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Part III. Tracing Muslim Networks

Chapter Nine

Ideological and Technological Transformations of Contemporary Sufism

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ISLAM, IDEOLOGY, AND SUFISM

One of the major trends in the development of Islamic religious culture over the past

two centuries has been what one may call the Islamization of Islam. With the growing

domination of European culture through colonialism, the modern western concept of

religion was applied to categorize what we now familiarly call the religions of the world.

Islam, an Arabic term designating both the individual act of surrender to God and the

corporate performance of ritual, became the accepted designation for one religion among

many.[1] Nineteenth-century European Orientalist scholarship played a key role in developing this "religionizing" concept of Islam, which excluded many of the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the tradition; at the same time, colonial policy marginalized and privatized the institutions that had supported and transmitted these aspects of Islamic culture in Muslim countries. Curiously enough, nineteenth-century Muslim thinkers, in part responding to this colonial concept, articulated positions of reform and revivalism that mirrored the Orientalist concept of Islam. In the twentieth-century, Islam has been increasingly used by fundamentalists as an ideological term for mobilizing mass activism against colonial interests or the secular post-colonial state, and this simple, hard-edged formula of opposition has been uncritically accepted and reproduced by Western media outlets.

Up till now, one major aspect of the contemporary Islamic tradition has been frequently omitted from public discussions: Sufism, or Islamic mysticism. In a recent survey, I have argued that Orientalist scholarship has, since its inception two centuries ago, systematically attempted to exclude Sufism from its definition of Islam.[2] In the nineteenth century and even well into the twentieth century, Sufism was almost invariably defined as the product of "foreign influences," which might be anything from Greek philosophy to Buddhism to yoga. This exclusion of Sufism from Islam was paralleled by the new concepts of Islam that were being introduced at the same time by Islamic reformists, forebears of today's fundamentalists. What both Orientalists and fundamentalists failed to acknowledge was the way in which Sufism, broadly defined, had characterized most of the leading Muslim

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[1] The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Edward Lane's 1842 *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* as the first use of the term "Islam" in English. Prior to that, "Mahometanism" was the common designation for this religion. Both terms conveyed the Enlightenment concept of religion as one of many competitive belief structures. For a fuller discussion, see my *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), especially chapter 2.
[2] See the evidence discussed in my *Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), especially chapter 1; also in "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the Teaching of Sufism," in *Teaching Islam*, ed. Brannon Wheeler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 108-23.

religious thinkers of the premodern period. Certain tropes of hagiography, such as the execution of the Sufi martyr Hallaj (d. 922), were interpreted to mean that Sufism was totally opposed by "orthodox" Islam (however, or by whomever, that is to be defined). The fact that Muslim scholars from al-Ghazali (d. 1111) to Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762) were saturated with Sufi teachings was an embarrassment to be left out of the history of Islam. Even those figures most often invoked by today's anti-Sufi ideologists, such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), were themselves members of Sufi orders, despite their critiques of particular Sufi doctrines and practices. Muslim modernists like Sir Muhammad Iqbal have also tended to reject Sufism as medieval superstition, contributing further to the notion that Sufism is irrelevant to Islam.

It was not possible to ignore Sufism completely, however. Again, in what conspiracy theorists might call a deep collusion, Orientalists and fundamentalists both conceded that Sufism was once legitimately Islamic, but this concession was tempered by being limited to a classical golden age in the distant past. One could confidently speak well of Sufi masters who were safely buried centuries ago; Europeans, particularly the Protestant British, agreed with the Wahhabi founders of the Sa`udi regime that dead saints are lifeless dust—this in contrast to the vehement pronouncements of Sufis, that the saints in their tombs are living conduits to the divine presence. In practice, this attitude had the added advantage that one could safely dismiss contemporary Sufis as the degenerate representatives of a once-great tradition. As far as the study of Sufism is concerned, the golden-age attitude translated into a direct correlation between the relative antiquity of a Sufi and the attention of which he was deemed

worthy; consequently, studies of contemporary Sufism, except from a purely political perspective, have been rare until recent times.[3]

Nevertheless, upon closer examination, it turns out that Sufi leaders, Sufi institutions, and Sufi trends of thought have been surprisingly resilient and adaptive to the contested situations of modernity. Nineteenth-century Sufi leaders such as Emir `Abd al-Qadir of Algeria were not only active in anticolonial resistance, but also were connected with reformist circles. Much the same could be said of Indian Sufis such as the Naqshbandi leader Ahmad Barelwi and the Chishti master Hajji Imdad Allah, the North African shaykh Ahmad ibn Idris, and many others. Today, both in traditionally Muslim countries and in the West, a battle is being waged for control of the symbolic resources of Islam, and in this contest, both fundamentalists and modernists regarded Sufism as their chief opponent. In spite of appearances generated by the media, if Sufism is defined broadly to include a range of devotional practices including the intercession of saints and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad, it may fairly be said that the majority of Muslims today still adhere to a Sufi perspective on Islam. The aim of this paper is to illustrate how proponents of Sufism and admirers of its cultural products have expressed themselves through the communications media of modern technology, and to venture some speculations about the kind of community that is sustained by this technology. In making this analysis, I rely in particular on the insightful observations of Manuel Castells, in delineating varied cultural expressions

