Chapter-4
Relevance of Peace and Universal Brotherhood in the contemporary world
Sufism is described as a teaching of ethical and spiritual ideals, which has been historically embodied in lineages of teachers who held prominent positions in Muslim societies.¹ It was formerly understood in Orientalist scholarship as a spiritual movement that reached its apogee during the medieval period of Islamic history, with its crowning achievement being the brilliant literary productions in Arabic and Persian that became the classics of the Sufi tradition. This “golden age” theory of Sufism, shared equally by modern reformist Muslim critics of Sufism, entailed as its corollary the inevitable degeneration of Sufism in more recent times. The study of Sufism also tended to privilege the “classical” sources in Arabic and Persian over the “folk” manifestations of Sufism in Turkish, Urdu, and other languages (the word “classic” has been imported into Persian and Urdu as klasik, while the Arabic word turath, or “heritage,” serves the same purpose). It has only recently become possible to begin to locate this conceit in the historical conditions of modernity, in which academic discourse on Sufism and Islam forms part of a process involving European colonialism, the rise of Salafi reformism and fundamentalism, and secular modernism.²

In a recent study, Bruce Lawrence and C W Ernst have challenged the “golden age and decline” historiography of Sufism, which seems to be the result of a deep

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¹ For a general survey, see Guide to Sufism; Carl W. Ernst (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997).
collusion between Orientalists and fundamentalists. In particular, they have pointed to the realization among Sufi masters of the Chishti order that the ongoing challenges of each age must be met anew with spiritual resources and responses suitable to current needs. The following anecdote concerning the Chishti master Muhammad Chishti in the late sixteenth century (which today would be considered the period of decline) illustrates this problem, with reference to the central Chishti spiritual practice of listening to music (sama'):

It is related of the revered Shaykh Hasan Muhammad that a man of Lahore came and said, "In this time there is no one worthy of listening to music (sama')." [The master] replied, "If there were no one worthy of listening to music, the world would be destroyed." The man said, "In times past, there were men like Shaykh Nasir ad-Din [Chiragh-i Dihli], the Emperor of the Shaykhs [Nizam ad-Din Awliya'], and the revered [Farid ad-Din] Ganj-i Shakkar. Now there is no one like them." [The master] answered, "In their time, men said the very same thing".  

Modern Sufi groups have not, however, been passive observers of their fate. Like everyone else, they too have been caught up in the effects of what we now call globalization, the increasingly complex linkage of networks of every kind around the world. Sufis too are affected by the commodification of religion in global capitalism, with its inevitable technological mediation of culture, communication,
and personal relations. Sufi groups have likewise participated in ecumenical consideration of inter-religious relations, though the necessarily local situation of each group dictates a wide variety of responses to religious pluralism. Sufis have actively contested the reformist claim to exclusive ownership of the symbolic capital of Islam. They have also refuted Orientalist scholarship that has typically viewed Sufism as a foreign doctrine grafted onto Islam.

Scholarly study of religious movements like Sufism should have a descriptive character, rather than having the academy take it upon itself to issue prescriptive decrees on what is or is not an acceptable form of religion for other people. This being said the interaction of global processes with local contexts, focusing on Sufism in both its traditional homelands and in its new Euro-American homes show that all of the recent phenomena that have impacted Sufi groups are part of the larger process of globalization, that does not erase by any means the significance of locality. Indeed, the interaction between the local and the global always means that there are differential factors and outcomes, so that we cannot with any confidence predict uniformity among the Sufi responses to modernity.


Sufism and globalization.

For one of the most important aspects of globalization in relation to Sufism, we must look first, not to the traditional homelands of Sufism in the countries of Asia and Africa, but to the representation of Sufism in Europe and America; this example will help clarify how similar processes are also functioning in traditionally Muslim countries.¹ The most striking recent representation of Sufism has been the spectacular popularity of the poetry of the great Persian Sufi Jalaluddin Rumi, whose verse in modern English translation is said to be the best selling poetry in America. Through the efforts of gifted American poets like Robert Bly and Coleman Barks (followed by a host of less talented imitators), these new versions of Rumi have attracted the attention of some of the luminaries of American culture, ranging from journalist Bill Moyers to popular entertainers and actors such as Debra Winger, Martin Sheen, and even Madonna.² New Age guru Deepak Chopra has gotten into the act with his own ‘translation’ of Rumi (with the aid of an Iranian associate) as well as a popular CD recording. What is remarkable about these poems is the way that they present Rumi as an ecumenical figure who transcends any religion; both Islamic origins and Persian poetic conventions are downplayed, and the erotic and humorous aspects of his verse are emphasized.³ Another distinctive feature of Rumi interpretation is the view that he and his teacher Shams-i Tabriz had a homosexual relationship. ¹

