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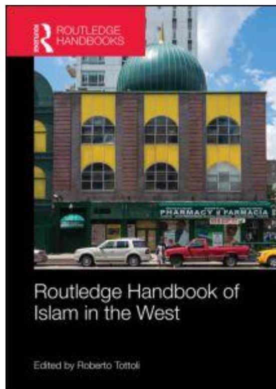

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Islam, Sufism, and the postmodern in the religious melting pot

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Islam, Sufism, and the postmodern in the religious melting pot

Francesco Alfonso Leccese

Sufism: stereotypes and globalization

In recent decades new modalities of transmission of Islamic knowledge, in particular of its mystical trend, Sufism, have given birth to original religious movements from the traditional Islamic key concepts. The process of globalization, quickened in recent years by the great technological innovations in transport, communication, and information, has also brought about a transformation in the way Islamic knowledge is transmitted on a global scale. As already stated, the numerous economic, political, and cultural changes that have occurred in the last two centuries do not allow a clear distinction between the Islamic and the Western world anymore (Ernst 2004). For example, the "discovery" of Sufism by the West and the emergence in the Western mainstream culture of capital figures of classical Sufism, such as Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–73), has been linked to the "rediscovery" of Sufism in Islamic countries since the second half of the twentieth century.

Sufism had been first introduced into the Western culture in the nineteenth century by some British Orientalists who had undertaken research projects on the Indian subcontinent about some of the most fascinating aspects of what they classified as "Oriental" culture – Sufi poetry, dance, and rituals. Even though those elements were among the most genuine expressions of the Islamic tradition, they did not suit the earlier Orientalists' idea of Islam. Therefore they created the academic concept of Sufism, presented as a mystical current strongly influenced by Hinduism and different from Islam. Their interpretation has greatly affected Western mainstream opinion about Sufism, perceived as a universal "spiritual" doctrine. Other research carried out in the same period on the branches of some Sufi brotherhoods in North African French colonies gave rise to a series of stereotypes – useful for legitimizing the *mission civilisatrice*[1] – which showed Sufis as conservative and incompatible with the project of modernization of the imperial powers (Sirriyeh 1999; Ernst 2011). Those stereotypes turned out to be so influential that even the new Muslim elite, who had been educated in European schools and who would lead the nationalist movements against colonial rule in the first decades of the twentieth century, accepted them. Sufism and its institutionalized aspects, such as brotherhoods and their practices, were rejected as elements of backwardness, responsible for the decay of the Islamic civilization and of the colonial penetration into Muslim countries.

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René Guénon and the Traditional movement

It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that actual Sufis began to appear in the West as a result of translated texts and research by some European – and later American – scholars on the esoteric doctrines of the East. The most important of them was undoubtedly René Guénon (1886–1951), whose works on the spiritual doctrines of some Oriental traditions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Taoism – interpreted as parts of a unique Tradition – exerted a strong influence on Sufi movements and researchers, not only in the West, but even in Muslim countries. Guénon was initiated into Sufism by Ivan Aguéli (John Gustaf Agelii) (1869–1917), a Swedish painter and intellectual of Tatar-Finnish origin, who had embraced Sufism and taken the name ʻAbd al-Hadi. Aguéli contributed to *Il Convito – Al-Nadi*, an Italian Arab review published in Cairo from 1904 to 1910, and to *La Gnose*, a journal published in Paris from 1909 to 1912, whose main promoter and contributor was Guénon himself (ʻAbdul-Hâdî 1988).

Aguéli put Guénon in contact with an Egyptian branch of the Shadhiliyya, the ʻArabiyya Shadhiliyya, whose *shaykh* was ʻAbd al-Rahman Elish al-Kabir (d. 1929). Guénon dedicated to the Egyptian master one of his most important works, *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (1931), to underline the strong influence of his teachings on his own spiritual research, even though they had never met. In 1930 Guénon decided to move to Cairo, where he lived for the rest of his life known as *shaykh* ʻAbd al-Wahid Yahya. In those years he kept in touch with the disciples of the Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya, a Sufi brotherhood founded by Sidi Salama al-Radi (1866–1939) (Gilsenan 1973). The key themes of Guénon's thought are criticism of the Western modern world, the contrast between East and West and between traditional and modern sciences, the rediscovery of Tradition – that he believed was still alive in some Oriental spiritual paths – and the search for a self-realization that in his view was strictly linked to formal adhesion to an Oriental way of initiation. He did not suggest any particular spiritual path, but many of his readers considered Sufism the best way Westerners could follow to achieve spiritual progress. Even though Guénon neither created a new school of thought nor led a religious movement, he had a profound impact on his contemporaries as well as on subsequent generations, and today he is recognized as one of the seminal figures of the Traditional School, based on the belief that the world's great religions all share the same origin. Guénon was the major inspiration behind *Études traditionnelles* (1935–92), a French journal that was exclusively dedicated to the esoteric and metaphysical doctrines of East and West. It contributed also to arousing interest in Sufism in Europe and in the United States with the first translations of and commentaries on a series of treatises by Ibn ʻArabi and texts by other Sufi masters that up to then had been available only in their original languages. The journal published writings by Guénon himself and his collaborators and correspondents, such as Frithjof Schuon (1907–98), Titus Burckhardt (1908–84), Martin Lings (1909–2005), and Michel Vâlsan (1911–74).