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[3] The critique of "golden-age" approaches to Sufism has been fully developed in Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (Palgrave Press, 2002). Although certain major scholars (Louis Massignon, Marshall Hodgson, Ira Lapidus) have recognized the centrality of Sufism in Muslim societies, there has been little attention to contemporary Sufism until fairly recently. For brief surveys of 19th- and 20th-century Sufism, see the following articles listed under "Tasawwuf" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), X:313-340: "4. In 19th and 20th-century Egypt" (F. de Jong); "°. In Persia from 1800 onwards" (L. Lewisohn); "6. Amongst the Turks (c) The Ottoman Turkish lands and Republican Turkey in the 19th and 20th centuries" (Th. Zarcone); "7. In Muslim India (b) In the 19th and 20th centuries" (C. Ernst); "8. In Chinese Islam" (J. Aubin); "9. In Africa south of the Maghrib during the 19th and 20th centuries" (J. O. Hunwick).

found in the media of print, sound recording, broadcast media and film, and the interactive networking of the Internet.[4]

SUFISM IN PRINT

In European history, it has become a truism to state that the Protestant Reformation was to a certain extent the child of print; Gutenberg's invention of moveable type made possible the first modern best-seller, Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible. In a comparative extension of this topic, Sinologists are now examining the relationship between religion and print in China, where the long history of printing is closely tied to religious texts. Anthropologists and historians of religion alike have focused on the question of the relation between the oral and written aspects of sacred texts. Yet for Islam, perhaps pre-eminently the "religion of the book," research on the relationship between religion and the technology of print is still in its infancy. Partly this is due to the relatively late introduction of print to Muslim countries; despite the existence of Arabic printing in Europe by 1500, there were only a few experiments with printing in Muslim countries by the 18th century, and it was not until the late nineteenth century that printing became a major factor in the dissemination of Islamic texts.

To date, much of the scholarship on the subject of Islam and print has focused on the phenomena most easily accessible to Europeans, such as the presses established by European Christian missionaries and by governments, whether native or colonial; many other aspects of printing in Muslim countries remain unexplored, however. Orientalists have speculated, often in a condescending way, on the possible causes that hindered the

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[4] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, volume 1, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), pp. 327-75.

introduction of printing among Muslims until such a late date. Was it an economic threat to the thousands of calligraphers who made their livelihood from copying manuscripts? Was it a problem of capital formation and marketing, due to the difficulty of recouping the large sums required to invest in the machinery of a printing press? Or was it a profound attachment to the oral transmission of the divine word as embodied in the Qur'an? These questions, and many others, will remain highly debatable as long as the actual history of printing in Muslim countries remains relatively unknown. Clearly, even establishing the outlines of this history will require the labors of scholars working on many different regions and languages, so these large questions remain premature, and may not even be useful. What is most questionable, however, is the degree to which inquiries about Islam and print have been posed from a thoroughly Eurocentric perspective, rather than from a comprehensive inquiry as to the religious purposes to which Muslims turned the new technology.

To be sure, scholars such as Barbara Metcalf have recognized the important role of print in the Islamic religious academies of nineteenth-century colonial India. Since the `ulama' (religious scholars) have been the articulators and transmitters of Islamic religious texts, they are certainly a key element to examine for the relation between Islam and print. Yet they are not by any means the only actors to consider. In a provocative essay, Francis Robinson has argued that Islamic religious scholars in India accepted print because, under colonial rule, "without power, they were fearful for Islam".[5] He also points out that the adoption of print for religious texts had several unexpected results: 1) the rise of "Islamic protestantism," i.e., a scripturalist revivalism that rejected many aspects of traditional Islamic practice; 2) the internationalization of the Muslim community; and 3) the democratization of religious

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[5] Francis Robinson, "Technology and religious change: Islam and the Impact of print," *Modern Asian Studies* 27/i (1993), pp. 229-251, quoting p. 240. Revised version: "Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia," in Nigel Crook, ed., *The Transmission of Learning in South* Asia (Delhi: OUP, 1996), pp. 62-97.

knowledge and the consequent erosion of the authority of the `ulama'. Robinson observes, "Print came to be the main forum in which religious debate was conducted," a generalization that works well even beyond the specific groups he describes.