¹ For a recent collection of studies, see *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2006).
² For a critique of inferior translations of Rumi’s poetry, see Ibrahim Gamard’s website

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A parallel phenomenon is the widespread production and distribution of sound recordings of Sufi music, in a variety of formats ranging from sober and academic ethnomusicology to exuberant world-music recordings and fusion dance hits. The wildly popular crossover success of Pakistani vocalist Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, who has appeared on Hollywood film scores, is a powerful testimony to the broad appeal of this particular tradition of Sufi music, based on the qawwali performance associated mainly with the Chishti order. Pakistani-American rock group Junoon is likewise determined to make the Punjabi lyrics of Sufi poet Bullhe Shah the basis for a message of liberation that can appeal to youth worldwide. Similar tendencies can be seen in Senegal, where the well-established Mouride Sufi brotherhood has had a powerful impact on music and popular culture over the past century. The influence of this Sufi tradition appears in musicians like Youssou N'Dour, who has an enormous following in Europe, particularly France. Devotional performance of the Arabic and Wolof poems of Mouride founder Ahmadu Bamba is featured on fusion recordings made in Canada by Musa Dieng Kala.

Both the print and audio dissemination of cultural products associated with Sufism illustrate a process that has been taking place in Muslim societies for at
least a century and a half, which consists of the use of new technologies to publicize the previously esoteric teachings of Sufism. The introduction of print and lithography technology made possible the distribution of Sufi teachings on a scale far beyond what manuscript production could attain. As has been noted in the case of Ibn `Arabi's Arabic works, when they first emerged into print in the late 19th century, suddenly a work that had been represented by at most a hundred manuscripts (and those difficult of access) was easily available at a corner bookstore in a thousand copies. Evidence is still far from complete, but indications are that in the principal locations for the introduction of printing technology on a mass basis in the 19th century (Cairo, Istanbul, Tehran, and Delhi), the main patrons of publication, aside from governments, were Sufi orders. Another striking instance of the newly specialized situation of Sufism is the way Sufi leaders could focus on marketing to their disciples through the publication of Sufi periodicals, a topic that is only beginning to be explored, but which is well attested in the Ottoman regions, in Egypt, and in South Asia. To this one can add lithographic printing (both color and black and white) for the mass production of images of Sufi saints, whether imaginary portraits or photographs of living masters. All this publicization of Sufism occurred at precisely the time when Sufism was becoming an abstract subject, separated from Islam in Orientalist writings, and condemned by reformists as a non Islamic innovation. The dissemination of Sufi books and recordings in Europe and America is a more elaborate version of what was happening in Muslim countries, though for a

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1 See Guide to Sufism, chapter 7, and Sufi Martyrs of Love, chapters 6 and 7, for further discussion of Sufism in print.
different kind of audience. While in Muslim countries Sufi publications functioned as apologetics, to keep in touch with distant followers, and as acts of piety, Sufi material in Europe and America has joined the shelf of New Age teachings, in a veritable marketplace of spirituality.

Another recent area of publicizing Sufism has occurred in relation to Sufi shrines and rituals, which governments increasingly view as sources of tourist revenue. The revival of the whirling dervish dance in Turkey in 1954 was permitted only on condition that it be a purely aesthetic and cultural performance rather than a religious event. Visitors to Turkey today are greeted by innumerable cassettes, posters, and kitsch statuettes relating to Mevlana and the dervishes, with the annual festival of Rumi’s death anniversary celebrated by the secular calendar on Dec. 17 in Konya (held in a gymnasium rather than a Sufi lodge) as a major tourist draw. Music hall performances of the Whirling Dervishes in Turkey and in tours overseas are arranged by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, frequently in combination with concerts of classical Ottoman music. Yet the reception accorded the Whirling Dervishes is frequently at least as spiritual as it is aesthetic. Uzbekistan, having recently rediscovered its Islamic past after decades of official Soviet atheism, has taken to promoting pious pilgrimage to sites like the tomb of Baha’u’ddin Naqshband in Bukhara, as seen in a recent film produced by the Foreign Trade Association of Bukhara.¹

This is a significant process that has all but escaped noticed in many Muslim countries, and it has certainly gone over the heads of Euro-American journalists (as W. C. Smith trenchantly observed, it used to be that Muslims believed in God, but now they believe in Islam). A striking instance is the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which Islam is defined as ideology (using the Persian neologism idiuluzhi, a transliteration of the French idéologie). If this is not a radical transformation of the notion of Islam, it is hard to imagine what would be. But perhaps the most spectacular example comes from Pakistan, which since its founding in 1947 has struggled to define itself as an Islamic state. One of the most contentious issues among the many sectarian disputes that have troubled the state has been the status of the Ahmadi sect. This group has tested the boundaries of orthodoxy because of claims that the nineteenth-century founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, could have been a prophet after Muhammad (many Muslims regard the prophethood of Muhammad as the final revelation, so that any claimant to prophecy is typically looked upon with great suspicion). In 1974, the government of President Z. A. Bhutto passed a law that declared Ahmadis (also called Qadianis) to be non-Muslims. Subsequent challenges to this law, on the basis of fundamental rights guaranteed by Pakistan’s constitution, succeeded in calling this law into question.

