

**In Memoriam:**  
**Celebrating the Lifelong Contributions of a Dedicated NELC Colleague at IU**

Universities as educational establishments devoted to the production and dissemination of knowledge, when aiming to carry these heavy responsibilities conscientiously, contribute to the real and permanent good in this world, and as such they are the true philanthropic institutions—performing *sadaqah jariyah*. Small numbers of teachers and researchers in these learned institutions manage to leave powerful legacies of scholarship through their publications and, more importantly, a *silsilah* of accomplished pupils. Even smaller numbers succeed in leaving behind the most eternal and valued of societal capital: a personal reputation, a good name. As Shaykh Muslihuddin Sa'di of Shiraz has sagaciously said:

*Sa'diyaa mardi nekunaam Namirad hargiz*  
*Murda aanast ke naamash ba neku-yi nabarand*  
(Oh Sa'di, a person of good name shall never die;  
Dead are those who's names are not uttered for good deeds!)

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) at Indiana University, during its short history that now approaches a half a century, has faced and met considerable challenges, and has been blessed by the leadership and services of some remarkably dedicated scholars, teachers, mentors and leaders such as Professor Victor Danner (professor and Chairman of NELC). This scholar of Middle Eastern history, languages and literature was a pioneer of his fields at Indiana University. NELC owes much to him for his many contributions.

Not long ago we encountered a series of crises, which briefly threatened the very existence of NELC as an academic unit on our campus (1999-2000). We are however very pleased to have regained our academic strength and administrative credibility, and emerged more determined to keep NELC as an important part of IU's mission for providing and promoting international education in the United States. We are especially pleased to be able to celebrate the accomplishments of our former colleagues through the annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies and the Wadie Jwaideh Memorial Lecture in Arabic and Islamic Studies. Both of these Memorial Lectures were inaugurated during the academic year 2002-2003, and we are delighted to publish the lecture (No. 4) by Professor

Carl Ernst in 2006, *In Memoriam*, to honor our colleague and to share their cherished memories with you.

The Memorial Lecture in this volume was made possible with the generous support from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (COAS) of Indiana University, members of the Danner family, their close relatives, students and friends around the world. We are grateful for their help.

It is our hope that these lectures will continue for decades to come and with your generous help future generations will continue to benefit from the latest social sciences and humanities research and analysis on the Middle East. Indeed, we have established the Danner Memorial Lecture Funds administered by the Indiana University Foundation to insure future funding for these important memorial lectures.

We also hope that through the publication of these lectures, we are able to perpetuate the legacies of great teachers, true scholars and inspiring guides. Indeed, it is the hope of immortalizing the memories of such exemplary colleagues and their good name and reputation that, with your generous help, we will be able to undertake presenting these Memorial Lectures for years to come.

Nazif M. Shahrani  
Professor of Anthropology  
Chair, Department of Near Eastern  
Languages and Cultures (NELC)  
Indiana University

Sufism, Islam, and Globalization in the Contemporary World:  
Methodological Reflections on a Changing Field of Study

Carl Ernst  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Sufism is often referred to as the mystical dimension of Islam; I prefer to describe it as a teaching of ethical and spiritual ideals, which has been historically embodied in lineages of teachers who held prominent positions in Muslim societies.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> For a general survey, see my *Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997).

colonialism, the rise of Salafi reformism and fundamentalism, and secular modernism.<sup>2</sup>

In a recent study, Bruce Lawrence and I have challenged the “golden age and decline” historiography of Sufism, which seems to be the result of a deep collusion between Orientalists and fundamentalists.<sup>3</sup> In particular, we 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.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2002), esp. chapter 1; Carl W. Ernst, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the Teaching of Sufism,” in *Teaching Islam*, ed. Brannon Wheeler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 108-23; id., *Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), esp. chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Gul Muhammad Ahmadpuri, *Takmila-i siyar al awliya'* MS K.A. Nizami, Aligarh, India), fols. 43b-44a, cited in *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, p. 13.