Another aspect of this topic that has recently claimed the attention of scholars is the use of print (and other means of communication, like the cassette) by twentieth-century Islamist or fundamentalist groups to propagate their ideologies. Certainly the ability of print to fix a text without variants has contributed to the bibliolatry and scriptural literalism that characterizes these groups. But partly because of the way in which these groups have succeeded in monopolizing Islamic symbolism, both in the eyes of foreign journalists and in indigenous forums, those who raise the question of Islam and print have not been impelled to look past these highly visible phenomena. A cynic might call this the closed-feedback loop in which Western media and scholarship use and are used by twin agendas, that of the fundamentalists and that of the secular governments which they oppose. Once again, those topics of most interest to the West are most prominent in research.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the emergence of Sufism as a topic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been the publicizing of a previously esoteric system of teaching through modern communications media. Today, Sufi orders and shrines in Muslim countries produce a stream of publications aimed at a variety of followers from the ordinary devotee to the scholar. Just as the recording industry democratized the private rituals of *sama`* (listening to music) for a mass audience (see below), the introduction of print and lithography technology made possible the distribution of Sufi teachings on a scale far beyond what manuscript production could attain. As has been noted in the case of Ibn `Arabi's Arabic works, when they first emerged into print early in the nineteenth century, suddenly a work that had existed in at most a hundred manuscripts around the world (and

those difficult of access) was now made easily available at a corner bookstore through print runs of up to a thousand copies.[6]

Evidence is still far from complete, but it has been recently suggested, largely on the basis of Arab and Ottoman evidence, that the main patrons of publishing in Muslim countries in the nineteenth century, aside from governments, were Sufi orders.[7] What was the character and extent of publication by Sufi groups, or on Sufism in general? The evidence is still very thin, and it is necessary to tease out Sufism from subject categories that are otherwise defined. What is available, however, is suggestive. For instance, a preliminary survey indicates that there were 112 native presses in various parts of India publishing books in Persian and Urdu during the first half of the nineteenth century, and that most of their publications were on religion, poetry, and law.[8] It is quite likely that many books falling into the categories of religion and poetry could be described as connected to Sufism. Lists of books published in the early nineteenth century from Bengal include the philosophical encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity (both in Arabic and in Urdu) and Persian literary classics by Sa`di, Jami, and others.[9] The prominence of Persian literary classics in the Indian native presses is also reflected in the presses operated by Europeans in

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[6] Martin Notcutt, "Ibn `Arabi in Print," in *Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi, A Commemorative Volume*, ed. Stephen Hirtenstein (Rockport, MA: Element, 1993), pp. 328-39.

[7] 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. Rich evidence from Morocco is supplied by Fawzi Abdulrazak, "The kingdom of the book: The history of printing as an agency of change in Morocco between 1865 and 1912," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1990; translated into Arabic by Khalid Bin al-Saghir, *Mamlakat al-kitab: tarikh al-tiba'h fi al-Maghrib, 1865-1912* (Rabat: al-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, Jami'at Muhammad al-Khamis, Kulliyyat al-Adab wa-al-'Ulum al-Insaniyya, 1996).

[8] Syed Jalaluddin Haider, "Munshi Nawal Kishore (1836-1895): Mirror of Urdu Printing in British India," *Libri: International Journal of Libraries and Information Services* (Copenhagen, Denmark) 31 (1981), pp. 227-237, citing p. 230.

[9] B. S. Kesavan, *History of printing and publishing in India: a story of cultural re-awakening* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1985), pp. 396, 398-402.

Calcutta in the late 18th century.[10] Likewise, books published in Iran since the mid-nineteenth century fall primarily into the categories of classical Persian literature, religious writings, and romantic epics and popular narratives, all of which overlap to some extent with Sufism.[11] Similarly, in the press founded by the Egyptian ruler Muhammad `Ali in 1822, in addition to a large number of translations of European works on subjects like military science, there were significant works on religion, ethics, and poetry. Among these were a number of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish Sufi texts by authors such as Sa`di, Rumi, and Ibn `Arabi.[12] The publicization of Sufism occurred at precisely the time when Sufism was becoming an abstract subject, separated from Islam in Orientalist writings, and condemned by reformists as a non-Islamic innovation. Some of these publications in turn responded directly to presentations of Sufism by Orientalists, fundamentalists, and modernists. In this category one can find not only editions of "classical" Sufi texts in Arabic and Persian (and their Urdu translations), but also writings of contemporary Sufi leaders, including discourses, lectures and essays, biographies, prayer and meditation practices, and manuals for using talismans and charms bearing the names of God (*ta`widh*). Since all these books were available

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[10] Examples include *Layli-Majnun* by Hatifi, edited by Sir William Jones (1788); the text and translation of Sa`di's ethical treatise, *Pand nama*, ed. Francis Gladwin (1788); Sa`di's complete works (1791 and 1795); and the poems of Hafiz (1791). See Graham Shaw, *Printing in Calcutta to 1800: a Description and Checklist of Printing in Late 18th-century Calcutt*a (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1981), nos. 111, 113, 181, 186, 277. See also C. A. Storey, "The beginning of Persian printing in India," in *Oriental Studies in Honour of Cursetji Erachji Pavry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 457-461.