In 1933 Frithjof Schuon affiliated to the ʻAlawiyya Shadhiliyya, an Algerian Sufi brotherhood whose eponymous *shaykh* was Ahmad al-ʻAlawi (1869–1934), one of the most charismatic Sufi masters of his time, widely known in Europe and in the United States thanks to the study *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (1961) by Martin Lings. Al-ʻAlawi had founded his order in Mostaganem, Algeria, his birthplace, and then spread it throughout Algeria and other parts of North Africa, Syria, and Yemen. His brotherhood was one of the first to establish a presence in Europe, especially among Algerians in France and Yemenis in Wales. Ahmad al-ʻAlawi was highly considered in Europe for his open-minded approach to the dialog relations between Sufism and Christianity. In 1926 he was invited to Paris to lead the first communal prayer at the inauguration ceremony of the newly built Great Mosque in the presence of the French President.

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After the death of Ahmad al-'Alawi in 1934 and the appointment of 'Adda Bentounes (1898–1952) as his successor at the head of the order, Schuon performed a spiritual retreat, *khalwa*, in the *zawiya* of Mostaganem, followed by a disputed claim (Sedgwick 2004a: 88) of having received an *ijaza* (license) as a *muqaddam* (deputy) of the 'Alawiyya, with permission to admit disciples to the 'Alawiyya order. The first *zawiya* of the 'Alawiyya under Schuon's guidance was founded in Basel, soon followed by others settled in Amiens, Paris, and Lausanne.

Schuon was an important representative of the Perennial Philosophy,[2] a school of thought which claims that permanent and universal metaphysical truths underlie the diverse religions, whose written sources are in the revealed Scriptures as well as in the writings of the great spiritual masters. In this perspective a new direction in Schuon's thought resulted from his deep interest in the religious traditions of the Native Americans.

Schuon had been attracted by American Indians since he was a child but his interest became more serious in 1946, when he asked his followers and admirers to be put in touch with a Native American "elder." Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000), an anthropologist at the University of Indiana affiliated to the 'Alawiyya, sent him John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), a sort of autobiography – which had been heavily edited – of Black Elk, a Lakota speaking Oglala Sioux, a leader and *wichwasha wakan* (holy man), who had taken part in the battles of Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee. Schuon appreciated the book so much that he began to discuss Native American spirituality in his correspondence with Guénon and asked Brown to contact Black Elk to do a research project about Native American religion. After spending one year between 1947 and 1948 with Black Elk, in 1953 Brown published *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* – a work he wrote in Lausanne with Schoun's intellectual support (Sedgwick 2004a: 123). In 1959 Schuon visited the United States for the first time and lived for several months with the Plains Indians, coming into contact with their religious traditions. He was adopted into the Sioux and participated in a number of Native American rituals (Sedgwick 2004a: 123).

In 1948 the turning point in Schuon's thought gave rise to a sharp dispute with Guénon about the correct nature of a Traditional Sufi brotherhood. Guénon denounced the risks of falling into a sterile syncretism as in his opinion esoteric practice was complementary to an exoteric framework. He also thought that a European Traditional Sufi brotherhood should not differ from a Sufi brotherhood rooted in Islamic countries, just as European Islam should not differ from its original interpretation. On the contrary, Schuon paid less attention to the exoteric framework, focusing on the esoteric practice instead. Schuon's departure from the model of a Traditional Sufi brotherhood became more evident in the 1960s, when he changed the name of his *tariqa* into 'Alawiyya Maryamiyya – generally shortened to Maryamiyya – from Schuon's visions of the Virgin Mary (in Arabic *Maryam*). This change was not perceived by Schuon's followers as a departure from Islam, even though a short prayer to the Virgin Mary was added to the daily litany.[3] During the 1960s and 1970s, various Maryamiyya *zawiya*s were present in Europe, Argentina, and the United States. The main American *zawiya* was established in 1967 in Bloomington, Indiana, by Victor Danner (1926–90), a professor of religious studies at Indiana University, which became an important center for the diffusion of Schuon's Perennialism among a group of intellectuals and bestselling writers like Thomas Merton, Houston Smith, and Sayyed Hossein Nasr. In 1981 Schuon moved to Indiana, where a new Schuonian community of sixty to seventy disciples had settled at Inverness Farm. He lived there for the rest of his life and introduced Native American rituals into the spiritual practices of his community.

Within the Traditional movement, René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon can be regarded as representatives of two different trends that in the second half of the twentieth century would be

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peculiar to Western Sufism. On the one hand René Guénon focused on Sufi doctrine and, even though he lived in Cairo from 1930 until his death, he influenced the spread of traditional Sufi thought in the West. He had an intensive correspondence with some European intellectuals who had embraced Sufism and who favored the birth of European branches of various Sufi orders that claimed their indissoluble connection with Sufism, viewed as the inner aspect of Islam. They put an emphasis on Islamic external law (*shari'a*) as a complementary but functional way to grasp the inner reality of existence (*haqiqa*), and on the transmission of spiritual teaching through a Sufi genealogical tree (*silsila*). The most important among those orders were the 'Alawiyya, guided by Michel Vâlsan, and the Darqawiyya, whose leader was Roger Maridort.