The theme of decline is always with us, it seems. We caution our fellow scholars against the temptation to become Orientalist connoisseurs who praise the great Sufis of the past while looking disdainfully at contemporary Sufi leaders. If Ibn `Arabi or Rumi were alive today, would they simply replicate the powerful literary productions they designed for the thirteenth century, with its Mongol invasions, Crusades, and other catastrophes? For better or worse, Sufism as a spiritual repertoire today faces different challenges that undoubtedly call for different responses.

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. I begin from the premise that contemporary Sufis are no more immune to globalization than any other group; they too are affected by the commodification of religion in global capitalism, with its inevitable technological mediation of culture, communication, and personal relations.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

The most important local context for Sufism (as for religion in general) is the state, which everywhere is the ultimate authority that defines religion; whether the state attempts to outlaw Sufism or merely regulates its institutional centers, much of the

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<sup>5</sup> I presented an earlier analysis of this phenomenon in “Technological and Ideological Transformations of Contemporary Sufism,” in *Muslim Networks: Medium, Methodology & Metaphor*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Miriam Cooke, Islamic Civilization and Muslim Network Series (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 191-207.

<sup>6</sup> Wahid Bakhsh Sial Rabbani, *Islamic Sufism: The Science of Flight in God, with God, by God and Union and Communion with God, Also showing the Tremendous Sufi Influence on Christian and Hindu Mystics and Mysticism* Lahore: Sufi Foundation, 1984).

energy of contemporary Sufi groups must go into negotiating the forms of their social existence within the limitations imposed by the state. Ideologically, Sufi groups like other subaltern traditions have had to negotiate a *modus vivendi* with respect to the intellectual basis of the European enlightenment and its sequels; this means that secularism, the prestige of modern science, and all the apparatus of modern societies (universities, the press, etc.) became contexts in which Sufism has had to find a place. In addition, Sufi groups have been involved in rethinking the politics of peace and war.

In addressing the main theme of this article, however, it is important to raise several preliminary questions before proceeding with a brief and selective analysis of these factors. First, is it possible anymore to speak of a “Muslim world” as if it were an entity somehow separate from Europe and America (a.k.a. “the West”)? I argue that this is no longer a meaningful concept, at least outside of neocolonial contexts.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, it is risky to make a diagnosis of the spiritual needs of the current age with an eye to Sufism as a potential cure. In this context, I would urge that considerable caution be taken to avoid making magisterial Orientalist pronouncements, which may have unforeseen effects of a political character. 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 following analysis will examine the interaction of global processes with local contexts, focusing on Sufism in both its traditional homelands and in its new Euro-American homes, and it will not be possible to make sweeping generalizations that apply in all cases. Although it may be said 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

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<sup>7</sup> See my *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) for a critique of the notion of a “Muslim world.”

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> For a recent collection of studies, see *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> For a critique of inferior translations of Rumi's poetry, see Ibrahim Gamard's website, <http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> *The Love Poems of Rumi*, ed. Deepak Chopra, trans. Fereydoun Kia (New York: Harmony, 1998); *A Gift Of Love: Deepak & Friends Present Music Inspired by the Love Poems of Rumi* (Rasa Music CD 3078), containing recitations by Deepak Chopra, Madonna, Demi Moore, Martin Sheen, Blythe Danner, Goldie Hawn, Robert A.F. Thurman, and Rosa Parks.

the erotic and humorous aspects of his verse are emphasized.<sup>11</sup> Another distinctive feature of Rumi interpretation is the view that he and his teacher Shams-i Tabriz had a homosexual relationship.<sup>12</sup> This theory of “gay mysticism” plays into significant transformation of gender roles that are taking place in some modern societies, which indeed it may be projecting onto the 13<sup>th</sup>-century mystic. In any case, what is striking is the way in which Rumi has become the touchstone for modern re-thinking of identity in a non-authoritarian mode.

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

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<sup>11</sup> Olav Hammer, “Sufism for Westerners,” in David Westerland, ed., *Sufism in Europe and North America* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 127-143.

<sup>12</sup> Although Andrew Harvey omits Rumi from his anthology, *The Essential Gay Mystics* (Book Sales, 1998), the Persian Sufi poets Sa`di, Hafiz, ‘Attar, ‘Iraqi, and Jami are included.