[11] Ulrich Marzolph, *Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

[12] Titles include the anonymous *Jawhar al-tawhid* (1241/1825); Sa`di's *Gulistan* (1244/1828 and 1287/1841); `Attar's *Pand nama* (1244/1828, 1253/1838, and 1257/1842); a Turkish commentary on Hafiz (1250/1835); *Ma`rifat nama*, a Turkish work on mysticism by Ibrahim Haqqi (1251/1836); a three-volume Turkish commentary on Rumi's *Masnavi* by Kefravi (1251/1836); Ibn `Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* (1253/1838); the Ottoman poetry of Shaykh Ghalib (1253/1838); a Sufi Qur'an commentary by Isma`il Haqqi (1255/1840); the Persian poems of Hafiz (1256/1841); and several Turkish works on Sufism. See T. X. Bianchi, "Catalogue Général des livres arabes, persans et turcs, imprimés à Boulac en Égypte depuis l'introduction de l'imprimerie dans ce pays," *Journal Asiatique* (July-August 1843), pp. 24-61, citing nos. 19, 46, 47, 97, 109, 113, 137, 148, 149, 190, 199, 201, 202, 209, 217.

commercially, this new trend amounted to a mass marketing of Sufism on an unprecedented scale.

Through printed books, today one can also gain access to Sufism through scholarly publications from Western-style universities, learned societies, and cultural centers with government sponsorship. In format and style, these works are very much in the same tradition as European academic Orientalism; European-style punctuation, footnotes, and editorial techniques have been largely adopted in Arabic-script publishing. In contrast, non-academic Sufi writings tend to preserve the aesthetic form of the manuscript, particularly in lithographs created by trained calligraphers. As opposed to the elite monopoly on culture characteristic of the manuscript, book publication presupposes a mass audience created by public education and sustained by print capitalism. While access to manuscripts in the premodern period was rare and difficult, and scribal errors required the comparison of different manuscripts, print makes books easy to acquire and standardizes their texts. Therefore, when a scholar today edits a classical Sufi text, it does not merely replicate the experience of an eleventh-century author for the modern reader. Carrying official authorization as part of "classical" Islamic literature, the printed text now functions in new ways to defend Sufism from the polemics of both fundamentalists and Westernized secularists. In countries like Pakistan where Arabic and Persian both function as "classical" languages, there has been a concerted effort to translate much of the curriculum of Arabic and Persian Sufi literature into Urdu. Like the classical Greek works of Aristotle and Euripides at Oxford bookstores, the Arabic Sufi works of Sarraj, Qushayri, and Suhrawardi are now to be found in Urdu versions on bookshelves in Lahore. Their eminence and Islamic scholarship makes them powerful allies in the defense of Sufism against ideological opponents.

A striking evidence of the newly specialized situation of Sufism is the way Sufi leaders could focus on marketing to their disciples through the publication of serials, a topic that is only beginning to be explored. Probably the first leading Sufi involved in publication of serials in India was Hasan Nizami, a prolific author and publisher in Urdu from 1908.[13] Arthur Buehler has shown how the modern Naqshbandi teacher Jama`at `Ali Shah (d. 1951) directed his movement through *Anwar al-Sufiyya*, a periodical aimed at Sufi devotees. Mandatory subscriptions for disciples combined with a rigorous train-travel program for Jama`at `Ali Shah enabled him to use modern technology to keep in touch with a far-flung network of followers.[14] The role of modern communications technology in Pakistani Sufism is also evident in the case of the Chishti master Zauqi Shah (d. 1951). Educated at Aligarh and trained as a journalist in both English and Urdu, he founded a Sufi magazine, *Anwar al-Quds* (The Lights of Holiness), which was published in Bombay from October 1925 to February 1927. He continued to publish in newspapers, including some pieces in *Dawn* (Karachi, 1945-6) and a weekly column in *The People's Voice* (1948-9). While he published some polemical articles on the superiority of Islam in the magazine of Abu'l `Ala' Mawdudi, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, he also wrote essays refuting the claims to authority by the fundamentalist leader of the Jama`at-i Islami. In recent years, his successors have published an intermittent English language journal called *The Sufi Path*. A number of other periodicals devoted to Sufism are published in India and Pakistan currently in Urdu and other

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[13] Nithar Ahmad Faruqi, ed., *Khwaja Hasan Nizami* (New Delhi: Mahnama Kitab-numa, 1994), esp. pp. 89-107. See also Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Sufi Order in South Asia and Beyond,* chapter 6.
[14] Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh* (Charleston SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998). This periodical has recently been revived in English: *Sufi Illuminations* (*Risala-yi Anwar as-Sufiyya* 1/1-2 (1996), available from the Naqshbandiya Foundation for Islamic Education, PO Box 3526, Peoria, IL 61612-3526 (individual subscription $10/year).

languages.[15] There are likewise numerous other examples of Sufi periodicals in Egypt and Turkey. Periodicals have the effect of preserving a sense of community among individuals scattered far from the traditional local center.