In 1950 Michel Vâlsan, who had been the Paris *muqaddam* of the Schuonian 'Alawiyya branch for ten years, wrote a twenty-five-page open letter to announce his decision to distance himself from Schuon and denounce his departure from Islam into universalism (Chacornac 1958). Some years later Vâlsan, who was an accomplished scholar and a collector of Ibn 'Arabi manuscripts, which he edited and published in French, emerged as the independent master of another European branch of the 'Alawiyya. He based most of his teachings on Akbarian[4] thought and had among his disciples Michel Chodkiewicz and Charles-Andrés Gilis, eminent experts of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrines.

Roger Maridort (1903–77) received an *ijaza* from the Moroccan Darqawi *shaykh* Muhammad al-Tadhili (d. 1952) and settled his own branch in Turin, Italy, by 1961. Roger Maridort and his disciples devoted themselves to spreading Guénon's work, classical Sufi texts, and Traditional writings through their publishing house, Edizioni Studi Tradizionali, and the journal *Rivista di Studi Tradizionali*, the Italian equivalents of the French Éditions Traditionnelles and *Études Traditionnelles*.

On the other hand, Schuon was a charismatic master who succeeded in creating his own Sufi order in the West. Schuon's attempt to combine Sufi practice with various Oriental spiritual ideas and techniques in some cases resulted in a sort of universal Sufism. Today, the Maryamiyya's membership still consists mainly of a circle of intellectuals and academics – some of them are Schuon's older disciples – who are preserving the perennialist teaching of their master, trying at the same time to underline its Islamic essence (Aymard and Laude 2004: 92–4).

Universal Sufism and forerunners of the New Age

While the Traditional movement was bringing Sufi doctrines to the West thanks to the influence of charismatic intellectuals and to the translations of classical Sufi texts, some Eastern Sufi masters began to travel across the West presenting Sufism as part of an Oriental timeless wisdom without any formal link with Islam. The most influential among them was Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882–1927), an Indian classical musician who was linked to the Nizami school of the Chishtiyya brotherhood – one of the most popular Sufi brotherhoods of the Indian subcontinent. In 1910 he left India for a music tour in the United States, and later in Europe, during which he began to transmit Sufi teachings and practices. Despite the fact that he was affiliated to the Chishtiyya, he did not spread Chishtiyya's doctrine and rituals but created his own way, the Sufi Order of the West, now Sufi Order International. Hazrat Inayat Khan focused his doctrine on the Divine Unity and on the inner aspect of six religions – Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism – that involved the conception of a universal Sufism. The reference texts of this movement were a collection of the abovementioned six religions and the creation of a practice characterized by a new kind of meditative technique that mixed up ritual elements of Islam and Hinduism with others inspired by Christianity. This belief implied

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that Sufism did not necessarily require conversion to Islam, since in Khan's opinion Sufism was an inner religion without any link with its exterior form. Initially, Inayat Khan spread his movement in the United States. His first female disciple was Rabia Ada Martin, previously Ada Ginsberg (1871–1947), a woman of Russian-Polish Jewish origin who he designated as his spiritual successor at the head of the Sufi Order. This appointment resulted in a dispute on the succession that gave rise to a series of independent offshoots, whereas the leadership of the Sufi Order passed to the founder's son, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916–2004), and later to his grandson Zia Inayat Khan, current master of the Order.

In the 1940s Rabia Ada Martin began a correspondence with the Indian guru Meher Baba[5] (1894–1969), who had attracted many followers during his visits to the United States and who would later publicly declare himself the Avatar – in Hinduism the direct manifestation of the Divine Being – of the Age. When Rabia Ada Martin died, the designated successor, Ivy Oneita Duce (1895–1981), a former businesswoman, handed over that Inayat Khan's branch to Meher Baba, who created Sufism Reoriented (Hammer 2004). In the late 1960s one of Inayat Khan's disciples, Samuel Lewis (1896–1971), an American mystic and dance teacher who had collaborated with Rabia Martin in the guidance of the Sufi Order branch in the United States, formulated the Dances of Universal Peace (www.dancesofuniversalpeace.org), that is, exhibitions of "psychic purification" and "moral development." Lewis combined the dance of the Mevlevi whirling dervishes with meditative techniques derived from 500 different spiritual traditions, as a method to promote peace through the arts. Lewis, who was called Murshid SAM (Sufi Ahmad Murad) by his disciples, spent the last years of his life traveling through Asia and the Middle East, and after returning to the Unites States – shortly before he died – he founded his own Sufi group in San Francisco, the Sufi Islamiyya Ruhaniat Society, later Sufi Ruhaniat International (Lewis 2008; Hermansen 2004). Lewis was one of the leading figures of the New Age movement in the United States, to the extent that the book which contains a series of ten lectures he gave from July to September 1970 was titled *This Is the New Age, in Person* (Lewis 1973).

