

Carl W. Ernst, "Tasawwuf [Sufism]," article for *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard Martin (Macmillan Reference U.S.A., 2003)

**Tasawwuf**, an Arabic term for the process of realizing ethical and spiritual ideals; meaning literally "becoming a Sufi," tasawwuf is generally translated as Sufism.

The etymologies for the term Sufi are various. The primary obvious meaning of the term comes from suf, "wool," the traditional ascetic garment of prophets and saints in the Near East. The term has also been connected to safa', "purity," or safwa, "the chosen ones," emphasizing the psychological dimension of purifying the heart and the role of divine grace in choosing the saintly. Another etymology links Sufi with suffa or bench, referring to a group of poor Muslims contemporaneous with the Prophet Muhammad, known as the People of the Bench, signifying a community of shared poverty. The ideal qualities evoked by these derivations are the key to the concept of tasawwuf as formulated by authors of the tenth century, such as Sulami (d. 1021). While acknowledging that that the term Sufi was not current at the time of the Prophet, Sufi theorists maintained that this specialization in spirituality arose in parallel with other disciplines such as Islamic law and Qur'anic exegesis. But the heart of Sufism, they maintained, lay in the ideal qualities of the Prophet Muhammad and his association with his followers. Definitions of Sufism described ethical and spiritual goals and functioned as teaching tools to open up the possibilities of the soul. In practice, the term Sufi was often reserved for ideal usage, and many other terms described particular spiritual qualities and functions, such as poverty (faqir, darvish), knowledge (alim, arif), mastery (shaykh, pir), etc.

Orientalist scholarship introduced the term Sufism to European languages at the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to that time, European travelers had brought back accounts of exotic religious behavior by Oriental dervishes and fakirs, who were considered important only when their social organization posed a problem for European colonialism. The discovery of Persian Sufi poetry, filled with references to love and wine, allowed Europeans to imagine Sufis as freethinking mystics who had little to do with Islam. The “-ism” formation of the word (originally “Sufi-ism”) reveals that “Sufism” was a part of the Enlightenment catalog of ideologies and belief systems, and frequently it was equated with private mysticism, pantheism, and the doctrine that humanity can become divine. Scholars such as Sir William Jones (d. 1794) and Sir John Malcolm (d. 1833) advanced the thesis that Sufism derived from Hindu yoga, Greek philosophy, or Buddhism. This concept of the non-Islamic character of Sufism has been widely accepted in Euro-American scholarship ever since, despite (or perhaps because of) its disconnection with the Islamic tradition, in which tasawwuf and its social implementations have played a central role. Thus, in terms of its origin, the introduction of the term Sufism into European languages may be regarded as a classic example of Orientalist misinformation, insofar as Sufism was regarded primarily as a radical intellectual doctrine at variance with what was thought of as the sterile monotheism of Islam. Nevertheless, as a word firmly ingrained in the vocabulary of modernity, Sufism can usefully serve as an outsider’s term for a wide range of social, cultural, political, and religious phenomena associated with Sufis, including popular practices and movements that might be in tension with normative definitions of Sufism.

#### Origins and early history.

The Qur’an itself may be taken as a major source of Sufism. The experience of revelation that descended upon the Prophet Muhammad left its mark in numerous passages

testifying to the creative power of God and the cosmic horizons of spiritual experience. God in the Qur'an is described both in terms of overwhelming transcendence and immanent presence. In particular, the ascension (mi`raj) of the Prophet Muhammad to Paradise, as elaborated upon from brief references in the Qur'an (17:1-2, 53:1-18), provided a template for the movement of the soul toward an encounter with the Creator. While it was commonly accepted that the Prophet's ascension was accomplished in the body, for Sufis this opened up the possibility of an internal spiritual ascension. The notion of special knowledge available to particularly favored servants of God, particularly as illustrated in the story of Moses and al-Khidr (Qur'an 18:60-82), provided a model for the relationship between inner knowledge of the soul and outward knowledge of the law. Another major theme adopted by Sufis was the primordial covenant (7:172) between God and humanity, which established the relationship with God that the Sufi disciplines sought to preserve and restore. A broad range of Qur'anic terms for the different faculties of the soul and the emotions furnished a basis for a highly complex mystical psychology.