Sufis were not without ambivalence regarding the use of print for these purposes. Early in the nineteenth century, the Naqshbandi master Shah Ghulam `Ali was enraged to hear that pictures of saints (evidently printed) were available at the great mosque of Delhi. In a conversation that took place in the 1890s, Haydar `Ali Shah (a prominent Chishti leader of the Punjab, d. 1908) denounced the production of printed prayer manuals. Affirming the supreme value of oral transmission, he stated that even if a master got the Arabic names of God wrong, and taught disciples to say the nonsense words *hajj qajjum* instead of *hayy qayyum* ("The Living, the Subsistent"), his instruction was to be preferred to an impersonal practice derived from a book. This prejudice did not, however, prevent his disciples from publishing his Persian discourses in 1909.[16] Yet it is striking to see that ritual could be adapted to the new technology, as in the case of constructing documents of initiation. Typically, initiation into a Sufi order in previous times had involved the disciple learning by heart and then transcribing by hand the family "tree" of the Sufi lineage, inscribing his own name at the end of a line traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. With the availability of print for this ritual process (as in the mass production of *qawwali* (recordings), some Sufi groups produced

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[15] The Khanqah Mujibiya in Phulwari Sharif, Bihar, published a journal called *Ma`arif* from the 1950s up to the 1980s; see Fozail Ahmad Qadri, *The Celebrated Garden: A Study of Phulwari Sharif Family of Muslim Divines* (Shillong: North-Eastern Hill Univbersity Publications, 1998), p. 68. American libraries have holdings of several Sufi periodicals from Pakistan published over the past two decades, including three from Karachi (*Darvish, Rumi Digest*, and *Sachal Sa'in*) and one from Quetta (*Dastgir*).

[16] Ghulam Haydar `Ali Shah of Jalalpur Sharif, *Nafahat al-mahbub* (Sadhura, Pakistan: Bilali Steam Press, 1327/1909); Urdu trans. from Persian by `Abd al-Ghani as *Malfuzat-i Haydari* (Lahore: al-Qamar Book Corporation, 1404/1983-4).

ready-made printed lineage documents, with the "tree" ending in blank spaces for the would-be initiate and the master to inscribe their own names.[17]

The publicizing of Sufism through print (and, more recently, electronic media) has brought about a remarkable shift in this tradition. Advocates of Sufism have defended their heritage by publishing refutations of fundamentalist or modernist attacks on Sufism. In this sense the media permit Sufism to be contested and defended in the public sphere as one ideology alongside others. This is very much the case, for instance, in the numerous publications of the Barelvi theological school in South Asia, which over the past century have defended the devotional practices of Sufism against the scripturalist attacks of the Deoband school.[18] Likewise, leaders of Egyptian Sufi groups have responded directly to reformist criticisms posed to them by newspaper editors, claiming that Sufism is at the core of Islam, refuting charges of its foreign origins, and defending Sufi rituals and the master-disciple relationship.[19] Traditional Sufi genres like biographies and discourses created an intimate relationship between readers and Sufi masters; through the wider distribution made possible by print, such publications both served local Sufi networks and at the same time functioned as proclamations that at least potentially formed part of the public legitimation of Sufism. Through these modern public media, Sufism is no longer just an esoteric community constructed largely through direct contact, ritual interaction, and oral instruction.

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[17] *Silsila-i `aliyya-i Chishtiyya Nizamiyya Fakhriyya Sulaymaniyya Lutfiyya*, ed. Hajji Makhdum Bakhsh (Lucknow: Nawal Kishor, 1913); a photograph of the signature page of this document may be seen at http://www.unc.edu/~cernst/chishti.htm. For other examples of printed *shajara* genealogies, see Qadri, p. 43, n. 16, and Liebeskind, p. 219.

[18] This controversy has been discussed at length by Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and his movement, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also the extensive list of Barelvi publications offered for sale in the large (224 page) catalogue *Kitabi Dunya* offered by Nizami Book Agency of Budaun, U.P. (1988-89).

[19] Julian Johansen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt: the Battle for Islamic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 169-210.