Lewis was not the first to show Westerners the Sufi whirling dances since a decontextualized form of whirling dance had already been introduced into the West by Georges Ivanovič Gurdjieff (1872–1949). Born in Alexandropoul, Transcaucasia, between the late 1890s and the early 1910s he traveled through the Middle East and Central Asia and was initiated into the alleged Sarmoun Brotherhood, a secret Sufi order rooted in quite an inaccessible area of Afghanistan which he described in his *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963), one of his most successful works. Gurdjieff developed a peculiar teaching method that he called the *Fourth Way*, which was based on a syncretic combination of the spiritual teachings he had derived from different religious traditions of the East, especially from Sufism. He spread his teachings in the main cities of Europe and the United States – London, Paris, and New York – through the Institute of the Harmonious Development of Man, founded in 1919. Gurdjieff also taught his disciples a complex meditative dance inspired by the whirling dervishes' ritual and the various movements of the Islamic and Sufi rituals, such as the ritual prayer (*salat*) and the invocation of God (*dhikr*). Gurdjieff and his followers presented their *movements* in theater performances in front of an enthusiastic audience – completely unaware of their meaning and origin – for the first time in Paris in 1923 and some months later in New York (Lewis 2008: 515).

Peter Brook (b. 1925), the famous English theater and film director,[6] showed some of those movements in his movie adaptation of *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1978), on which Jeanne de Salzmann (1889–1990), one of Gurdjieff's closest disciples, collaborated as a consultant. The movements are choreographically perfect, even though they may appear rather mechanical if compared to the original Sufi rituals. Sufism's seminal contribution to the teachings of Gurdjieff is attested to by the research carried out by one of his disciples, John G. Bennett

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(1897–1974), a British scientist and philosopher. He identified the roots of the principles and techniques of Gurdjieff's method in the wisdom of the *Khwajagan*,[7] Sufi masters who lived between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries in Central Asia. Two centuries later their spiritual heritage was adopted by the Naqshbandiyya order and formally expressed through the eleven principles of the order itself (Bennett 1995 [1977]).

Another forerunner of the New Age was Idries Shah (1924–96). Born in India of an Afghan father and a Scottish mother and raised in England, Idries Shah had a large following in the West for his interpretation of Sufism as a psychological method for self-realization rather than a spiritual path rooted in the Islamic tradition. He neither spread the teachings and ritual techniques of a specific Sufi brotherhood nor asked his disciples for formal adherence to Islam, but he represented a kind of non-traditional Sufi who, like Inayat Khan and Gurdjieff before him, made proselytes mainly in the Western intellectual sphere. Idries Shah was a prolific writer and among his works we can find some of the most successful texts on Sufism published in the West, such as *The Sufis* (1964) and *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin* (1966). The main promoter of Shah's Sufism is Robert Ornstein (b. 1942), a psychology professor at Stanford University who has translated Sufi themes into a psychotherapeutic language, meeting with an enthusiastic reception in the American academic community of psychologists. His academic essays, among which *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972) is the most famous, have played an active role in the spreading of universal Sufism in the United States with a marked therapeutic imprinting (Lewis 2008; Hermansen 2004).

Sufism and the 1960s counterculture movement

The discovery of Sufism by Westerners was also linked to some aspects of the American and British counterculture that emerged in the 1960s, that is, interest in Oriental traditions and the search for the disclosure and the nurture of "the authentic self," which often took the "journey to the East" (Taji-Farouki 2007: 3).

Even if the New Age eludes a univocal definition, its main themes are the centrality of the concept of self-spirituality and a de-traditionalized and anti-authoritarian character melted up with a perennialist inclination. A leading figure in the British alternative culture of the late 1960s was Bulent Rauf (1911–87), a Turkish intellectual settled in London in 1966, who played an important role in the spreading of Ibn 'Arabi's thought through the Beshara movement, founded in 1971. This movement was the long-time result of his encounter with Reshad Feild (b. 1934), previously Tim Feild, an Englishman of aristocratic origins who had been previously involved in pop music as a member of the British folk trio the Springfields. He joined the Sufi Order of Pir Vilayat Khan after receiving initiation by spiritual masters of different orientations, from both the East and the West. Reshad Feild was designated by Vilayat Khan as the representative of his order in the UK and was among the founders of the charitable trust that on Bulent Rauf's suggestion was called Beshara (from the Arabic original word *bishara*, "good news"). In 1971 the Beshara Trust purchased Swyrne Farm in the Cotswolds, England, and under the guidance of Reshad Feild it became the first center of the Sufi Order in the UK. Meditation sessions – based on Chishti techniques, *dhikr* from other Sufi traditions, and Mevlevi whirling dances – were organized there, initially addressing young people who were linked to the hippie movement, and later Oxbridge graduates[8] as well. In 1972 *The Twenty-nine Pages*, a summary of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical teachings collected by Bulent Rauf himself, was introduced in the study sessions, and the following year Rauf took over from Feild as the guide of the Beshara movement. In 1974 the Beshara Trust began to organize seminars at the Crisholme house, in Scotland, as well as residential courses. They were focused on intellectual exercises

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based on the study of Ibn ʻArabi's texts, on meditation and spiritual practice (*dhikr* and *wazifa*), and on service, such as kitchen and garden work.

In the following years, the Beshara movement spread outside Britain, with the establishment of new study circles in France, the Netherlands, Canada, the United States, and Australia. Alongside those circles, an academic organization, the Muhyiddin Ibn ʻArabi Society, was founded in 1977 with the aim of promoting the metaphysical doctrine of the Andalusian Sufi master in Europe and in the United States. Since then the Society has organized annual symposia in the UK and in the United States, and has produced translations and editions of Ibn ʻArabi's texts. Twice a year it publishes the *Journal of Muhiyddin Ibn ʻArabi Society*, which contains the contributions of eminent scholars from all over the world.