A major reversal of religious rights in Pakistan took place, however, in a 1993 decision that perhaps for the first time actually spelled out a detailed governmental definition of Islam. The presiding judge declared that the symbols
and rites of Islam (such as the profession of faith, and buildings called mosques) were the equivalent of intellectual property that could be copyrighted by the rightful owners, although he never spelled out just how such claims of ownership could be established. Therefore anyone who improperly recited the profession of faith, or called their place of worship a mosque, was in effect using a copyrighted logo without permission, and was liable to legal penalties. The implications of this decision are breathtaking. Not only is a religion being defined as a commodity or piece of property, which the judge actually compared to Coca-Cola, but also the courts -- not religious communities -- are entitled to decide what is essential to any religion. Moreover, in this decision the limits of Islam are being characterized in relation to a sectarian group. Current Pakistani passports now require professed Muslim citizens to sign a declaration that they adhere to the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad, i.e., that they are not Ahmadi. Such an outcome (reminiscent of oaths of orthodox interpretation of Holy Communion during the Protestant Reformation) can only be imagined as a result of very recent local history, especially when religion is reduced to the status of a brand name. It recalls the pontification of the Egyptian parliament in the 1980s on the question of whether the Sufi writings of Ibn 'Arabi should be considered as contrary to Islam;

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this is another example of how the modern state defines religion, in this case banning the works of the Andalusian mystic as un-Islamic. ¹

The production of items like books and recordings is by no means the only form of technological change that has affected Sufism. While television remains under government control in Middle Eastern countries, and film has had only occasional use for purposes connected with Sufism, the Internet boasts a robust Sufi presence, with dozens if not hundreds of web sites representing Sufi traditions from all over the world.² The apparent paradox of publicizing an esoteric tradition is nowhere more apparent than on the Internet, where the open secret of mysticism must be reconfigured in terms of what are basically advertising paradigms. There are today a host of Sufi Web sites that proclaim themselves to interested Internet surfers, offering everything from detailed textual materials online to boutiques of unusual products. Some of these are related to traditional Sufi orders, such as the Nimatollahi, Naqshbandi, Rifa‘i, and Chishti orders. Sometimes they appear to prolong and perpetuate the authority of the printed text, as one can see from the extensive devotional and spiritual treatises available online, in English translation, in the elaborate Web sites of the American Naqshbandi order led by Shaikh Hisham Kabbani. This Web site also features extensive polemics directed against fundamentalist forms of Islam, and the name

itself indicates an attempt to appropriate the key symbolic term of the Prophet's moral example (sunnah). Although many of the Sufi Web sites do have some interactive features, such as email addresses, in terms of their religious message they tend to be largely informational with a proselytizing touch.

In contrast, the web sites associated with Hazrat Inayat Khan in North America play much more fully into the Internet sensibility. Pir Vilayat Khan, Sufi Sam, and other representatives of this Sufi tradition have a massive presence that is ramified in a number of parallel but distinct organizations as well as individual Web sites. These sites feature numerous interactive features including discussion groups, travel schedules of leaders, online classes, daily inspirational messages, audio files, and massive collections of links to sites on Sufism and other religions. Discussion groups associated with these sites have free-ranging and sometimes combative debates on topics such as the relationship between Sufism and Islam. This kind of Web Site may truly be said to constitute a "virtual community," which sociologist Emanuel Castells defines as "a self-defined electronic network of interactive communication organized around a shared interest or purpose, although sometimes communication becomes the goal in itself." I shall return to these groups below, in connection with the de-emphasis on Islam found in these popular forms of Sufism.

1 In Indonesia, remarkably, a popular television program on Sufism ("Tasawuf") began appearing in May 2000, featuring interviews of Sufi laypeople plus commentary by academic experts on Sufism; see Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *Journal of Asian Studies* 60 (2001), pp. 701-729, citing p. 720, n. 35.
The variation in the kind of Internet presence maintained by different Sufi groups can be understood in terms of some of the fundamental characteristics of modern communications media and technology. As Castells points out, "in a society organized around mass media, the existence of messages that are outside the media is restricted to interpersonal networks, thus disappearing from the collective mind."\(^1\) This new situation constitutes a challenge for groups that were traditionally defined by granting access to esoteric teachings reserved for a spiritual elite. And in another sign of Sufi presence on the Internet, one can now take advantage of several Sufi blogs, including one maintained by an academic specialist on Sufism, Prof. Alan Godlas.