Arabic and Wolof poems of Mouride founder Ahmadu Bamba is featured on fusion recordings made in Canada by Musa Dieng Kala.<sup>13</sup>

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; I call this process “the publication of the secret.”<sup>14</sup> 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, Arabic works, when they first emerged into print in the late 19th century, were 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

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<sup>13</sup> Fiona McLaughlin, "Islam and Popular Music in Senegal: The Emergence of 'New Tradition,'" *Africa* 67 (1997), pp. 560-81; id., "In the Name of God I will Sing Again, Mawdo Malik the Good': Popular Music and the Senegalese Sufi Tariqas," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30 (2000), pp. 191-207; id., "Music for modern Muslims: Griots and Sufism in Senegal," *Africa* 67 (1997); Musa Dieng Kala, *Shakawtu – Faith* (Shanachie CD SHA-64072).

<sup>14</sup> See *Guide to Sufism*, chapter 7, and *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, chapters 6 and 7, for further discussion of Sufism in print.

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 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 government-constructed arena 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.<sup>15</sup> 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'uddin Naqsh-

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<sup>15</sup> Muhsin Mahdi, "From the Manuscript Age to the Age of Printed Books," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (Albany: State University of New York Press/Library of Congress, 1995), pp. 6-7. Mahdi suggests that the large followings of mystical orders made such publishing economically feasible.

band in Bukhara, as seen in a recent film produced by the Foreign Trade Association of Bukhara.<sup>16</sup> This commodification of Sufism needs to be juxtaposed with the similar objectification and reification of Islam.<sup>17</sup> 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

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<sup>16</sup> See the memoirs of Turkish Mevlevi musician Kudsi Erguner, *La Fontaine de la Séparation: Voyages d'un musicien Soufi* (Paris: Le Bois d'Orion, 2001); English trans., *Journeys of a Sufi Musician* (London: Saqi Books, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> "Beaming One," (Ozma Productions for the Foreign Trade Association, City of Bokhara, 1993). A copy is available in the Media Resource Center of the library of the University of North Carolina, catalog no. V4816.

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.<sup>18</sup> 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 Ahmadis. 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; this is another example of how the modern state defines religion, in this case banning the works of the Andalusian mystic as un-Islamic.<sup>19</sup>

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

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Lau, "Islam and Fundamental Rights in Pakistan: The case of Zaheer-ud-din v. The State and its impact on the fundamental right to freedom of religion," *Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law Yearbook* 1 (1994), available online at <http://www.soas.ac.uk/Centres/IslamicLaw/YB1Zaheer-ud-din.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Th. Emil Homerin, "Ibn `Arabi in the People's Assembly: Religion, Press, and Politics in Sadat's Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 80:4 (Summer, 1986), pp. 462-77.

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.<sup>20</sup> The apparent paradox of publicizing an esoteric tradition is nowhere more apparent than on the Internet, where the open secret of mysticism must be re-configured 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 (see a representative listing at <http://world.std.com/~habib/sufi.html>). 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 (<http://www.sunnah.org/>). 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*).<sup>21</sup> 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.

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<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> Garbi Schmidt, "Sufi Charisma on the Internet," in Westerlund, pp. 109-126.

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."<sup>22</sup> I shall return to these groups below, in connection with the de-emphasis on Islam found in these popular forms of Sufism.

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."<sup>23</sup> This new situation constitutes a challenge for groups that were traditionally defined by granting access to esoteric teachings reserved for a spiritual elite. I once asked the leader of a South Asian Sufi group whether or not he was interested in setting up a website (I posed this question on email, since he has access to this technology in his professional capacity as an engineer). He responded by quoting the words of a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Sufi master from his lineage: "We are not vendors who hawk our wares in the bazaar; we are like Mahajans (wholesale merchants)—people come to us." Nevertheless, he indicated that he did find the idea interesting, and it turns out that Malaysian disciples of this order have in fact set up a website where English

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<sup>22</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, volume 1, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), I:361.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, I:336.

language publications of the leading masters of the order are offered for sale. And in another sign of Sufi presence on the Internet, one can now take advantage of several Sufi blogs, including one (<http://sufinews.blogspot.com/>) 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.<sup>24</sup> The origins of this philosophy may be traced to the Traditionalist position developed by a number of ultramontane 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