Now that Sufism has been publicized through mass printing, what are the changes in personal relationships that the new media entail? As Dale Eickelman has observed, "The intellectual technologies of writing and printing create not only new forms of communication, they also engender new forms of community and authority."[20] Many questions remain about the number and kinds of books produced on Sufism, the number of copies printed, the kind of audience they were aimed at, the publishers themselves, etc., but it is possible to make a few preliminary observations here. Sometimes print is interactive and facilitates interaction of networks, or functions in defense against polemical opponents, but at other times it may be a symbolic or ritual gesture. Simply to publish the writings of a Sufi saint might be considered a pious act that brings blessings with it, and indeed the elaborate poems, dedications, and memorials that conclude many of these publications often have a decidedly ritualistic character. As David Gilmartin points out elsewhere in this volume, print as the medium for debate about imagined Muslim community had an ambiguous relation to the networks in Muslim societies. In the case of Sufism, the defense of strongly local lineages attempted to deflect criticism by claiming to embody the essential teachings of Islam. But there is an inescapably local element to any Sufi tradition or order, which is expressed by devotion to particular shaykhs, ritual at certain shrines, and writing in local languages. This very concreteness of local networks exists in tension with universal notions of community; indeed, we cannot speak of any empirical community of Sufis on a global basis. Sufis attempt to trump the systematic ideologies of reformist critics by staking a claim to the key symbolic capital enshrined in the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad. In polemical and academic publications, a universal Sufism aims at capturing "the mantle of the Prophet" in Roy

[20] Dale F. Eickelman, "Introduction: Print, Writing, and the Politics of Religious Identity in the Middle East," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68 iii (1995), pp. 133-38, quoting p. 133.

Mottahedeh's apt phrase, but Sufi lineages still depend on face-to-face contact and real communities that are of necessity more limited.

It is my assumption that the extent of publication by contemporary Sufi groups has been underestimated, partly because of the reformist critique mentioned above. But this misreading is also a result of inadequate access to locally distributed publications, and the limited amount of historical research that has been done on printing in Muslim countries. For instance, a knowledgeable British scholar, Graham Shaw, estimated that Munshi Nawal Kishor, the Hindu founder of the most important Persian/Urdu press in nineteenth-century India, had published around 500 books by the time of his death in 1895.[21] But Prof. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi of Illinois State University a few years ago acquired a complete collection of the publications of the Nawal Kishor press, consisting of nearly 5000 volumes! No doubt some of these were printed by Nawal Kishor's successors, but less than one-fourth of these titles are listed in European or American libraries.[22] A great many of these publications were classical Persian poetry (including Sufi poetry), Sufism, and Islamic religious texts. The major libraries of Muslim countries doubtless hold a considerable number of volumes on Sufism still unknown in the West, so at the very least, the question of Sufism in print provides a charter for further research.

AUDIO AND FILM

After the late introduction of print in Muslim countries, the technological pace picked up quickly in the twentieth century with the introduction of mass media, including sound recordings, film, radio, and television. Sufi-related music, which may be found in

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[21] G. W. Shaw, "Matba`a [printing]. 4. In Muslim India," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new ed., 1991), 6:806.
[22] The Persian titles of this magnificent collection are in the private collection of Prof. Tavakoli-Targhi; the Urdu volumes (about 15% of the total) have been purchased by the University of Chicago.

many countries, soon began to become available in commercially available recordings. This was at first produced both for popular local audiences, as in the case of Indian *qawwali* recordings in a 1920s and 1930s, as well as for highbrow European ethnomusicologists some years later.[23] In neither case can this be said to be a product of traditional Sufi *tariqa* organizations; it is, instead, a reconfiguration of cultural products for resale on the mass distribution market (whether one calls it "pop culture" or not).

In recent years, Sufi music has been the subject of a new appropriation that may be called "remix." In World Music albums, international festivals, and fusion performances, Sufi music has been performed in contexts never before envisioned. To take but a single example, the *qawwali* music of Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh `Ali Khan ("Must Must Qalandar") was remixed by the British trip-hop group Massive Attack in 1990 to become an international dance hit with a strongly reggae flavor. At the same time, performers who were once low-status service professionals catering to the spiritual experience of elite listeners have made the shift to become box office superstars who are regarded as spiritual personalities in their own right. A glance of the top 25 recordings listed under Sufi music by online bookseller Amazon.com indicates the remarkable variety and profusion available to the world of consumers today. But this is best described as a cultural and commercial appropriation of Sufism rather than as the dissemination of Sufi teaching and authority.[24] Broadcast media in most formerly colonized countries are typically under control of the state, and so is not surprising to find that films prepared for television distribution in Muslim countries strongly reflect government interests. This political emphasis is obvious in the few documentary films on Sufism that have been produced in non-European countries, in

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[23] See *Guide to Sufism*, pp. 189-91, 195-96.
[24] Regula Qureshi, "'Muslim Devotional': Popular Religious Music and Muslim Identity under British, Indian and Pakistani Hegemony," *Asian Music* 24 (1992-3), pp. 111-21.