Whatever may be the social realities of those individuals and groups who profess the Sufi ideal, Sufism as an academic concept is undeniably a child of the Enlightenment, one more in the large series of ideological and religious "isms" given nominal existence by European encyclopedists. How have the actual participants in Sufi traditions responded to this type of scholarly categorization? One trend has been the wholesale rejection of the Enlightenment and modernity among circles of Sufi-influenced thinkers who advocate the notion of a Perennial Philosophy, or Tradition. These authors include Huston Smith, Sayyed Hossein Nasr, René Guenon, and Frithjof Schuon.\(^2\) The origins of this philosophy may be traced to the Traditionalist position developed by a number of ultramontane

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2 Ibid., 1:336
French Catholic thinkers of the nineteenth century, and it elevated tradition (particularly the Catholic Church) to a position of divine and absolute authority. What is especially relevant here is that, despite their theoretical respect for Catholicism, most of the adherents of the Perennial Philosophy were attracted to Islam. Disenchantment with the excesses of the European Enlightenment and modernism (particularly colonialism, racism, scientism, nationalism, and secularism) would seem to be the primary reason for this attraction. Against this promethean enterprise the Perennialists held out the more-than-human authority of primordial revelation, divine gnosis adapted providentially to different circumstances in the form of religions, and a devolutionistic view of history that sees modernity as a debased and demonic revolt against reality. With these premises in mind, one can see how Islam as a sacred tradition, and Sufi metaphysics as its exposition, would naturally occupy the central position. The Islamic theological emphasis on unity, the historiographic concept of Islam as final revelation in a sequence of prophetic dispensations, and the oppositional position of Islamic countries as the largest bloc undergoing European colonization, all make Islam a natural standpoint for Traditionalists seeking an authentic affiliation. The Traditionalist perspective is now shared principally by a small but influential number of mostly Muslim intellectuals in Europe and America, but increasingly also in other countries such as Pakistan and Malaysia.

There are other manifestations of Sufi-influenced criticism of the Enlightenment that are harder to classify. One is the Murabitun movement led by 'Abd al-Qadir...
al-Murabit (formerly known as Ian Dallas, author of a popular Sufi-style autobiographical novel, The Book of Strangers).\textsuperscript{1} In part a development of the Shadhili-Darqawi Sufi order of North Africa, combined with an insistence on the Maliki school of Islamic law, this movement has been active in Europe, the U.S., and Mexico. Members of this movement reject Hobbesian theories of politics and advocate a return to the principles of the Sokoto caliphate established in West Africa in the eighteenth century by Shaykh ʿUthman dan Fodio.\textsuperscript{2} The former website of this group was, remarkably, esoteric; in late 2002, only authorized members had permission to view the website. Even more individualistic Sufi-inspired critiques of the Enlightenment and globalization can be found in the anarchist manifestoes of Hakim Bey (Peter L. Wilson).\textsuperscript{3} All these examples demonstrate the variety of ways in which Sufi themes are inflected with the accents of globalizing modernity.

In modern Sufi movements a kind of universalistic response, particularly in the cluster of European and American movements associated with Hazrat Inayat Khan. An Indian master associated particularly with the Chishti order, Inayat Khan made the momentous decision to present Sufism to Europeans and Americans as a spiritual path that was not necessarily tied to Islam. More than most of his contemporaries, he grasped the depth of the enormous prejudice

\textsuperscript{1} Ian Dallas, \textit{The Book of Strangers} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).
\textsuperscript{2} Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley, “The Natural State,” available online at http://bewley.virtualave.net/Page2.html.
against Islam in Europe and America, and concluded that his message of spirituality would be far more effective if presented in a different way. With over a hundred centers in America, the Sufi Order in the West (now led by Pir Zia Inayat Khan, grandson of the founder) is probably the largest single Sufi group in the USA, yet it is striking that neither shari'a practice nor distinctively Islamic beliefs play an important role for this movement.¹

True Sufism delves beyond religion, Sherif Baba said in a recent lecture at the University of Arkansas. "What brings people together, what allows the love of God to enter the hearts of people, is morality. . . . All religions are the same," Sherif Baba said. "Sufism isn't religion. It is the love of humanity." Nonetheless, this Rifa'i group places considerable importance on veneration of the Prophet Muhammad and on the 99 beautiful names of God as the sources of ethics, and includes observation of Islamic rituals such as the fast of Ramadan, so its universalism is combined with a recognition of the primacy of Islamic themes. Another example of a Sufi group offering a universalist perspective is Muhammad Zuhri, an Indonesian master who has created a web site offering to contribute prayers on behalf of those suffering from HIV-AIDS, regardless of their religious affiliation. All one has to do is to contact the website, and then at an agreed upon time pray (in whatever manner one wishes) while the Indonesian Sufi master does the same. This is an interesting example of inter-religious engagement in the form of service by Sufis for a virtual cyber-community. While

universalistic tendencies are quite noticeable in some Sufi movements in Europe and America, it should be acknowledged that others insist on shari'a practice, and even include the wearing of clothing from the order's country of origin as a normal feature of membership.¹