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<sup>24</sup> Marcia Hermansen, "In the Garden of American Sufi Movements: Hybrids and Perennials," in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. Peter Clarke (London: Luzac Oriental Press, 1997), pp. 155-178; Carl W. Ernst, "Traditionalism, the Perennial Philosophy, and Islamic Studies," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, vol. 28, no. 2 (December 1994), pp. 176-81; Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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*).<sup>25</sup> 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 `Uthman dan Fodio.<sup>26</sup> The former website of this group (<http://www.murabitun.org>) 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

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<sup>25</sup> Ian Dallas, *The Book of Strangers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley, "The Natural State," available online at <http://bewley.virtualave.net/Page2.html>. This website also contains extensive excerpts from the writings of `Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit.

anarchist manifestoes of Hakim Bey (Peter L. Wilson).<sup>27</sup> All these examples demonstrate the variety of ways in which Sufi themes are inflected with the accents of globalizing modernity.

### **Sufism and Ecumenism**

As sociologist Bryan Turner has pointed out, globalization can engender two main kinds of ideological responses, one being a retrenchment to local and traditional identities, and the other being an embrace of universal tendencies already found in the tradition.<sup>28</sup> In modern Sufi movements, we can see many examples of the latter 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 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.<sup>29</sup> A comparable emphasis on universality is found in the teachings of Mehmet Sherif Catalkaya er-Rifai, a

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<sup>27</sup> Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1991); Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Scandal: Studies in Islamic Heresy* (New York: Autonomedia, 1988); id., *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> Bryan Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. pp. 77-114.

<sup>29</sup> Pirzade Zia Inayat Khan, ed., *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan* (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Press, 2001).

Turkish Sufi master at the Rifai-Marufi Fellowship in Chapel Hill, N.C. 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 (<http://www.barzakh.net/>) 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.<sup>30</sup> 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

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<sup>30</sup> 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.

the day in Iran during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>31</sup> 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 smaller scale in other gatherings taking place around America, as for instance at the tomb of Baba Mu-haiyaddeen 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 Oveissi-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.<sup>32</sup> Leadership disputes thus remain a potential source of conflict within and among the Sufi orders.

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<sup>31</sup> Leonard Lewisohn, "Tasawwuf. 5. In Persia from 1800 onwards," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), X:326-332, esp. 330a. A fuller version of this article is available: Leonard Lewisohn, "An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism," *Bulletin of the School for Oriental and African Studies* 61 (1998), pp. 437-464; 62 (1999), pp. 36-59.

<sup>32</sup> Maktab Tarighe Oveyssi Shah Maghsoudi, Inc.; Nader Angha, Plaintiffs-Appellants, v. Ali 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), available online at [http://www.cfac.org/CaseLaw/Cases/Maghsoudi\\_Kianfar.html](http://www.cfac.org/CaseLaw/Cases/Maghsoudi_Kianfar.html).

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.<sup>33</sup> 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 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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

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<sup>33</sup> 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 AB-BAS, *The female voice in Sufi ritual: devotional practices of Pakistan and India* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Karen Ask and Marit Tjomslund, ed., *Women and Islamization: contemporary dimensions of discourse on gender relations* (Oxford: Berg, 1998); Carl W. Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999), pp. 179-199.

<sup>34</sup> Shakina Reinhertz, *Women Called to the Path of Rumi: The Way of the Whirling Dervish* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 2001), esp. pp. 15-28.

<sup>35</sup> Catharina Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility and Zikr in Contemporary Istanbul* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2003).

Festival in Chapel Hill, North Carolina on more than one occasion.<sup>36</sup> 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 Qadhdhafi, 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

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<sup>36</sup> See the web site of Cemalnur Sargut at <http://www.cemalnur.org>, with extensive biographies of women connected to this Sufi group.