In 1973, after leaving Inayat Khan's Sufi Order and the leadership of the Sufi community of Swyrne Farm, Reshad Feild began to travel across Central and North America, and later created centers for spiritual and psychological development in Mexico, Canada, and California. In his successful autobiography *The Last Barrier* (1976) he gave an account of the teachings he had learned from the many Sufi masters he had met, like Bulent Rauf and the Konyan Mevlevi *shaykh* Suleyman Loras Dede (1904–85). Even though Reshad Feild brought the traditional Mevlevi line to the West at the request of *shaykh* Suleyman Loras Dede, with whom he had a lifelong relationship, he did not consider himself a Sufi, but rather – as he himself said – a true seeker with no labels (Feild 2002 [1976]: ix).

Bulent Rauf did not even regard himself as a traditional Sufi master, and although his family was rooted in Ottoman Sufism – his grandfather having been buried in Ibn ʻArabi's mausoleum in Damascus – he was not formally affiliated to any Sufi lineage. He always conceived the Beshara movement as a medium to popularize the teaching of Ibn ʻArabi, one of the most difficult authors of Sufism.

Since his death, the Beshara school, under the leadership of Peter Young, one of his first students, has continued to promote a perennialist interpretation of Ibn ʻArabi's texts, organizing a wide variety of courses, seminars, reading weeks, and educational events around the world. The courses provided by the Beshara are a balanced program of study – often focused on a particular text by Ibn ʻArabi or Jalal al-Din Rumi – work, meditation, and devotional practice, aimed at achieving spiritual self-realization of the students, regardless of their backgrounds (Taji-Farouki 2007; Jeffery-Street 2012).

Bulent Rauf developed his universal approach to Sufism over the years. While in the early years he promoted relations with and visits to the Mevlevi and the Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya orders in Turkey, he gradually distanced the Beshara movement from traditional Sufism until he interrupted any formal contacts with the traditional Sufi background in the late 1970s. Nowadays the Beshara continues to organize visits to the saints' tombs in Turkey as part of the school program, and trips to Andalusia and Anatolia – *In the Footsteps of Ibn ʻArabi* – to visit the places where Ibn ʻArabi lived. This emphasis on Sufism's cultural heritage is present in *Turning* (Cilento 1973), a documentary film made in Turkey to commemorate the 700th anniversary of Jalal al-Din Rumi. It was directed by the Australian actress Diane Cilento, who also acted as narrator in the first part of the film, while Bulent Rauf, her consultant, was narrator in the second part, in which he "provides a concise commentary on the cosmology expressed through the geometry of the movements" (Beshara). This documentary film was probably the first made by Westerners to show the Mevlevi dervishes' rituals to a Western audience (Taji-Farouki 2007; Jeffery-Street 2012).

A role in the discovery of Sufism by exponents of the counterculture in the late 1960s was also played by a branch of a Moroccan Sufi order, the Habibiyya Darqawiyya, which had settled in London exactly in those years.

In that period the British branch was led by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Sufi (b. 1930), previously Ian Dallas, a Scottish intellectual and scriptwriter who had also starred in Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963) as Maurice, the mind reader. Ian Dallas had been initiated into Sufism in 1967 by the Moroccan *shaykh* Muhammad ibn al-Habib al-Darqawi (1876–1971), who would later appoint him as his *muqaddam* in the UK. Dallas gathered around himself a group of European and American intellectuals and artists, who met in the three main Western *zawiya*s of the order settled in London, Cordova, and Berkeley, California (Whiteman 2012).

Among the first group of British followers of this Habibiyya branch, there were three members of the psychedelic rock band Mighty Baby, Ian Whiteman (b. 1945), Roger Powell (b. 1949), and Mike "Ace" Evans (1944–2010), who, in 1972, after an extensive journey made to Morocco a year before, recorded and released an album, *If Man But Knew*, as the Habibiyya. This work, one of the earliest pieces of world music ever recorded in Britain and the Habibiyya's sole album, was the result of their encounter with Sufism. They had been profoundly affected, both spiritually and musically, by the traditional Sufi music and singing they had heard in the Habibiyya *zawiya*s of Fez and Meknes. Moroccan Sufism inspired the lyrics of *If Man But Knew*. They were sung in Arabic and focused on the Divine and on love for the Prophet. The texts were taken directly from traditional Sufi orations and from the *qasida*s (Sufi poems traditionally chanted in the Sufi rituals and gatherings) collected in the *Diwan* of the Habibiyya *shaykh* Muhammad ibn al-Habib al-Darqawi (d. 1971). After their return from Morocco, they made the recordings in London with the contribution of two multi-instrumentalists from Northern California, Conrad and Susan Archuletta, who were disciples of the order themselves. The album was deeply influenced by Sufi practice – the musicians fasted for three days before recording, said their prayers and meditated for an hour before each session – and was mostly extemporized.[9] The result was a combination of the common instruments of modern, Western music (acoustic guitar, drums, piano, organ, viola, flute, and so on) with more exotic instrumentation (such as *bina organ*, *koto*, *shakuhachi*, zither, *nay* flute, *mandola*, and all kinds of percussion) and an Eastern-influenced hypnotic psychedelic music (Vernon 2008; Whiteman 2007). This project was somewhat unique because it was not an ethnomusicological work,[10] but probably the first album ever made by a group of European Sufi musicians and an example of the mediating role played by music in the discovery of Sufism by the 1960s counterculture. The front cover photograph of the album was evocative as it showed a *sibha*, the Sufi rosary, while on the back cover were the turbaned faces of the band members. The man who took the photos was Peter Sanders, one of London's key photographers of rock musicians in the mid-1960s, a member of the British Habibiyya order himself.[11]

