one's own self. The Institute for Sufi research was founded to clarify these preconditions. ... If He, Allah subhana taala, has mercy on this institute, it will soon own a 'Sufi healing

school' in a rural location which could assume the responsibility for offering a little help to the vast number of spiritually sick people in the cities through genuine advice for life found in the last revelation.⁴⁵

This quotation is derived from a typescript of interviews with 11 shaikhs from Germany, England, Turkey, Iraq and other countries compiled on behalf of the institute. The typescript was intended to act as a kind of advertising brochure to convey to readers that it is possible to get in touch with any of the shaikhs through the institute.⁴⁶ It was never published in this form, but it is of interest in terms of understanding the self-image of Sufis in Germany at that time. They offered Sufism as a market of shaikhs who worked with different techniques, but were potential leaders on the – generally – same path to spirituality. The authors presented the Western Sufis as an international network of individual 'Eastern' shaikhs and their Western muridun (disciples) who combined the wisdom of Sufism with new esoteric and scientific knowledge from thinkers like Fritjof Schuon, George Ivanovich Gurdjieff and René Guénon.⁴⁷ As with the cultural and institutional background of the 'Eastern' shaikhs, Islam appeared to be unimportant and went largely unmentioned. Of greater importance was the scientific authority these new Sufi practices were awarded by psychologists, philosophers and others. For example, in the introduction to the typescript, the authors also recommended Oscar Ichazo, who worked in the field of transpersonal psychology in connection with Sufism.⁴⁸

One year later, the Sufi institute found a rural location in the Lüneburger Heide in Lower Saxony where it was able to open a 'Sufi healing school' known as House Schnede. Salah Id and Makowski rented a house,⁴⁹ lived there with a large community, and used it as a convention centre for spiritual seminars. Abdul Halis and other well-known Sufis such as Reshad Field,⁵⁰ the Turkish Halveti shaikh Muzzaffer Ozak⁵¹ and Shaikh Nazim⁵² offered dhikr, lectures and workshops. Yoga workshops, classes in humanist psychology, esoteric seminars on energy flow and similar classes were also provided.⁵³

A few months after the house was opened in 1981, Salah Id died in a car crash. Despite the loss of such a central figure like Id, little changed in the workshops offered at the house. Indeed, this event may well have reinforced the open-minded nature of the courses offered in the house, because Id was the only Muslim of origin among the leaders in Schnede. In the following years, the convention centre concept proved insufficient to cover the costs of the house and finance became an increasing problem. The community lived in House Schnede until the mid-1980s, and then moved to a small neighbouring town where they lived and worked.

Up to the mid-1980s, the sympathizers and organizers of House Schnede institutionalized their spiritual and Sufi-like way of life – if at all – in communities of small autonomous groups, which celebrated dhikr together more or less regularly and sometimes recited wird (repeated recitation of short names or characteristics of Allah) while also continuing to study humanist and transpersonal psychology and practice esoteric forms of life support, e.g. I-Ching, Tarot

etc. Their relationship with the shaikhs was more symbolic than actual, thus they did not feel entirely committed in one-way or the other.

The forms of 'seeking' or 'wandering' through the offerings of the spiritual market did not resemble those of a religious community that agreed on a doctrine or tradition. The views were very heterogeneous, the community members did not follow any single shaikh, only a few of them believed in Islam, and the visitors and tenants of House Schnede even included sympathizers of Baghwan.⁵⁴ The targeted group of House Schnede can best be described as 'spiritual individualists', for whom spirituality is supposed to lead to the recognition of something transcendent, extraordinary or even god-like as immanent in the life of the individual.⁵⁵ Miriam, a member of the Burhaniyya, clearly expressed this to be the valid attitude of the order even today when she remarked that she only joined the Burhaniyya because of the wurd and the muraqaba (meditation directed towards the shaikh): "God does not mean anything to me." Sufism was understood less as a religious confession than as a way of experiencing oneself (*Selbsterfahrung*). If religion would need the belief in non human beings, it did not appear to be religion at all, but a new way of experience and relationship – and this is what they were seeking. For that purpose, new methods, including religious methods, were used.