An additional dimension of universalism is the relationship between Sufi orders, which is characterized both by rivalry and by collaboration. It has been observed that intra-order schisms and competition between orders were in fact the order of the day in Iran during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.² In this respect one of the new phenomena is a congress of Sufi orders that has taken place in North America annually over the past five years, under the auspices of the International Association for Sufism, a primarily Iranian group headed by Dr. Nahid Angha, a professional psychologist. This Sufi conference has brought together Sufi groups of all different perspective from a variety of different national origins (Iranian, Turkish, Bangladeshi, Senegalese, etc.), with different degrees of emphasis on Islamic shari'a practice and customs. The focus of these conferences is not academic lectures but zikr performance and proclamations of universal brotherhood (and sisterhood, given the prominence of women in these meetings). This kind of eclectic meeting of different Sufi orders is repeated on a

¹ Marcia Hermansen has also pointed to the phenomenon of gradualism in several American Sufi orders, in which complete conversion to Islam is not demanded all at once, but gradual adoption of Islamic practices is encouraged; see Hermansen, “What's American about American Sufi Movements?”, in Westerlund, pp. 33-63, citing p. 43.

smaller scale in other gatherings taking place around America, as for instance at
the tomb of Baba Muhaiyaddeen near Philadelphia, reflecting the dictum that
ultimately all the different paths to God are one. At the same time, it should be
noted that the sponsor organization of the Sufi conference, the International
Association for Sufism, has been engaged in a legal dispute with the Maktab-e
Tariqa-e Oweis-e Shahmaghsoudi over the succession to the authority of the late
Nader Angha, founder of that order; this dispute has ended up focusing on the
issue of intellectual property and ownership of logos and trademarks, a further
example of commodification of religion. Leadership disputes thus remain a
potential source of conflict within and among the Sufi orders.

Another aspect of the ideological adaptation of Sufism to globalization has been a
strong interest in feminism and the historic role of women in the Sufi orders.2
One can point to the prominent positions of women in many Sufi groups in
Europe and America, including positions of leadership with the title of shaykha,
as examples of this trend. The dissemination of the practice of the Mevlevi
turning dance now includes many women performers (sema-zans), who have been
fully trained in the ritual according to traditional forms. American women in this

Kianfar; Nahid Kianfar; International Association of Sufism, Inc., Defendants-Appellees (No. 96-
15002, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, D.C. No. CV-95-02881-DLJ; Appeal
from the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, September 16, 1998).
2 Camille Adams Helminski, “Women & Sufism,” Gnosis #30 (Winter 1994); Lynn Wilcox,
Women and the holy Qur’an: a Sufi perspective (Riverside, CA: M.T.O. Shahmaghsoudi, 1998);
Muhammad ibn al-Husayn Sulami, Early Sufi women: Dhikr an-niswa al-muta’abbidat as-
Sufiyyat, trans. Cornell, Rkia Elaroui (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999); Shemeem Burney
Abbas, The female voice in Sufi ritual: devotional practices of Pakistan and India (Austin:
University of Texas Press, 2002); Karen Ask and Marit Tjomsland, ed., Women and Islamization:
contemporary dimensions of discourse on gender relations (Oxford: Berg, 1998); Carl W. Ernst,
Mevlevi tradition have recreated what is in effect a parallel female initiatic lineage that parallels the standard patriarchal silsila or chain of male teachers that constitutes the backbone of the Sufi order. By delving into the early history of the Mevlevi order, and reconstructing the role of women in the circle of Rumi himself, these modern women Sufis have produced an interesting new interpretation of gender roles in Sufism.\(^1\) At the same time, it should be noticed that women in Turkish Sufi circles have also come into their own in recent years, as we see for example in the Halveti Cerrahi charitable foundation in Istanbul.\(^2\)

There is also a prominent circle of female Sufi teachers in the lineage of Turkish Sufi leader Kenan Rifai (d. 1950). One such prominent teacher, Cemalnur Sargut, has brought groups of up to 40 disciples (mostly well-educated women) from Istanbul to the U.S. to participate in the Rumi Festival in Chapel Hill NC on more than one occasion.\(^3\) It is probably safe to say that the participation of women in Sufi orders is a subject that still remains relatively unexplored, but at the same time the changes in gender roles that are occurring world-wide are bound to have transformative effects on traditional Muslim societies where Sufism still flourishes.