The earliest figures claimed by the Sufi movement include the Prophet Muhammad and his chief companions; their oaths of allegiance to Muhammad became the model for the master-disciple relationship in Sufism. Muhammad's meditation in a cave on Mount Hira outside Mecca was seen as the basis for Sufi practices of seclusion and retreat. In an extension of the authority of the Prophet as enshrined in hadith accounts, Sufis regarded the model of the Prophet as the basis for spiritual experience as well as legal and ethical norms. While there is debate about the authenticity of much of the classical hadith corpus, many hadith sayings favored by Sufis describe the cosmic authority of Muhammad as the first being created by God, and in many other ways these sayings establish the possibility of imitating divine qualities. Veneration of the Prophet Muhammad, both for his own qualities

and in his role as intercessor for all humanity, became the keynote of Sufi piety as it diffused through Muslim society on a popular basis.

Among the early successors to the Prophet, the later Sufi movement singled out as forerunners ascetics like al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), who was renowned for preaching the vanity of this world and warning of punishment in the next (see **Zuhd**). By the end of the eighth century, small groups of like-minded individuals, particularly in northeastern Iran and in Iraq, had begun to formulate a vocabulary of interior spiritual experience, based in good part on the Qur'an and the emerging Islamic religious sciences. Intensive and protracted prayer (including not only the five obligatory ritual prayers daily, but also five supererogatory ones) and meditation on the meanings of the Qur'an were notable features of early Sufi practice. The sometimes stark asceticism of early Sufis, with its rejection of the corrupt world, came to be tempered by the quest to find God through love. This emphasis on an intimate and even passionate relationship with God is associated particularly with the outstanding early woman Sufi, Rabi'a of Basra (d. 801). Other early Sufis contributed to the development of an extensive psychological analysis of spiritual states, as a natural result of prolonged meditative retreats. Socially speaking, many of the early Sufis came from lower class artisan and craftsman origins. Their piety often included deliberate critique of the excesses of wealth and power generated by the rapid conquests of the early Arab empire. Major early figures in the Sufi movement included Dhu al-Nun of Egypt (d. 859), the ecstatic Abu Yazid al-Bistami in Iran (d. 874), the early metaphysician al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (d.910) in Nishapur, and the sober psychologist and legal scholar Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910).

Although religious criticism of Sufi practices and doctrines started to occur as early as the late ninth century, it is particularly in the case of al-Hallaj (executed in 922) that

tensions between Sufism and the legal establishment became apparent. Although the trial of al-Hallaj was a confusing mix of politics and crypto-Shi`ism, in hagiographical sources it became mythologized as a confrontation between radical mysticism and conservative Islamic law. Sufi writers adapted to this crisis by insisting upon adherence to the norms and disciplines of Islamic religious scholarship, while the same time cultivating an esoteric language and style appropriate to the discussion of subtle interior experiences. Early Sufi writers such as Sarraj (d. 988), Ansari (d. 1089), and Qushayri (d. 1072) emphasized Sufism as the “knowledge of realities,” inseparable from yet far beyond the knowledge of Islamic law and scripture. Many of these writers also declared their loyalties to established legal schools or the Ash`ari school of theology.

The institutional spread of Sufism was accomplished through the “ways” or Sufi orders (see **Tariqa**), which increasingly from the eleventh century offered the prospect of spiritual community organized around charismatic teachers whose authority derived from a lineage going back to the Prophet Muhammad himself. Under the patronage of dynasties like the Seljuks, who also supported religious academies (see **Madrassa**) in their quest for legitimacy, Sufi lodges eventually spread throughout the Middle East, South and Central Asia, North Africa and Spain, and South Eastern Europe. While dedicated membership in Sufi orders remained confined to an elite, mass participation in the reverence for saints at their tombs has been a typical feature in Muslim societies until today.