In accordance with Thomas Luckmann's theory,⁵⁶ this development can be described as a double privatization of religion in a secular Christian society. First, the acquisition of Sufi practices and ideas was for the most part a personal matter. Hence, the degree of adaptation was up to the individual and was subject to a bare minimum of sanctions based on membership or belonging. Loose and sometimes short-lived networks were established. People broke away from Christian traditions and looked for answers and techniques for achieving self-awareness in diverse and mostly foreign traditions. They were convinced of the universal truth and power of self-healing available in various old and foreign traditions like Sufism. Moreover, religious traditions were mainly used as possibilities for the creation of self-awareness and self-knowledge (*Selbsterkenntnis*) with the aim of reaching a better understanding of one's own biographical and micro-social problems. The ego in its psychological, 'cosmic' and spiritual/energetic structure was the focus of study and tarot cards, horoscopes, the I-Ching and swinging, together with body-focused therapeutic and spiritual methods used for this purpose. It was also the time of the so-called sexual revolution and people were discovering their bodies, emotions and sex beyond marriage and family. Like the prophets, with a unique style of life, the shaikhs also stood for new forms of experience, authority and relationships.

German Sufism in global competition: traditionalizing mysticism as 'authentification'

In the mid-1980s, the German Sufi scene changed dramatically as the cultural aspects of Islam became more important. One of the several possible contributing factors to this change is that the Iranian revolution roused public discourse

on the topic of Islam in West, as well as among the Western Muslim migrant community. The question of what had failed in the modern, secular political development of Iran arose and, in scholarly research, the field of 'Post-colonial Studies' emerged. Sensitivity for the cultural and interest bound perspectives of research became stronger, and in the 1990s the view of religion as a cultural and identifying force changed. Nevertheless, Islam was then, and is still, mostly not well received in the West.

At the same time, the Sufi-oriented groups started to settle themselves as different traditions or schools. The first group, which established itself as a Muslim Sufi Order, was the Haqqaniyya of the Turkish Cypriot Shaikh Nazim. Today this is the biggest Sufi group in Germany with approximately 500 members.

Nazim's early German followers were so-called 'dropouts' from mainstream society. Some of them had travelled in the Near and Far East and later lived together as Sufis in Berlin while others moved to Mecca and Medina for religious studies in 1978, and from there went to Damascus for a while⁵⁷ where Shaikh Nazim lived at that time. When they returned to Germany in the mid-1980s, they started to offer dhikr-groups in the name of the Naqshbandiyya-Haqqaniyya Sufi Order, named after Shaikh Nazim al-Haqqani who was by that time already known in Europe. Hussein Abdul Fattah, an elusive character of the German Sufi scene, offered many courses on Sufism in the name of Nazim, but with a very Western interpretation and made an important contribution to the spread of the Haqqaniyya in Germany. However, from the beginning the inner circle was troubled by having to comply with the rules of what Nazim called the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. These entailed wearing clothes such as jalabas and turbans, growing beards and getting married, to name but a few. Nazim's authority and charisma, as a spiritual leader from the Muslim world, made the reconnection to Islam perfectly natural because to follow him meant to follow Islam. Nazim, to this day, is also accepted by Turkish Muslims in Germany and, when he visits periodically, he speaks in Turkish mosques (in Turkish). The German Sufi centre also keeps contact with some Turkish adherents of Nazim, but they do not attend dhikr meetings of the German group; they prefer visits to the German Khalifa Hassan discreetly. A second transethnic group, which originated from a New Age background is the Mevleviyye, or what has sometimes been called the Halisiyye (the pure) led by the German Abdul Halis Dornbrach (born in 1945). He studied Arabic as teenager somewhere between the ages of 13 and 16, converted to Islam at the age of 20, travelled throughout Turkey for several years and studied in Aleppo, where he lived in a Mevlevi lodge and studied Islamic law. After several turns in his Sufi life, following and teaching different traditions of Sufism, he bought a house near Berlin in 1991 in order to establish a centre of Mevlevi Sufism. Until that time he had taught a mixture of several Sufi traditions, but then focused on the way of the Mevleviyye. He designed the centre in the style of a Turkish Sufi lodge (tekke) and offers home study courses via the Internet, weekly courses at the tekke on the Mevlevi way, and is looking for students who want to be part of the 1,001-day Mevlevi training.⁵⁸ He emphasizes the important rule of adab, the correct behaviour of a Sufi.