In 1973 another musician, Richard Thompson (b. 1949), a songwriter and former member of the British folk-rock band Fairport Convention – one of the greatest guitarists of all time, according to *Rolling Stone* magazine – joined the Habibiyya order. Thompson had read a lot about Sufism as a teenager, but he had had no way of finding any practitioners until they almost arrived on his doorstep when the church hall in Belsize Park – about 200 meters from his house – was one day rented for a Sufi meeting. So he went down there and looking around he realized that he knew four of the people in there, all musicians he had done session work with. They were members of the British branch of the Habibiyya order, which had its *zawiya* in Bristol Gardens, Maida Vale, London (Thompson 2012). Thompson was struck by that Sufi group's great background mix from all classes and different countries, and subsequently he spent a few sabbaticals in Morocco and Algeria "listening to the wisdom of old guys" (Adams 2010). He transferred this spiritual experience to the album *Pour Down Like Silver* (1975), made with his first wife Linda Thompson. The cover photographs show the Thompsons dressed in traditional Muslim clothes, while the lyrics were a sign of their new ascetic direction.

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The Western Habibiyya branch was characterized by a countercultural membership from the British rock scene and artists of the San Francisco Bay Area, like Conrad and Susan Archuletta and the poet and painter Daniel Moore (b. 1940), who joined the Habibiyya order in 1970. He had made his mark in 1964 with his first poetry collection, *Dawn Visions*, published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's the City Lights Books, San Francisco. From 1966 to 1969 Daniel Moore wrote and directed ritual theater for his Floating Lotus Magic Opera Company, in Berkeley, California.[12]

After his conversion, Daniel Moore began traveling extensively in Europe and North Africa, renouncing written poetry for about ten years. In 1980 he published three books of poetry in Santa Barbara, California, and in the following years he organized poetry readings for the Santa Barbara Arts Festivals. In 2005 he created Ecstatic Exchange, his personal publishing company specializing in contemporary Sufi poetry. Today Daniel Moore continues to give public readings, often accompanying himself on specially tuned zithers.

In about 1977, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Sufi (b. 1930) began to consider himself an independent master in the line of the Habibiyya and consequently he created his own movement, the Murabitun, In its etymology, the word "Murabitun" evokes the Sufis who inhabited the *ribat*s (fortifications built along the frontier of the *dar al-islam*) and, historically, the Almoravid dynasty that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries ruled in North Africa and Spain (al-Andalus). The Murabitun Movement was characterized by the militant imprinting given by 'Abd al-Qadir, who focused his teaching on political and economical issues, promoting the study of the *Muwatta'* – the first written collection of *hadith* comprising the subjects of Muslim Law, compiled and edited by Malik ibn Anas (715–96) – among his disciples. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Sufi considered the *Muwatta'* the foundation of an ideal legal and social system. His perspective implied a total rejection of the Western capitalist banking system, to be replaced by an Islamic one based on the *zakat*, on the abolition of bank loans, and on the re-establishment of a *halal* currency. Consequently 'Abd al-Qadir advocated the restoration of the Islamic gold *dinar* and of the silver *dihram*, used in the age of the caliphate, and later a system of *e-dinars* on the internet (www.dinarshops.com) and within the Murabitun communities around the world to avoid paper money, considered *haram* (forbidden).

The new direction in 'Abd al-Qadir's thought resulted on the one hand in the abandonment of his order by a great deal of earlier Western converts from an alternative background (Sanders 2007 [2002]), on the other in "the most far-reaching and successful Islamic *da'wa* (the proselytizing of Islam) in the twentieth century" (www.shaykhabdalqadir.com/content/bio.php). In Spain the Murabitun were involved in the various political initiatives promoted by Spanish Muslim organizations and foreign donors that brought about the construction of Granada Mosque in 2003. The missionary activities of the movement have concentrated on regions with intense social conflicts, such as the Mexican state of Chiapas, where in 1996 the Murabitun took part in the Zapatista uprising,[13] and South Africa, where, during the 1980s newly converted Zulus were recruited (Hermansen 2005: 483–9; Garvin 2005; Hermansen 2009: 34–6). Today South Africa is the main center of the Marabitun Movement as its leader himself currently lives there. In 2004 'Abd al-Qadir founded the Cape Town Dallas College with "the function of educating and producing a new generation with the capacity for leadership at the national and international level" (Dallas College, Leadership for Young Muslims, www.dallascollegect.com/?page_id=2).