### Major figures and doctrines

The central role of Sufism in premodern Muslim societies is perhaps best typified by the intellectual career of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111). Having become the foremost theologian at the Nizamiyya academy in Baghdad at a very youthful age, he underwent a

spiritual crisis chronicled in his autobiographical Deliverance from Error. Systematically questioning everything, he interrogated the four chief intellectual options available in his day: dialectical theology, Greco-Arabic philosophy as interpreted by Ibn Sina, Isma`ili esotericism, and Sufism. He regarded theology as a severely limited discipline, and philosophy as tainted by metaphysical arrogance, while the Isma`ilis were dismissed as authoritarians with a fallacious understanding of religion and morality. This left the Sufis as the only custodians of knowledge that transcends the limits of reason; Ghazali's conclusion was that Sufism, properly understood, was the surest guide to the spiritual ideals deriving from the Qur'an and Prophet. While Ghazali programmatically separated Sufism from theology, philosophy, and Shi`ism, in fact the subsequent history of Sufism could not be separated from these three streams of Islamic thought. Ghazali assumed that Sufis would be based in an authentic tradition of Islamic law, and it was in fact normal for Sufis to profess whichever school of law was current in their region (Hanafi in South and Central Asia and the Ottoman lands, Shafi`i in Persia and the eastern Mediterranean, Maliki in North Africa and Spain, and Hanbali sporadically in Khurasan and Egypt). Ghazali's massive synthesis, Giving Life to the Sciences of Religion, connected basic Islamic ritual and religious texts and practices with the interiorization of Sufi piety in a way that was accessible to Muslim intellectuals trained in the madrasa legal tradition. The intellectual integration of Sufism with the Islamic religious sciences typified many Muslim societies up to the age of European colonialism. In other writings, Ghazali was also critical of antinomian tendencies and unconventional practices found in Sufi circles. These deliberately nonconformist trends were also inevitably a part of the Sufi ambience.

The pervasive role of Sufism is demonstrated by countless biographical works in Arabic, Persian, and other languages, recounting the virtues and exemplary religious lives of

the Sufi saints. Many of these biographical traditions about Sufis are also enmeshed in the history of Islamic religious scholarship and dynastic political history. Although it is difficult to select a handful of representative figures out of the innumerable possibilities, it would be impossible to leave out the great Andalusian Sufi, Ibn `Arabi (d. 1240). Perhaps more than any other, Ibn `Arabi illustrated the fusion of ethical and psychological mysticism with powerful metaphysical analysis, all in the context of Islamic law and the Qur'an. His teachings on human perfection, the manifestation of divine attributes in creation, the divine names, imagination, and the nature of existence, were expressed through a series of difficult but extremely popular Arabic writings, including the voluminous encyclopedia *The Meccan Openings*, and the succinct treatise on prophecy and mysticism, *Bezels of Wisdom*. The latter work has attracted over 100 commentaries, in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, in countries ranging from the Balkans to South Asia. Ibn `Arabi also elaborated upon the doctrine of sainthood, which in Islamic contexts derives from authority and intimacy conferred by God rather than from sanctity as recognized in official Christian doctrines of sainthood. In particular, Ibn `Arabi described in detail the invisible hierarchy of saints who control the destiny of the world; he also expressed, sometimes in enigmatic code, his own role as one of the chief figures of this hierarchy.

Although polemical opponents as well as modern scholars have criticized Ibn `Arabi for identifying God with creation and nullifying Islamic law, works of recent scholars like Chodkiewicz and Chittick have demonstrated both Ibn `Arabi's metaphysical complexity and his strong engagement with the shari`a. The phrase most commonly used to describe the teachings of Ibn `Arabi, "oneness of existence" (*wahdat al-wujud*), never occurs in his writings; it vastly oversimplifies his doctrines, which are better described as demonstrating the dialectical tension between the different modes of existence in terms of divine attributes.

Nevertheless, there have been many critiques directed at Ibn `Arabi over the centuries, accusing him of flagrant heresy. Ironically, the best-known of his critics, the Hanbali legal scholar and controversialist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), was himself a Sufi and a member of the Qadiri order.