Since there is quite a lot of competition between Sufi Orders in the West, as a German shaikh, it is not easy to be acknowledged as authentic. There are various conditions for obtaining acknowledgement as an authentic, genuine Sufi leader: the *ijaza*, the certificate of a learned shaikh, and/or a revelation and calling by Muhammad through the medium of dream are possible prerequisites to initiation as a shaikh. In a non-Muslim environment, being a native Muslim embodying a Muslim-Sufi life helps to gain the acceptance of followers. Clearly, a crucial condition for getting acknowledgement as a genuine religious leader is the ability to get a large number of devotees.

Indeed, Abdul Halis has been a central figure from the very beginning in spreading and organizing Sufism in Germany and has had many students, but he has had little success in gathering many followers or murids (disciples) as a shaikh. Today he still seems to have good connections to Sufis in Turkey, enough money to have bought property and built the German *tekke*, and the practical knowledge and ability of an educated Muslim and Sufi shaikh. Nevertheless, he only has a few students, mostly German women – although it is safe to say that Mevlevi Sufism is the most widely known form of Sufism in Germany as well as in the West in general.

The question of authenticity is often a controversial subject among Sufis (and sometimes also of non-Sufis) and Halis's charisma, dreams and knowledge seem not to be enough proof of his authenticity. He has even tried to add some formal confirmation by seeking legal recognition as a religious order in Germany. He has also had dream visions of bringing the dead body of his Syrian Mevlevi murshid (teacher) Farhad Dede (1882–1977) to the German *tekke* in order to establish the centre as a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. Thus, to attract followers it seems to be better to have a dead, authentic shaikh present than to be merely a converted German shaikh.

There are some further small transethnic Sufi groups or orders in Germany and individuals who offer courses on Sufi music and healing etc. It is not possible to mention all of them here,⁵⁹ but I would like to mention a third important transethnic Sufi group in Germany, namely the Burhani Order.⁶⁰

As mentioned earlier, the early Sufi followers and New Age adepts of House Schnede formed the basis for the later established Burhaniyya branch in Germany. In the late 1980s, Shaikh Nazim designated his khalifa for Germany. Many of the early members and visitors of Schnede House also followed Nazim and his community grew and opened new centres. The open market for Sufism was about to close its doors at this point, since Muzaffer Ozak, Salah Id and his murshid shaikh Osman in Karthoum (and some other important figures from the scene) had died and the old heroes, such as Reshad Feild and Abdul Fattah, had to withdraw after some time due to personal problems. Thus, the followers had to decide if they themselves wanted to leave or to stay, and which shaikh they wanted to follow.

These events were occurring at the same time as a conflict between the early Sufis in Germany emerged about the post of the khalifa of the Burhaniyya, after some of the German groups had begun to claim their independence as Burha-

nis.⁶¹ One of the group leaders presented himself as the independent leader of the tariqa Burhaniyya. This did not meet with the approval of some German Sufis nor with that of Shaikh Ibrahim, the son and khalifa of Osman. Although Ibrahim did not speak German or English, he started to increase his presence in Germany.