contrast with the cultural focus of the ethnographic films on Sufism made by Western anthropologists. A notable example of the official documentary film on Sufism is "The Lamp in the Niche," a two-part film directed by Girish R Karnad and produced in 1990 by the Ministry of Information of the Government of India. This film (winner of a national award for "Best non feature film on social issues") portrays Sufism as a broadly tolerant movement, Islamic in its origins to be sure, but more closely akin to the devotional Bhakti currents of Hinduism than to anything else. Likewise, the secular government of Turkey has produced a film called "Tolerance," devoted to the life and teachings of the 13th-century Sufi and poet Jalaluddin Rumi. Rumi is here portrayed as a universal polymath who foreshadows both Turkish nationalism and the secular values of post-Enlightenment modernity, an ironic configuration in a country where the practice of Sufism has been illegal since 1925.[25] The Foreign Trade Association of the City of Bokhara has also released "The Beaming One," a film on the famous 14th-century saint, Baha'uddin Naqshband. The commercial slant of this film, evidently aimed at encouraging pilgrimage to Uzbekistan from South Asia and Turkey, reveals the curious indecisiveness of post-Soviet societies striving to recapture an Islamic identity; at a loss to explain the mystical charisma of the saint, the narrator ends by comparing him to Gandhi and Tolstoy.[26] Like the occasions when official television broadcasts the ceremonies at annual festivals held at saints' shrines, these official films show a clumsy approach in attempting to manipulate the symbolism of Sufism for the benefit of the state.

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[25] "Tolerance, dedicated to Mawlana Jalal-Al-Din Rumi," (Landmark Films, 1995).
[26] "The Beaming One" (Ozma Productions, 1993). This latter film should definitely be viewed in conjunction with "Habiba: a Sufi saint from Uzbekistan," a New Age film distributed by Mystic Fire Video (1997) in their "Women of Power" series. While this female healer from Uzbekistan quotes the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, and the Sufi saints, she also makes mysterious references to "the snakes" and to the Goddess, as she leads followers on pilgrimage both to the tomb of Baha'uddin Naqshband and to the tomb of his mother.

ON THE INTERNET

The apparent paradox of publicizing an esoteric tradition is nowhere more apparent than on the Internet, where the open secret of mysticism must be reconfigured in terms of what are basically advertising paradigms. There are today a host of Sufi Web sites that proclaim themselves to interested Internet surfers, offering everything from detailed textual materials online to boutiques of unusual products. Some of these are related to traditional Sufi orders, such as the Nimatollahi, Naqshbandi, Rifa`i, and Chishti orders (see a representative listing of 140 sites 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*). 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 branches of this Sufi tradition have a massive presence that is ramified in a number of parallel but distinct organizations as well as individual Web sites. These sites feature numerous interactive features including discussion groups, travel schedules of leaders, online classes, daily inspirational messages, audio files, and massive collections of links to sites on Sufism and other religions. Discussion groups associated with these sites have free-ranging and sometimes combative debates on topics such as the relationship between Sufism and Islam.

This kind of Web Site may truly be said to constitute a "virtual community," which has been defined as "a self-defined electronic network of interactive communication organized around a shared interest or purpose, although sometimes communication becomes the goal in itself."[27] 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."[28] This new situation constitutes a challenge for groups that were traditionally defined by granting access to esoteric teachings reserved for a spiritual elite. Last year I 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 twentieth-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 Web site where English language publications of the leading masters of the order are offered for sale.

We should not imagine, however, that Internet representation is completely displacing earlier forms of communications and technology. The history of technology

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[27] Castells, I:361.
[28] Ibid., I:336.

indicates that older cultural forms persist alongside newly introduced forms of communication. Well after the introduction of writing, and even after the invention of printing, oral forms of culture have persisted up to the present day. The vast majority of participants in the Sufi tradition in Muslim countries are still from social strata that have very little access to the most modern forms of electronic communication, and many are indeed illiterate. Lower class devotees who attend the festivals of Sufi saints in Egypt and Pakistan are not represented on the Web. The effect of the spread of Internet technologies is likely to be "the reinforcement of the culturally dominant social networks, as well as the increase of their cosmopolitanism and globalization."[29] As might be expected, the authors of Sufi Web sites tend to be members of such cosmopolitan and globalizing classes: either immigrant Sufi leaders establishing new bases in America and Europe, immigrant technocrats who happen to be connected to Sufi lineages, or Euro-American converts to Sufism in one form or other. Outside of America and Europe, the chief locations for hosting Sufi Web sites are predictably in high-tech areas like Australia, South Africa, and Malaysia. In this respect the networks of Sufism in the Internet age differ significantly from the locally centered Sufi networks of the time of Ibn Battuta. Now the diasporas based on international business are linked through electronic communications in multiple locations, although it is still possible for Sufi practitioners to return to sacred sites at key times for face-to-face meetings of master and disciple.