Egypt, we can nevertheless point out that this means Sufism is necessarily defined in its social and bureaucratic form by local government policies.<sup>37</sup>

Both the colonial and post-colonial state have agreed in regarding Sufism with considerable ambivalence.<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, Sufism has been increasingly 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.<sup>39</sup> There is also the example of the immensely popular Majjbandari Sufi order in

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<sup>37</sup> Edward B Reeves, *The hidden government: ritual, clientelism, and legitimation in northern Egypt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990); 'Ammar 'Ali Hasan, *al-Sufiyah wa-al-siyasah fi Misr* (al-Ma'adi [Cairo]: Markaz al-Mahrusah lil-Buhuth wa-al-Tadrib wa-al-Nashr, 1997); Taoufik Bachrouh, *Les élites tunisiennes du pouvoir et de la dévotion: contribution à l'étude des groupes sociaux dominants, 1782-1881* ([Tunis]: Université de Tunis, 1989); Leonardo Alfonso Villalón, *Islamic society and state power in Senegal: disciples and citizens in Fatick* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> For the case of Sufism in Pakistan, see especially Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> Almut Wieland, *Islamische Mystik in Afghanistan: die strukturelle Einbindung der Sufik in die Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998).

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.<sup>40</sup> Then there is the at first sight surprising emphasis on spiritual 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> A different example that has not yet been analyzed is the case of the Sufi-oriented Darul Arqam organization, banned in Malaysia since 1994.<sup>43</sup> There is much material available on relations between Sufism and the state in Senegal and Mauritania.<sup>44</sup> 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 val-

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<sup>40</sup> Peter J. Bertocci, "Form and Variation in Majibhandari Sufism," paper prepared for the conference on "The Work of the Imaginaire in South Asian Islam," North Carolina State University, April 12-14, 2002; id., "A Sufi Movement in Modern Bangladesh," *Oakland Journal* (Fall 2001), available online at <http://www2.oakland.edu/oujournal/files/Bertocci.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Rozehnal, *Islamic Sufism Unbound: Politics and Piety in Twenty-First Century Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Shah Sayyid Muhammad Zauqi, *Tarbiyat al-`ushshaq*, comp. Shahid Allah Faridi, ed. Wahid Bakhsh Siyal Karachi: Mahfil-i Zauqiyya, 1393/1974), pp. 763/10/0978 (introduction); Syed Muhammad Zauqi Shah, *Letters of a Sufi Saint to Jinnah* (Lahore: Talifat-i Shaheedi, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "The Futuristic Thought of Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad of Malaysia," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). In the 1980s, Darul Arqam was seen as one of the three most important independent Islamic organizations in Malaysia, along with ABIM and the Tablighi Jama'at; see Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam: Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), esp. pp. 104-116.

<sup>44</sup> David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920* (Athens, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2000).

ued, while institutional Sufism and dervish orders are considered highly questionable.<sup>45</sup> 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 among the hundreds of dervishes arrested, many were reportedly forced to pronounce public abjurations of Sufism.<sup>46</sup> In India, heavy-handed political agendas can be detected in attempts to locate Sufism as a potential antidote to Muslim fundamentalism and communal violence.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

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 Soroush argued that Sufism inevitably tends toward charismatic authoritarianism; in his view, the ascendancy of Khomeini’s ideas in the current Iranian regime shows the danger of

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<sup>45</sup> Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic regimes: Sufism and the state in Iran, from the late Qajar era to the Islamic Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> The Amnesty International report on this incident is available online at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/document.do?id=ENGMDE130162006>.

<sup>47</sup> 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).

<sup>48</sup> 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), reviewed by Arshia Sattar (<http://infochangeindia.org/documentary37.jsp>).

allowing Sufism to penetrate into politics.<sup>49</sup> I would argue, however, that local situations inevitably trump sociological generalizations about the political role of Sufism; scholars should suspend judgment until it is clear exactly how a given Sufi movement will function within its own local environment.

### **Sufism and the Politics of Peace**

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.<sup>50</sup> Under the circumstances of late post-colonial globalization, then, what roles have Sufis taken in relation to international political conflict and peace activism?

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<sup>49</sup> A detailed summary of this conference is available online at [http://www.isim.nl/files/muslim\\_intellectuals\\_report.doc](http://www.isim.nl/files/muslim_intellectuals_report.doc), in the discussion of paper no. 8, Jlaluddin Rakhmat, "The Revival of Sufism: Does it help? A glance at the Modern Sufi Associations in Indonesia."