Ibrahim removed the self-proclaimed khalifa from his tariqa and the rest of the group followed him establishing a Sudanese based branch of the order. They rented a room for a zawiya and organized regular meetings for dhikr. In 1991, this group and others set up the Burhaniyya Foundation to collect money for the purchase of Schnede House, which they finally purchased in 1992. Ibrahim soon reformed the autonomous structure into a centralized one. There is currently no khalifa in the German branch, only local leaders for the organization of zawiya and for public relations. These leaders have neither spiritual power nor religious authority. All European branches of the Burhaniyya adopted this structure. It appears to be a defence mechanism against new single-handed efforts by local leaders to break from the main tradition.

The changes in the formal organization of the tariqa were accompanied by transformations in ritual and doctrinal action along more openly Islamic lines. The Burhanis began to refer to their dhikr of the assembly only as 'hadra' which means 'presence' or 'attendance' of the shaikh and, therefore, accepted that the way to God is only open through Shaikh Osman's presence.⁶² They promoted a special myth, concerning the origin of their souls, to explain the character of the German branch.⁶³ The German Burhaniyya members now feel like a privileged group in possession of special knowledge and with proximity to the current ruler of cosmic and spiritual reality. One Burhani member proclaimed, 'we are the chosen ones for doomsday'.

Previously, new students almost always converted to Burhani-Sufism before converting to Islam. Although the German Burhanis still see Sufism as the basis of and a more authentic version of Islam, it is now taken for granted that an adept will soon convert to Islam.⁶⁴

Today, the Germans are advised by the Sudanese on questions of Burhaniyya practices and every zawiya (community) includes some Sudanese members for leading the dhikr and singing Osman's qasa'id, songs that he post-mortally revealed to the Sudanese. The Sudanese are their experts on the rituals and they accompany the Germans in singing and dancing the dhikr. They are the 'native Muslims' who create authenticity for the German branch.

Every year, the Europeans have a meeting in Schnede House to celebrate the hauliya meeting, the annual feast for Osman.⁶⁵ Shaikh Ibrahim and other Sudanese join in the feast every year and give classes, to men only, on dhikr and qasa'id.⁶⁶ During the feast, the Sudanese also offer lessons on the shari'a, especially to the women. However, the Germans have a rather different approach in their behaviour and acceptance of Islamic rules. They interpret some of the rules in their own way, for example, the women use nail polish⁶⁷ and do not always wear a headscarf or pray five times a day. The most important change for the Sudanese Sufi order was the insistence by the German members that women

should take part in the dhikr beside the men, although they now accept that the women are not allowed to sing. But in 2003, Ibrahim prohibited women to dance. Thus, even though the Germans are a very important and powerful group of the worldwide Burhani Order, some decisive Sudanese rules seem to prevail.

Declaring that they represent the best of Islamic traditions, the German Sufis attempt to spread Burhani-Sufism. In order to do this they have begun recording the songs by and about Osman, and have invested in revitalizing the infrastructure of Khartoum. While they were previously very reticent when it came to the publication of texts from Shaikh Osman, they are now translating the qasa'id for their German student community. They say that they are afraid of being misunderstood because the verses contain special comments on the Qur'an, which differ from the classical commentaries. The verses include, for example, the idea that the Burhanis may expect special gifts in the hereafter.⁶⁸ Thus far, they have publicized Burhani-Sufism through the music of their Sudanese 'mystic troubadours' and this seems to reflect their own fascination with Sudanese Sufism.

Conclusion

The parameters, within which the Western and particularly European reception and adoption of Sufism proceed, are multifaceted. First of all, the interest in Sufism emerged in times of an increasing development of secularism. This was the time when 'mysticism' entered a process of separation from 'church discipline' (*Kirchenzucht*) and began to stand for 'original religious experience'. In the meantime, Schleiermacher was one of the German masterminds arguing for the existence of a universal religious experience.⁶⁹ The reception of Sufism in Germany as mysticism has to be understood in this context.