Another major Sufi figure was the great Persian poet, Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273). Trained as a theologian with a Sufi background, Rumi unleashed his spiritual talent after encountering the enigmatic dervish Shams-i Tabriz. His collection of lyrical poems, named after Shams, is the largest body of such poetry by any Persian poet of the last millennium. His great poetic epic, *Masnawi-i ma`navi* (Spiritual Couplets), is a vast repository of Sufi teaching through stories and images. The Sufi order established by his descendents in Anatolia, known as the Mevleviyya, have become famous to foreign observers as the “whirling dervishes,” due to their characteristic turning meditative dance. Rumi’s writings, which have been immensely popular from Southeast Europe to India, portrayed divine beauty and mercy through unforgettable and vivid imagery, easily memorized and popularized in musical performance. Today Rumi’s poetry enjoys a new vogue in English translation by American poets Robert Bly and Coleman Barks.

Despite Ghazali’s earlier objections to philosophy, Sufi teachings in their metaphysical form overlapped with both the terminology and the doctrines of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy as interpreted in the Arabic tradition. Although Sufis aimed at a knowledge that transcended intellect, it was inevitable that philosophical categories would be used to put Sufism into cosmological and metaphysical perspective. Figures such as Shihab al-Din Yahya al-Suhrawardi (executed in 1191) combined a critical revision of the metaphysics, logic, and psychology of Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037) with an identification of being as light. His “Illuminationist” (*ishraqi*) philosophy, expressed both in logical treatises

and in Platonic fables in Arabic and Persian, drew upon Sufi mystical experience as an important source of knowledge. Although Ibn `Arabi was not a philosopher, and Suhrawardi was not really a Sufi, the shared quest for understanding the relationship between God and the world allowed Sufism and philosophy both to play roles in the intellectual tradition of later Muslim societies.

Likewise, although Ghazali had made clear his objections to Shi`ism in its Isma`ili form, it is also apparent that Sufism cannot be separated from Shi`ism either. The recognition of the Shi`i imams as spiritual leaders possessing authority and intimacy with God (*walaya*) is closely related to the rise of the spiritual master and the concept of sainthood in early Sufism. Sufi lineages either include `Ali or some of the later imams in their spiritual genealogies, and the imams of Twelver Shi`ism are deeply revered in Sufi circles. While the majority of Sufi scholars have been affiliated with Sunni legal schools, some Sufi orders (Ni`matollahi, Khaksar) have had a Twelver Shi`i orientation. Certainly there have been Shi`i theologians who have rejected the claims of Sunni saints, and the Safavid dynasty suppressed organized Sufism in Iran after seizing power in the early sixteenth century and making Shi`ism the state religion. As a result, formal Sufi orders in Iran have had a precarious existence or even gone underground under threat from militant Shi`ism. Nevertheless, philosophical Sufism (*irfan*) has remained an important aspect of the advanced curriculum in Iran. Philosophers of the Safavid period, such as Mulla Sadra (d. 1640), drew upon Ibn Sina, Ibn `Arabi, Suhrawardi, as well as Sufi and Shi`i themes.

Ranging further afield, Sufi theorists in India and China to some extent adopted aspects of those cultures. Sufis in India were aware of yogic practices, including breath control and other psychophysical techniques. Knowledge of hatha yoga was disseminated through a single text known as The Pearl of Nectar (Amrtakunda), which was translated into

Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu with a heavy dose of Islamizing tendencies. Sufi masters of the Chishti and Shattari orders adopted certain yogic meditations into their repertoire through this channel. Similarly, when the Chinese Sufi Wang Daiyu (d. 1658) translated Persian Sufi works by Jami and others into classical Chinese, he employed a neo-Confucian vocabulary and cosmology that made the works virtually indistinguishable from the productions of Chinese literati.