Sufism and the State

One of the most notable aspects of the history of Sufism in the modern period was that of resistance to colonial invasions by foreign (largely European) powers. Prominent examples of this defensive militancy include the Sanusis in Libya until Qadhafi, the Mahdists in the Sudan, Shaykh Shamil in the Caucasus, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri in Algeria, and many others. The elimination of local elites by superior European military power often left the Sufi orders as the only organizations capable of mounting resistance against invaders. While the memory of this kind of Sufi defensive jihad lives on most strongly perhaps in Chechnya and nearby territories, that day is for the most part now gone, as first the colonial, and then the postcolonial state assumed greater and greater power over the lives of their citizens. Part of this process has involved the bureaucratic control of Sufi orders by the centralized government, with special attention to regulation of shrine festivals and the revenue collected by the shrines. Without going into the administrative details of how the regulation of Sufism is handled in countries like Pakistan and Egypt, we can nevertheless point out that this means Sufism is necessarily defined in its social and bureaucratic form by local government policies.¹

Both the colonial and post-colonial state have agreed in regarding Sufism with considerable ambivalence.² On the one hand, Sufism has been increasingly

¹ For the case of Sufism in Pakistan, see especially Katherine Pratt Ewing, Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
viewed from a modernist perspective as containing elements of irrational superstition and disorder that need to be restrained. Idiosyncratic traditions of local practice are also criticized as being foreign to the central canonical texts and teachings of Islam. Class enters into the picture, as middle- and upper-class Muslims increasingly partake of either European secular education or reformist interpretations of Islam; from either perspective, participants at large Sufi festivals appear to be misguided members of an uneducated lower-class. For precisely the same reason, Sufism still functions as a symbolism of resistance against dogmatic authority among small numbers of well-educated Muslims who see in it the possibility of a larger world-view than that proposed either by the 'ulama' or the salafi reformists.

On a case-by-case local basis, one can lay out a program for research on contemporary Sufism and its role in particular countries, from colonial times through the present. There is, for example, the marginalization of Sufi leaders in Afghanistan by the Pakistani and American patrons of the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s.¹ There is also the example of the immensely popular Majbhandari Sufi order in Bangladesh, which has had a major effect particularly on local government in relation to its seat in Chittagong, as well as influencing the national government.² Then there is the at first sight surprising emphasis on spiritual

² Robert Rozehnal, “Faqir or Faker?: The Public Battle Over Sufism in Contemporary Pakistan,” in Visions of Community: The South Asian Muslim Imaginaire, ed. David Gilmartin, Bruce B.
nationalism among the Sabiri Chishtis of Pakistan, who have predicted military supremacy for the Pakistan armed forces if they correctly follow the national destiny as charted out by modern Sufis, particularly Capt. Wahid Bakhsh Sial Rabbani.¹ This emphasis on politics among the Sabiri Chishtis goes back to Sayyid Zauqi Shah (d. 1950), who carried on an extensive correspondence with Muhammad Ali Jinnah. His biography portrays him as the inner or spiritual founder of Pakistan, in parallel with Jinnah, who was the external founder. A different example that has not yet been analyzed is the case of the Sufi-oriented Darul Arqam organization, banned in Malaysia since 1994.² There is much material available on relations between Sufism and the state in Senegal and Mauritania.³ Iran, as usual, is a special case. The transformation of Persia into a Shi‘i nation by the Sufi-based Safavi movement has left a deeply ambiguous situation, in which philosophical mysticism ('irfan) is valued, while institutional Sufism and dervish orders are considered highly questionable.⁴ In a recent example of official enmity towards Sufism, in Feb. 2006, Iranian government forces destroyed a center of the Gonabadi Sufi order in the holy city of Qom, and

⁴ Matthijs van den Bos, Mystic regimes: Sufism and the state in Iran, from the late Qajar era to the Islamic Republic (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
among the hundreds of dervishes arrested, many were reportedly forced to
pronounce public abjurations of Sufism.\(^1\) In India, heavy-handed political
agendas can be detected in attempts to locate Sufism as a potential antidote to
Muslim fundamentalism and communal violence.\(^2\) At the same time, underprivileged dalit ("untouchable") groups in the Indian Punjab have been
seizing on the message of Punjabi Sufis to support a progressive socialist agenda
to combat caste and gender discrimination in India.\(^3\)

The problem of Sufism and politics was the subject of a wide-ranging discussion
in an April 2000 workshop on “Muslim Intellectuals and Modern Challenges”
held at the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World in Leiden. In
response to the proposal of Indonesian scholar Jalaluddin Rakhmat that Sufism
could serve as a source for Islamic liberalism, thinkers like Abdolkarim Sorouch
argued that Sufism inevitably tends toward charismatic authoritarianism; in his
view, the ascendency of Khomeini’s ideas in the current Iranian regime shows the
danger of allowing Sufism to penetrate into politics.\(^4\)

Sufism and the politics of peace

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\(^1\) The Amnesty International report on this incident is available online.
\(^2\) Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, ed., *Contemporary relevance of Sufism* (New Delhi: Indian Council for
Cultural Relations, 1993); Asgharali Engineer, ed., *Sufism and communal harmony* (Jaipur: Printwell, 1991).