The Perennials as well as the theologians and most German Orientalists searched for and found a new source of universal truth in Sufism, which seemed to be absent in the increasingly secularized Western Christian societies. That is why Richard King is correct when he claims that the separation of politics in the notion of mysticism is a central subject of Western Orientalism.⁷⁰

The second phase of Sufism, in the context of the New Age, was more spirituality and therapy oriented, which means that the aspect of 'self-experience' within Sufi rituals was emphasized. This corresponded with the search for freedom and new, sometimes vague, orientations of the times. In this phase, Sufism was perceived as independent from Islam and, accordingly, mixed with other, often South-East Asian, forms of spiritual experience.

The third phase is marked by the formation of German branches of Sufis, such as the Naqshibandiyya, the Burhaniyya and the Mevleviyye. This I have called a turn to 'authenticity', because these Western Sufi groups stopped dealing with hybridization or alteration as previously common in the context of the New Age. On the contrary, it seems that the perception of uncertainty and relativity of the global and open plural market of religious and spiritual forms led to a more fundamental search for shaping 'authentic' forms of Sufi life.⁷¹ Authenticity here means having a mixed form of Sufi practice: original traditions from the home-

land, Islam as the real context of Sufism, and a real Sufi-shaikh – in general it seems that the new German Sufis were trying to imitate the Sufism of the shaikhs' homeland tradition.

Today, Sufism is received in Germany in all three forms in coexistence. We find a Sufi healing market, a Sufi-music market, a large variety of books on Sufi-mysticism and poems, which can be found among offerings of the New Age market. Then, there exists an understanding of Sufism much like that of the Perennialists: of one manifestation of an universal mysticism, which is the source of each current religion and is therefore more general, authentic and true than the 'orthodox' religion of Islam can be – as we have also seen in early German reception of Sufism according to the writings of Schleiermacher. This perennialist idea exists among the followers of the described groups⁷² as well as among the customers of the Sufi-market. Finally, there are Sufi orders that try to be 'genuine' or 'authentic' Sufic, Islamic and culturally correct, according to their shaikhs' homeland tradition. The result is a colourful carpet of the most diverse forms of Sufism, sometimes adopted by the same people – even if the understanding of Sufism and of the different ways do not always seem to fit together.

Notes

- 1 See Georgius de Hungaria (c.1422–1502) who, while he was in captivity in Ottoman lands, studied Islam and especially Sufi orders and wrote the *Tractatus de Moribus, Conditionibus et Nequicia Turcorum*, published in 1481 (ed. R. Köhlau (1993), Cologne: Böhlau).
- 2 See Rana Kabbani (1986) and, for example, Barbara Hodgson (2006).
- 3 Ludwig Ammann (1989: 4).
- 4 J.-W. Goethe (1994); see also Katharina Mommsen (2001); on other German poets from the nineteenth century see Andrea Pollaschegg (2005).
- 5 Ludwig Ammann (1989: 1–3) and Pollaschegg (2005).
- 6 *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie für die gebildeten Stände*, Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 7th edn, Vol. 8, 1827, 97f.:

Orientalisch, morgenländisch. In der Geschichte der Cultur verknüpft man mit dem Worte Orient den Begriff von einer geheimnisvollen Größe, Majestät und Ruhe, welche über dem Grabe der Urzeit schweben, aus welcher mit dem Priestertume und der Patriarchenwürde die geistige Entwicklung des Menschen mitten unter den erhabensten und furchtbarsten Erscheinungen des Völkerlebens hervorging. Zugleich verbindet sich mit jenem Worte die Vorstellung von dem Einfachen und Wunderbaren im Beharrlichen und Steten, welche ebenso den Charakter der physischen wie der moralischen Welt im Osten bezeichnet.

(quoted by Ludwig Ammann, 1989: 37–38)

- 7 This follows the general agreement that identity is established through self-construction and difference; see Niklas Luhmann (1993). Exotic and strange phenomena are predestined to become the model for shaping new self-identities.
- 8 See Rüdiger Sesemann (2004), Elisabeth Sirriyeh (1999), Carl W. Ernst (1997: 10–18).
- 9 See Carl W. Ernst (1997: 8–14).
- 10 Richard Hartmann (1916). In this article he also refers to Goldziher and Nicholson and others who thought in the same way.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Max Weber (1972: 375–376).