<sup>50</sup> The similarities between the al-Qa'ida organization of Usama bin Laden and Sufi-style jihad have been discussed by James Howarth, "Al-Qaida, globalisation and Islam: a response to Faisal Devji" ([http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-middle\\_east\\_politics/al-qaida\\_3200.jsp](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>).

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 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.<sup>51</sup>

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

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<sup>51</sup> M. R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, *Islam & world peace* (Philadelphia, PA: Fellowship Press, 2002).

the authority of Saudi-financed Islamic institutions in America.<sup>52</sup> 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 U.S. 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<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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. 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

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<sup>52</sup> 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); see also <http://www.sunnah.org>.

<sup>53</sup> Open Letter to Hisham Kabbani, circulated on alt.sufi newsgroup, 20 July 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Zeyno Baran, ed., "Understanding Sufism and its Potential Role in US Policy," a report on an Oct. 2003 conference sponsored by the Nixon Center of Washington, D.C., which featured academic presentations plus a dialogue between Shaykh Kabbani and U.S. Middle East adviser Bernard Lewis (available online at [http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/baran\\_sufism.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/baran_sufism.pdf)).

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, inter-sectarian 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.<sup>55</sup> 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 de-

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<sup>55</sup> A. Nizar Hamzeh and R. Hrair Dekmejian, "A Sufi Response to Political Islamism: Al-Ahbash of Lebanon," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996), 217-229 (available online at <http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/pspa/al-ahbash.html>).

spair that is consuming the heart of so many women, children and men.<sup>56</sup>

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.

## **Conclusion**

The Enlightenment and its avatars, modernity and globalization, constructed Islam and Sufism as separate categories that it could confront or absorb as circumstances required. Its deep collusion with its conflictive partner, Salafi reformism, has led to a defensive incorporation of European ideologies in Muslim societies, principally Protestant scripturalism and rationalist fundamentalism. In this way, modern Islam fulfilled the Enlightenment definition of religion, even while resisting it. At the same time, the fixation on a medieval golden age of Sufism worked to the advantage both of colonial Orientalism and to anti-colonial reformists and fundamentalists. In the contemporary situation, Sufism has been officially pushed into a dubious and marginal posture, while still providing spiritual and intellectual tools that hold their appeal in many diverse and irreducibly local contexts related to religion and politics.

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<sup>56</sup> "Declaration of La Jolla, California," document circulated on Internet by International Sufi School of the revered master Sheikh Abdoulaye Dieye. The latter is also author of a book, *Touba: signs and symbols* (1997), on the significance of the Mouride pilgrimage city in Touba, Senegal, plus several works on Mouride history: *Le centenaire du Jihad al-akbar, 1895-1995* ([Sénégal], 1979); *Sur les traces de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba: l'exile au Gabon, période coloniale 1895-1902* (Paris: Ed. Ndigel, 1985); *L'histoire du Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, "Serviteur du prophète"* [a children's book] (Paris: CDG Creations, 1990).

The study of contemporary Sufism requires scholars trained as traditional Orientalists to reappraise their ambiguous position vis-à-vis the subject of their research, as do other scholars in religious studies.<sup>57</sup> No longer is it possible for the scholar to claim an Olympian posture of detachment based on the study of ancient texts and foreign lands. As anthropologists are required to submit “human subjects” research proposals to Institutional Review Boards, so scholars in religious studies investigating contemporary movements need to scrutinize their ethical responsibilities.<sup>58</sup> Scholarly research on Sufism can have direct political effects on lineage disputes within orders, Sufi debates with reformists, inter-religious dialogue, and state policies toward Sufis; Sufis themselves are quite aware of these potential political effects of scholarship.<sup>59</sup> All these factors call for self-critical thinking about the positioning of scholars.

If Euro-American scholars, as representatives of the Enlightenment, decide to promote their concept of Sufism as a tamable form of Islam, this risks the possibility of de-legitimizing Sufism, both in its traditional homes and in its new immi-

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Tweed, "Between the Living and the Dead: Fieldwork, History, and the Interpreter's Position," in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, ed. James V. Spickard, J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 63-74. For a university policy statement on the ethics of human research ethics, see <http://research.unc.edu/ohre/>.