The Murabitun has emerged as a movement without parallel in any Western Sufi order; some researchers even liken it to the Islamist movements. As a matter of fact, while a lack of interest in political issues is generally peculiar to Western Sufi orders, the Murabitun's political involvement – though criticized by other Western Sufi brotherhoods – can be traced back to a

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typology of militant Sufism having occurred in particular historical contexts, such as the anti-colonial movements led by Sufi masters during the nineteenth century (Cook 2005: 73–92).

Sufi ideas in the postmodern

Nowadays, at the third stage of its rooting in the West, Sufism appears as a cultural category, in some cases even a "consumption good". As we have seen, the first stage, the introduction of Sufi doctrines and techniques into the West in the first half of the twentieth century, was characterized by an intellectual and spiritual interest in Oriental traditions which resulted in two main directions: the Traditional movement and universal Sufism. In the former, the reference figures for European and American Muslim converts were the Traditional movement leading figures, Western intellectuals, or Western Sufi masters. In the latter, Eastern masters created a new orientation: Sufi traditions melded with Oriental spiritual trends, giving life to a Sufi universalism. Separated from its Islamic roots, Sufism addressed – as generic Oriental wisdom – a wide range of Western spiritual seekers and led sometimes to new religious movements.

The second stage of the spread of Sufism in the West – between the 1960s and the 1980s – was characterized by the *discovery* by Westerners of Sufi masters and brotherhoods in their countries of origin. Traditional Sufi orders recruited disciples among Westerners, and their masters began to travel extensively across European and American countries trying to settle a traditional Sufism in completely different contexts.

Among the orders that settled their branches in the West in those years we have to mention the Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya, the Burhaniyya Dusuqiyya Shadhiliyya, and last – in chronological order – the Qadiriyya Budshishiyya.

Muhammad Nazim al-Haqqani (b. 1922), Cypriot master of the Haqqaniyya, made his first visit to London in 1973 and in a few years he spread his order in the UK and later in the USA, continuing to visit periodically his communities scattered in Western countries. In Europe and in the USA the Haqqani Naqshbandi Sufi Order increased the number of its adherents also thanks to some charismatic figures present in the order. The best known of these is the German convert Burhanuddin Herrmann, famous for his ability in telling traditional Sufi stories (Herrmann 2006) and for the seminars on Sufi traditions he organizes for contemporary seekers all over the world. A prominent exponent of the Haqqani Naqshbandi Sufi Order in the United States, the Lebanese American *shaykh* Muhammad Hisham al-Kabbani, is the founder and chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of America. Through this organization that promotes the activities of the order in the United States he aims to play a leading role in a more general Muslim framework.

The Burhaniyya Dusuqiyya Shadhiliyya is a Sudanese order revitalized by Muhammad 'Uthman Abduhu al-Burhani (1901–83), its charismatic *shaykh*, who succeeded in spreading it from Sudan to Egypt. Since the 1980s, the Burhaniyya has taken root throughout Europe, especially in Germany, with communities of disciples consisting mainly of European converts as that country was not involved in Egyptian or Sudanese migrations. In the following years – also thanks to its strong centralized organization – the Burhaniyya settled branches in other European countries, in the Middle East, and in the United States. The close link between the present master of the Burhaniyya, *shaykh* Muhammad ibn Ibrahim – the grandson of the founder of the order – and the German disciples is underlined not only by the fact that he spends long periods of the year with them in their country, but also by his marriage to a German convert.

The Qadiriyya Budshishiyya, mainly rooted in Morocco, expanded under the guidance of Abu al-'Abbas al-Mukhtar (d. 1971) and nowadays is led by his son, Hamza ibn Abu al-'Abbas

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al-Budshishi al-Qadiri. In recent years the Budshishiyya has also been spreading in some European non-francophone countries such as the United Kingdom and Spain, but it is in France that, under the guide of the local *muqaddam* Fouad Skali, it has gained the largest number of adherents not only among Maghrebi migrants but also among French Muslim converts. Fouad Skali, a Moroccan intellectual, is also director of the Fez Music Soul Festival, which has hosted traditional music groups of different religious backgrounds from all over the world since 1994.

The abovementioned Sufi brotherhoods share an emphasis on the role of their masters, thus confirming the old Sufi saying: "the master is the path, and the path is the master." Yet the global diffusion of these orders is due not only to the charisma of their masters but also to some ritual innovations they have introduced. For example, the aspiring disciples do not, as they had to in the past, have to overcome a long trial period before taking the bond of allegiance (*bay'a*) with their master, nor do they have to face a long spiritual retreat. Nowadays this practice, the *khalwa*, is not considered indispensable in these brotherhoods and is replaced by a meditation practice that allows the disciple a retreat from everyday life without a total withdrawal from society.

For these reasons, while in the West other *globalized* brotherhoods – like the Senegalese Muridiyya and the Indian Chistiyya – recruit their disciples above all among migrants coming from the original countries of the brotherhoods themselves, the Haqqaniyya, the Burhaniyya, and the Budshishiyya have succeeded in proselytizing not only among natural-born Muslims but also – or mainly – among Westerners.

In the third stage of the rooting of Sufism in the West, the internet has played a decisive role, not only as a medium of proselytizing but also because for the first time in the history of the Sufi orders a disciple can be virtually in touch with his/her master twenty-four hours a day, while in the past a disciple could spend years – traveling long distances – in search of his/her own Sufi master. In fact the esoteric teaching that was once restricted to an inner circle of disciples or to the elite in a brotherhood has today become accessible on global scale to whoever has a connection to the internet at his/her disposal.