- 13 Ernest Gellner (1981: 127).
- 14 Compare Hans G. Kippenberg (1997).
- 15 Friedrich Schleiermacher (1799: 248).
- 16 Hans G. Kippenberg (1997: 69).
- 17 It starts in the Catholic Kirchen-Lexikon (1893) and the Protestant Real-Encyclopädie (1862). In older German encyclopaedias on religion neither foreign religions nor the notion of mysticism were positively connoted.
- 18 Real-Encyclopädie (1862): 'Mystik im religiösen Sinne ist demnach die Religion, sofern sie ein Leben des Menschen in dem Geheimnis d. i. in Gott und Gottes in uns ist. Denn Gott ist das Geheimnis'.
- 19 Tholuck published this first long edition under the title: *Sufismus sine Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica* (1821).
- 20 In its preface he wrote: 'dass diese Auszüge die Frucht tragen mögen, träge flache Geister zu erregen und zu etwas Höherem hinzuführen als Hausmoral und Brauchverstand'.
- 21 He criticizes the historical sources collected and translated by Silvester de Sacy (Tholuck 1825: 6).
- 22 Ibid., p. 36: 'daß der Sufismus das Erzeugnis einer innerlichen religiösen Erregung der Muhammedaner ist, welche schon bald nach der Einführung des Muhammedanismus die tieferen Gemüther ergriff, und nachher eine bestimmte Gestaltung gewann'.
- 23 Ibid., p. 39.
- 24 Ibid., p. 40.
- 25 Ibid., p. 43.
- 26 Ibid., p. 47: 'Das Seyn Gottes in der Welt, sein Einwohnen in der menschlichen Seele wird dort weniger als im Alten und Neuen Testament gelehrt'.
- 27 Evelyn Underhill (1928). For further details about earlier history of the European discovery of mysticism see Louis Bouyer (1974), Gebhardt Löhr (2005).
- 29 According to Muhammad Iqbal, she criticizes an excessive veneration of shaikhs as saints and abuses of the shaikh's power, like the selling of healing amulets as 'Pirism' (Schimmel 1995: 43 and 338).
- 30 Mark Sedgwick (2003).
- 31 The notion stems from Agostino Steuco, *De perenni philosophia* (1540); he was a Christian Platonist.
- 32 Mark Sedgwick (2003: 24).
- 33 The following chapter is based in parts on Gritt Klinkhammer (2005).
- 34 There is a significant difference in regard to the sources of the development of Sufism between European countries open to immigrants based on the different situations in the countries of origin of the Muslim immigrants. Given that 80 per cent of the immigrants in Germany are from Turkey, Sufi tradition was not very widely represented or at least not publicly visible. The ban on Sufi Orders in Turkey in 1925 strongly limited the public practice of Sufism and led to new forms of Sufism such as the tradition of the Suleymancis.
- 35 Daniel Bell (1980).
- 36 Mosques were even more open for dhikr groups and visits by different shaikhs in the 1960s and 1970s than today, because most of the mosques are now bound to a particular Islamic association.
- 37 This observation is based on various conversations with members of the Burhaniyya and disciples of Shaikh Nazim and Abdul Halis. See Chapter 3.
- 38 Stanislav Grof (1987).
- 39 Regarding their reception of Hellinger, they remark that 'psychologists know how it functions, but we know why it functions'. What is meant is the Sufi's belief in the creation or existence of souls prior to the beginning of the world. The 'healing of the soul' can only occur when the soul finds its true position in the world.
- 40 Khulwat is a 40-day retreat during which one fasts and recites names of Allah and the Qur'an.