<sup>58</sup> Mustafa Draper, “Ethics and ethnographic research in the context of Sufi tariqas,” research paper for “Transnational Sufism --Ethnicity, politics and transnational Islam: A study of an international Sufi Order,” a seminar organized by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (CSIC), held in Sofia, May 2000, available online at [http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/mdraper/transnatsufi/Research\\_Papers/Draper.htm](http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/mdraper/transnatsufi/Research_Papers/Draper.htm) (accessed 29 December 2002).

<sup>59</sup> See as an example the appropriation of the academic concept of “neo-Sufism” (as proposed by Fazlur Rahman and John Voll) among Indonesian thinkers; this is discussed by Michael Laffan, "From Alternative Medicine to National Cure: A New Voice for the Sufi Orders in the Indonesian Media," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 135-136 (double issue on contemporary Sufism forthcoming in 2006), p. 10 of prepublication typescript. Thanks to Michael Laffan for sharing this work.

grant abodes, making it seem fully a tool of neocolonialism or state policy.<sup>60</sup> Instead of following that script, we need to join consideration of Sufism in Muslim majority countries with the study of Sufism as a force in non-Muslim societies, recognizing it as one more phenomenon that is affecting and changing the character of the post-Enlightenment globalizing world of which it is a part. Sufism as a contemporary global activity is, in other words, a highly suitable subject for the study of religion, but it needs to be pursued in a manner suitable to the times. It is in this spirit that I propose engaging in the study of Sufism and Islam in the contemporary world.

Carl W. Ernst

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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<sup>60</sup> Edward A. Alpers, "Islam in the Service of Colonialism? Portuguese Strategy During the Armed Liberation Struggle in Mozambique," *Lusotopie* (1999), pp. 165-184. See also, for the case of Tatarstan, Ravil Bukharaev, "Sufism in Russia: Nostalgia for Revelation," in Westerlund, pp. 64-94, esp. pp. 65-66.

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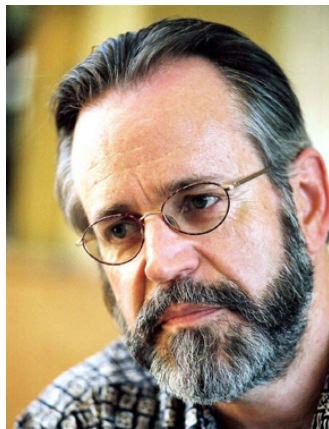
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**Professor Victor Danner** was born on October 22, 1926, in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico. As a young man, he served his country during WWII, after which he attended Georgetown University where he received his B.A. *magna cum laude* in 1957. Later that year he traveled to Morocco to become an instructor and eventually Director of the American Language Center, sponsored by the US Information Service. While there he took advantage of the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the country but also to perfect his knowledge of classical Arabic texts.

In 1964, Professor Danner returned to the US for his doctoral studies and graduated from Harvard in 1970. He came to IU in 1967 and was a professor of Arabic and Religious Studies at Indiana University until his death in 1990. He served as Chairman of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department for five years, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Middle Eastern Studies Program.

He was an internationally renowned scholar in the fields of Islamic mysticism, comparative religion, and classical Arabic literature. In 1976, he was invited to speak at the international World Festival of Islam in London. Professor Danner was also active in a number of professional organizations, including the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Traditional Studies, for which he served as Secretary-Treasurer. He wrote *Ibn 'Ata 'Allah's Sufi Aphorisms* (1973); *Ibn 'Ata 'Allah: The Book of Wisdom*, (1978); and *The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction* (1988), in addition to over twenty-five articles and reviews.



**Professor Carl W. Ernst** is a specialist in Islamic studies, with a focus on West and South Asia. His published research, based on the study of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, has been mainly devoted to the study of Islam and Sufism. He studied comparative religion at Stanford University (A.B. 1973) and Harvard University (Ph.D. 1981). He has taught at Pomona College (1981-1992) and has been appointed as visiting lecturer in Paris (EHESS, 1991, 2003), the University of Seville (2001), and the University of Malaya (2005). On the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

since 1992, he has been department chair (1995-2000) and Zachary Smith Professor (2000-2005). He is now William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor (2005-) and Director of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations. He and Bruce Lawrence are co-editors of the Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks Series at the University of North Carolina Press.