CHANGING FORMS OF COMMUNITY

These new forms of communications technology have introduced a tension into the internal aspect of religious community associated with Sufism. There is, on the one hand, a

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[29] Ibid., I:363.

continued need for personal mediation and interpretation by the Sufi master, and a focus on local shrines, combined with the ritual use of texts. On the other hand, texts are published for external audiences, both as printed books and increasingly on the Internet, as invitations to approach the inner teachings. This constitutes, in effect, a kind of Sufi preaching (*da`wa*) that has a self-consciously public posture far more extensive than in previous generations. But the alternative would be a privatization amounting to complete obscurity. Some Sufi Web Sites are tantalizing advertisements of spiritual authority, using sparing amounts of text, graphics, and occasionally photographs to convey the powerful mediating effect of Sufi masters and lineages; their primary interactive goal is to get the viewer into direct personal contact with the Sufi group. Other sites are comprehensive vehicles for virtual communities, loaded with extensive texts and links, where new forms of personal interaction are carried out and mediated by the technology itself. In contrast to the more limited circulation of print, the Internet makes possible the maintenance of networks in a more fluid fashion over any distance. The possibility of a virtual community facilitated by instant communications gives a new significance to the concept of Uwaysi initiation, by which Sufis could enter into contact with masters removed in time or space. Cyberspace becomes a reflection of the unseen spiritual world, though place and physicality are never abandoned.[30]

The spread of new communications media has also had unforeseen effects in allowing popular culture to trump ideology. Muslims who came to the United States after the liberalization of immigration laws in 1965 have tended to be middle-class technical and medical specialists who gravitated towards reformist and fundamentalist forms of Islam. Their children, who are reaching college age today, have been unexpectedly enchanted by the world music phenomenon, and large numbers of them are discovering Sufism through the

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[30] Letter of Jamiluddin Morris Zahuri, March 19, 2001.

powerful music of Nusrat Fateh `Ali Khan and others. In view of the overwhelming anti-Muslim bias in the news media, the stunning popularity of the Sufi poetry of Rumi is another surprising embrace of a manifestation of Islamic culture -- although, to be sure, Rumi's Muslim identity is frequently underplayed or elided in favor of a universalist spirituality. Nevertheless, despite the anti-Sufi influence of Saudi-financed forms of fundamentalism, there are increasing signs of interest in Sufi devotionalism in American Muslim communities (particularly among those of South Asian origin, about 45% of immigrant Muslims).

Another consequence of the new media is the erosion of textual authority and the social hierarchies associated with religion. The multiple "translations" of poets like Rumi and Hafiz illustrate a very postmodern concept of the poetic text. Almost none of these are by authors conversant with the original language, and while some like Coleman Barks are professional poets who work closely with translators and standard editions, there are "versions" of the Sufi poets that have no discernible relationship with any original text. This form of "Sufism in print" sometimes verges on total fantasy, in which the imagined words of the mystic poet become the protean mirror of desire.[31] It is striking, too, that the gender separation and stratification associated with traditional Muslim societies has been ignored in many new Sufi groups in the West. Not only are some groups actually headed by women, but women also join with men in performing ritual music and dance in public (like the *sema* of the Whirling Dervishes). It would be hard to find any precedent for this in traditional Sufi orders.

In addition, Sufism is no longer just for Muslims. The oldest modern presence of Sufism in Europe and America, dating from the early years of the twentieth century, derives

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[31] See the recent recording, "a gift of love: deepak & friends present music inspired by the love poems of rumi" (tommy boy music RCSD 3078), featuring readings by such celebrities as Deepak Chopra, Goldie Hawn, Madonna, Demi Moore, Rosa Parks, Martin Sheen, and Debra Winger.

from the Indian Sufi master Hazrat Inayat Khan. In view of the anti-Muslim feeling that still dominated the late colonial era, he presented Sufism as a universal form of spirituality beyond any particular religion or creed, despite its acknowledged Islamic roots. Other Sufi teachers who have come to the West, like the Sri Lankan teacher Bawa Muhaiyadeen, have followings comprised of both Muslims and non-Muslims, who dispute the ultimate religious identity of his teachings. While this erosion of Islamic identity fulfills the predictions of anti-Sufi fundamentalists, it is balanced by groups that insist upon Sufism as the true essence of Islam. Sufism has become a contested badge of identity, which is announced, performed, and disputed through all of the new forms of communication.

Sufism is a form of identity that was partially severed from Islam during the traumatic experience of European colonial domination over most of the rest of the world. It has been defined by Orientalists, maligned by fundamentalists, and condemned as irrelevant by modernists. Yet it has proven to be a highly resilient symbolic system that has endured in local contexts even as it has been appropriated by cosmopolitan elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim. In private networks, publications, pop culture, and virtual communities, it may be expected to continue operating for the formation of identity and community in a variety of situations. And it is safe to say that Sufism will continue to be a formidable issue for Islamic identity in the foreseeable future.[32]

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[32] For further reflections on this topic, see my article "Sufism, Islam, and Globalization in the Contemporary World: Methodological Reflections on a Changing Field of Study," presented at the conference on "The role of Sufism and Muslim brotherhoods in contemporary Islam: An alternative to the political Islam?", Edoardo Agnelli Foundation, Turin, Italy, Nov. 19-21, 2002.