- 41 Abdul Halis Dornbrach is of German decent and currently shaiikh of the Mevlevi branch with his own Tekke (zawiya) in Trebbus. See Chapter 3.
- 42 Muhammad Salah Id (or in German transcription 'Eid') was an Egyptian (1945–1981) who studied politics in Germany and did his doctorate at the University of Heidelberg. He was involved in the Christian–Jewish–Islamic dialogue of the Evangelic Academy of Berlin (Id 1981).
- 43 Abdul Fattah is the author of many books on Sufism and goes by different names: Steff Steffan, Abdul Fattah, Stefan Makowski. He lives in Austria and holds seminars on meditation.
- 44 A publishing house that produced books on Sufism and related topics was established at the same time. For further information on the central role of publishing houses in the development of the New Age phenomenon, see, for example, Bochsinger (1995).
- 45 Stefan Makowski (likely date 1979: 24).
- 46 Ibid., p. 24.
- 47 They were inspired by 'perennial philosophy', which supports the idea that there is a 'primal truth' in all religions and a treasure of old esoteric knowledge in traditions like the mythical Corpus Hermeticum; see, for example, Sedgwick (2004).
- 48 His therapeutic school (ARICA institute) was founded in Chile and later moved to the USA and Europe (Munich, London); see, for example, Oscar Ichazo (1976).
- 49 As a result of which the registered association 'Sufi-turuq-community' was founded.
- 50 Author of *The Last Barrier* (London 1976). Reading this book inspired some interviewees to learn more about Sufism.
- 51 He died in 1985 and was well-known in Germany and the USA for his numerous journeys and books (e.g. *The Unveiling Love*, 1984).
- 52 Shaikh of one of the largest orders in the West. See Chapter 3.
- 53 I was allowed to view flyers from this period in Abdullah Halis' 'Sufi-Archive' in Trebbus (near Berlin) which impressively documented this colourful mixture of seminars.
- 54 Western Sanyasins were very interested in Sufi practices as Baghwan encouraged his Western students to meet with masters of Sufism.
- 55 On the etymology of the term 'spirituality' and its connotation in the New-Age context, see Christoph Bochsinger (1995: 377–398 and 477–480).
- 56 Thomas Luckmann (1967).
- 57 For details, see Ludwig Schießmann (2003).
- 58 See www.mevlevi.de.
- 59 See for an overview Markus Dreßler and Ludwig Schießmann (2006).
- 60 For a more detailed analysis of the development of the Burhaniyya see Gritt Klinkhammer (2005).
- 61 In Britain, the organizing process of the Nazim group seemed to develop in the same way, so that Hisham Kabbani, the son-in-law and successor of Nazim, declared his unique position as the Nazim khalifa. But some of the followers in London seem to have ignored his statement. See Jorgen Nielsen *et al.* (2006).
- 62 About the changes of the ritual in Egypt one year after the death of Osman, see Earle Waugh (1991).
- 63 See Klinkhammer (2005: 278).
- 64 During my field visit to the hauliya (the annual feast of the shaiikh's birthday), in 2002, they requested that I take the bayat (the vow of fidelity to the shaiikh), though they did not ask me to first convert to Islam.
- 65 The feast is celebrated in Khartoum in spring and repeated in Germany in summer.
- 66 Shaikh Ibrahim died in 2003. His son Muhamed became his successor. This was proclaimed by Ibrahim some years before his death. It remains to be seen whether any changes will occur. On Muhamed see Klinkhammer (2005: 280f.).
- 67 This is discussed as a problem of the validity of wudu (the ritual washing for the five-time-prayer).

- 68 I had the opportunity to attend a lecture at the hauliya in 2002 where they presented and discussed a translation of qasida five (one of the 95 poems, respectively songs, which are said to have been written by the first Burhaniyya shaikh Osman).
- 69 For the Anglo-Saxon hemisphere, Eric Leigh Schmidt (2003) has shown a similar development.
- 70 Richard King (1999: 10f.).
- 71 On 'Authenticity and Globalization' see Stauth (1999).
- 72 Especially the followers of the German Alawiyya of shaikh Bashir Dultz, do not need to convert to Islam.

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Sufis in Western Society

Global networking and locality

**Edited by Ron Geaves,
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