\(^3\) This phenomenon is described in "Kitte Mil Ve Mahi (Where the Twain Shall Meet)," a Punjabi
film with English subtitles directed and produced by Ajay Bhardwaj (India Foundation for the
Arts, 2005).

\(^4\) A detailed summary of this conference is available online at
Associations in Indonesia.”
While the historical legacy of Sufism in the early colonial period included many examples of military resistance to foreign invaders, the shackling of Sufi groups by the modern nation state has put an end to militant activities for the most part (although the Sabiri Chishtis in Pakistan provide an interesting example of a Sufi concept of nationalist military might). Islamic militancy, once linked to dervishes and marabouts, is now firmly ensconced in fundamentalist and salafi circles. Any consideration of Sufi involvement in issues of war and peace needs to take into account the wider debates about jihad in Muslim circles over the past two centuries. In many cases, it would be fair to say that Sufi groups have tended toward liberal interpretations of jihad as defensive warfare, rejecting unprovoked military aggression against non-Muslims. There are important exceptions, however, and it would be a mistake to indulge in apologetics here.\(^1\)

Under the circumstances of late postcolonial globalization, then, what roles have Sufis taken in relation to international political conflict and peace activism?

One notable example was Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (d. 1986), the Sri Lankan Sufi master who spent the last years of his life in Philadelphia, and who is buried in a tomb on a Pennsylvania farm. He was disturbed by the interpretation of Islam that underlay the 1978-79 Iranian revolution, and he felt that this climactic event

\(^1\) The similarities between the al-Qa‘ida organization of Usama bin Laden and Sufi-style jihad have been discussed by James Howarth, “Al-Qa‘ida, globalisation and Islam: a response to Faisal Devji” (http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-middle_east_politics/al-qaida_3200.jsp); and Juan Cole, “Al-Qaeda’s Doomsday Document and Psychological Manipulation” (http://www.juancole.com/essays/qaeda.htm).
provided a confrontational and militant image of Islam that distorted what he saw as the universal Islamic emphasis on peace. While not engaging in a direct critique of the political thought of Khomeini and the ideologues of the Iranian revolution, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen wrote a treatise on Islam and peace that was in effect a defense of the peaceful vision of Islam. ¹

Another instance of Sufi involvement in politics was Shaykh Hisham Kabbani’s establishment of the Islamic Supreme Council of America as yet another branch of his multi-pronged Naqshbandi organization. This organization is defined as follows:

The Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA) is a non-profit, non-governmental religious organization dedicated to working for the cause of Islam. ISCA aims to provide practical solutions for American Muslims, based on the traditional Islamic legal rulings of an international advisory board, many of whom are recognized as the highest ranking Islamic scholars in the world. For the first time in America, we have tried to integrate traditional scholarship in resolving contemporary issues affecting the maintenance of Islamic beliefs in a modern, secular society.

Considered in the context of Shaykh Kabbani’s extensive ongoing polemics against Wahhabi and salafi interpretations of Islam, and despite the bland language of its mission statement, the very name of this organization was a deliberate challenge to the authority of Saudi-financed Islamic institutions in

Early on after its formation, in an apparent bid for influence with the American government, ISCA was somehow invited to give a briefing on Islamic issues for the US State Department. This event aroused the ire of Kabbani’s opponents, who charged him with being willing to sell out Muslim interests in order to become the pet of the American government. Attacks made against this group have raised charges reminiscent of suspicions of the Ahmadi movement in Pakistan, whose ecumenical and spiritual understanding of jihad is still widely believed to have been inspired by the British in an effort to undermine Islam and any principled Islamic resistance against British colonial rule. In any case, there continues to be interest in certain U.S. government circles on Sufism as a form of Islam that can be made compatible with American interests.

In many countries of the Middle East, religion and politics since the colonial period have had explosive results, nowhere more vividly displayed than in multi-religious Lebanon during its murderous civil war of the 1980s. While the world is most familiar with the violent activities of groups like the Shi’i Hizbollah and the Christian Phalangists, it is instructive to see that one particular Lebanese Sufi group of African origin, the Ahbash movement, had a program of religious pluralism and peace within the framework of the secular state.