The paradox of the divulgation of inner teachings is in the advertising character of the various Sufi orders' websites, making them appear just like a *product* on the religious global market and risking misinterpretation of the religious message (Ernst 2009).

As a matter of fact, in the present religious melting pot many New Age followers adopt the word "Sufi" as a label and appropriate Sufi iconic symbols, like the whirling dervishes, to promote their activities, giving birth to decontextualized forms of Sufism. The mystification of Sufism and its New Age interpretation can be easily seen in the cultural and commercial operation made about the Persian Sufi poetry by Jalal al-Din Rumi (Ernst 2009) and Hafez (Loloi 2004: 49–78). In particular, American pop culture has appropriated Rumi's figure and poems, and distorted his spiritual teaching.

The bestselling versions of Rumi's poems, edited by some American poets – Robert Bly and Coleman Barks are the best known among them – have succeeded in presenting Rumi's teaching as timeless wisdom with no reference to its original Islamic framework, and as suitable to satisfy the spiritual need of the many who do not identify with the traditional religions but are in search of personal development.

As a reaction against this religious melting pot and the degeneration of some Sufi orders – primarily their economical and political involvement – some Western Sufi intellectuals and scholars argue for the historical existence of Sufism before and outside its organized forms. In their opinion, a real and effective transmission of Sufi teaching can be preserved only under the guidance of a Sufi master in a restricted circle of disciples, without necessarily affiliating to an order (Chodkiewicz 1996; Geoffroy 2003: 290–3).

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These two antithetical trends remind us of the elusive nature of Sufism expressed by a tenth-century Sufi *shaykh*: "Sufism once was a reality without a name; it is now a name without reality." Even though used over the centuries by the detractors of Sufism against its historical developments, this paradoxical aphorism represents the undeniable complexity of the relation that exists between the signifier and the signified. As a matter of fact the practical and historical dimensions of Sufi thought are the glow of a Spiritual ideal that is unattainable except by a few.

Notes

1 The main aim of the French *littérature "de surveillance"* was the census of Algerian Sufism through information about the doctrines and practices of the different Sufi brotherhoods, about their *zawiya*s, their organization, and their political role (Rinn 1884; Petit 1899; Depont and Coppolani 1897).
2 Even though Schuon's disciples do not consider Aldous Huxley a "true" representative of the Perennial Philosophy, the fame of this movement in the mainstream culture is exactly due to Huxley's work *The Perennial Philosophy* (2009 [1945]) (Oldmeadow 2010: 272–5).
3 A collection of small texts written by Schuon himself, the *Book of Keys*, inspired by Islamic, Sufi, and Hindu sources, was introduced as the main text of Schuon's Maryamiyya.
4 Akbarian is an adjective that derives from the epithet given to Ibn 'Arabi by his disciples: *al-shaykh al-akbar*, "the greatest master."
5 Meher Baba is popularly associated with the sentence "Don't worry, be happy," which he often used to encourage his disciples and which is reproduced on one of his standard portraits. It inspired the famous song by Bobby McFerrin (1988) that gave the motto a worldwide diffusion.
6 Peter Brook was heavily influenced by Gurdjieff. The direct Sufi heritage in his work is perceivable in the theater adaptation of the classical Sufi text *The Conference of the Birds* (1979) of Farid al-Din 'Attar (1142–1220) and in the theater adaptations of Amadou Hampâté Bâ's *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar: Le sage de Bandiagara* (1957): *Tierno Bokar* (2004) and *11 and 12* (2009) (Nicolescu 1985, 1997; Gibbson 2010).
7 *Khwajagan* means "Masters" in Persian. The most important masters of the Naqshbandiyya genealogical tree in that period were Khwaja 'Abd al-Khaliq (d. 1220) and Yusuf Hamadani (1048–1141).
8 "Thousands of seekers came all over the world to spend weeks, or even months living in the community" (Feild 2002: xiv).
9 The underlying "theory was that the meditation would get the egos out of the way, so the music could become truly spontaneous … At the end of that we would just play, as if we were instruments being played, not the players" (Whiteman 2007).
10 This is the case of *Islamic Liturgy: Song and Dance at a Meeting of Dervishes* (1960) an 'Alawiyya *hadra* recorded by the ethnomusicologist John Levy (1910–76) in London, enriched by a detailed annotation by Martin Lings with transcriptions and translations of the litanies and recitations.
11 In 1970 Sanders made a photo report in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, as he was among the few professional photographers who had access to the holy cities of Islam. In the following years he has become a specialist in reportages on the Muslim world (Sanders 2002).
12 *The Walls Are Running Blood* and *Bliss Apocalypse* were the two major musical ritual dramas presented during those years. The theater company consisted of amateurs, painters, musicians – such as Conrad and Susan Archuletta – or artists in different fields, and their inspiration was primarily Zen Buddism. Each performance was played at night using only Coleman lanterns for illumination.
13 Today the Murabitun of San Cristobal forms a community of indigenous and non-indigenous Mexicans, as well as other Latin American and European converts.

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