1 For a synthesis of this polemic against Wahhabis, see Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Encyclopedia of Islamic doctrine* (8 vols., Mountainview, CA: As-Sunna Foundation of America, 2nd ed., 1998);
Indeed, by positioning themselves as a non-militant alternative to the Islamists, the Ahbash have emerged as a Sunni middle-class movement that attracts intellectuals, professionals, and businessmen, particularly the traditional Sunni commercial families of the urban centers. Among these social groups, the Ahbash call for religious moderation, political civility, and peace has had a powerful resonance after fifteen years of civil war and bloodshed. Indeed, there has been a convergence between the values, aspirations, and socioeconomic interests of the Sunni middle classes and the contents of Shaykh Habashi’s message—that is, intersectorian accord and political stability; an enlightened Islamic spiritualism within a modern secularist framework; a Lebanese identity wedded to Arab nationalism; and an accommodating attitude toward the Arab regimes, particularly the Syrian government.¹

Of course, this remains one voice among many in a society as diverse as Lebanon. A more recent example of Sufi peace efforts is Sheikh Abdoulaye Dieye of Senegal, a leader of the Mourides. He has been a prominent participant in ecumenical congresses of religious leaders of different faiths, and he is distinctive particularly for seeking out Jewish rabbis for discussions of common religious values, in search of a solution for the Palestine conflict. In a wide-ranging declaration made in California in Feb. 2002, he touched on issues such as ecology, poverty, and the effects of globalization, before making these interesting remarks on the quest for peace:

Many wars have been waged in the name of religions but the real reason for these armed conflicts and other acts of violence are only greed and the desire for power. This is true for Muslims and Islam, for the Jews and Judaism as well as for Christians and Christianity. . . . Let the Jewish and Muslim scholars meet in a part of the globe to ask for peace and reconciliation between these two nations. At the dawn of this millennium when it has been proved that violence merely aggravates the conflict and politicians can only acknowledge their inadequacy, I appeal to Muslim Sufis and Jewish Rabbis to find common grounds for better relations. Let them pray together, so that God Who is Merciful and Gracious, extinguishes with the flow of His Mercy all the areas seething with conflicts in the Middle East and the fire of despair that is consuming the heart of so many women, children and men.

It is noteworthy that Sheikh Dieye feels that it is the Sufi leaders who must step forward to represent Islam in this challenging encounter for the sake of peace. Based on an ecumenical recognition of the legitimacy of Jewish and Christian revelations and religious practice, this Sufi appeal completely bypasses the established 'ulama’ as well as the fundamentalists in an urgent effort to reach the heart of religion for the sake of all humanity.

The question now is not of knowing each other better through exchanges on a cultural level. Because culture, according to the need and requirement can and has
always been used quite effectively either in a positive way for bringing people
together or negatively to drive them apart. It serves as a tool in the hands of those
few who have the power and plan to exploit the emotions and sentiments of
people on religious beliefs, ethnic differences and language issues.

The need is to understand the importance of resolving issues of conflict for the
betterment and development on both sides. To benefit from the cultural
similarities and to give a positive turn to the richness of traditional arts and crafts,
enabling us to promote trade and commerce, for the economic uplift of our
societies and to live as friendly neighbours.

The real question is: do we have the will to do it? Do we really want to modify
outlook, alter attitudes and to change the thinking which is the foundation of all
actions. Ideas create images which eventually become realities. It is not
impossible for us to become more tolerant, to have compassion and to respect and
love others.

This has been the message of the Sufis who influenced large segments of the
population for centuries. They spread knowledge, wisdom, love and tolerance.
Pakistan's culture cannot be understood without thinking of the contributions of
the Sufis to literature, education and social reform.

When the northwestern part of the subcontinent was conquered by Mehmud of
Ghazni (R. 999 - 1030), Lahore became the Indian capital of the Ghaznavid
empire. It was here that a great author composed the first theoretical work in Persian language about the history and rules of Sufism. That was Ali Hajwary, known in Lahore as Data Garj Baksh, whose tomb has been regarded as a sacred place ever since his death in ca.1071. However, the real influence of Sufism on the subcontinent began in the late 12th century.

Muslim Sufis played a great role in the dissemination of the Islamic message of universal brotherhood and peace. They taught love of God and love of His creation. They were the first to use the regional languages using symbols taken from daily living and local environment for their teachings - because they wanted that the simple souls, illiterate men and women, should listen to their teachings - those who did not understand the Arabic of the Holy Quran or the Persian of the upper classes.

These Sufis contributed towards the refinement of intellect, emotions, tastes and manners giving a new dimension and meaning to the existing social structure. The role they played towards the enrichment of artistic sensibilities through poetry and music is unparalleled. The theme of their songs is universal love, the place of man in the cosmos, and the tragedy inherent in his fleeting existence on this earth. The Sufi is oriented towards action, as his intimate nature is not only receptivity but a life based on pure act.

In the end I would like to share with you a couplet from Baba Farid (1173 - 1266 A.D.)
"Shout, Farid, shout like the watchful man in the corn-field; as long as the bushel does not mature and fall, shout on."

Sarwat Mohiuddin