Alongside these main currents of Sufi thought, one can also distinguish a kind of anti-structure in a series of movements that were deliberately unconventional. Psychologically the mood was set in the concept of self-blame (malama), which called for incurring shame before the public as a discipline for the ego. While the early self-blamers among the Sufis were not supposed to infringe on religiously forbidden territory, the dropout dervishes of the Qalandar movements (including Abdals, Haydaris, Malangs, and Madaris) rejected institutional Sufism as a betrayal of independent spirituality. Shunning respectability, maintaining a bizarre appearance, and indulging in intoxicants, these eccentrics led civil disturbances in Delhi and even organized peasant rebellions against Ottoman rulers. They still may be seen on the fringes of Muslim societies as a kind of spiritual underground.

### Practices

Aside from the obligatory daily prayers and supererogatory ones, the most important Sufi practice is undoubtedly the recollection of God (dhikr) by recitation of Arabic names of God as found in the Qur'an. This recitation, which could be either silent or spoken aloud, typically drew from lists of ninety-nine names of God (it being understood that the one-hundredth name was "the greatest name" of God, known only to the elect). As with the supererogatory prayers, dhikr aimed at interiorizing the Qur'an and its contents, in order to

obtain closeness to God. As meditations, these practices aimed to empty the heart of anything but God and to begin to establish the qualities of the divine in the human being. Treatises like *The Key to Salvation* by Ibn `Ata' Allah of Alexandria (d. 1309) described in detail the psychological and existential results to be obtained from multiple repetitions of particular names of God. The parallelism between repetition of the divine names and Islamic theology is significant; in Ash`ari theology, the divine names are the attributes of God, and are the faculties through which the divine essence interacts with the created world. Recitation of the divine names thus reinforced the Islamic cosmology of Sufism. The mystical psychology that accompanied these practices articulated different levels of the heart and soul, which are further differentiated in terms of multiple spiritual states (*ahwal*) and stations (*maqamat*) that have been charted out in varying degrees of detail.

While dhikr recitation may originally have been restricted to adepts undertaking retreat from the world, as a kind of group chanting this practice can also be accessible to people on a broad popular scale. Simple chanting of phrases like “there is no god but God” (*la ilaha illa allah*) did not only express the fundamental negation and affirmation of Islamic theology, but also made it possible for a wider public to adopt the practices of Sufism. One of the advantages of dhikr was that it could be practiced by anyone, regardless of age, sex, or ritual purity, at any time. Under the direction of a master, Sufi disciples typically are instructed to recite dhikr formulas selected in accordance with the needs of the individual, based on the different qualities of particular divine names.

The tombs of Sufi leaders, especially those associated with major orders, played especially important role in the public development of Sufism. On a popular level, these tombs were commonly connected to lodges or hospices maintaining open kitchens where all visitors were welcome. Major festivals were held not only for standard Islamic holidays but

also in particular for dates honoring the Prophet Muhammad and the Sufi saints. While the birthday of the Prophet was a popular observance in many places, the death-anniversary of the saint that was also a focus of attention. The practice of pilgrimage (*ziyara*) to the tombs of saints was generally considered to be beneficial, but was especially valued at the anniversary of the moment when the saint was joined with God; all this assumes the saint's ability to intercede with God on behalf of pilgrims. At major shrines like Tanta in Egypt, or Ajmer in India, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims may congregate for days at the annual festival, with many distinctive local rituals and performances. Over the past two centuries, with the rise of the Wahhabis in Arabia and kindred Salafi reform movements elsewhere, there has been extensive criticism of pilgrimage to tombs and the notion of saintly intercession, all of which is considered to be sheer idolatry. Although in Saudi Arabia the tomb of practically every Sufi saint and family member of the Prophet has been destroyed, elsewhere pilgrimage to saints' tombs continues to be popular.

Another widely encountered form of Sufi practice is music and poetry, which take on different regional forms in accordance with local traditions. Although conservative Islamic legal tradition has been wary of musical instruments as innovations not present during the time of the Prophet, the rich and sophisticated musical traditions of Iran, India, Andalusia, and Turkey have furnished irresistible and highly developed forms for the communication of Sufi teachings, particularly when combined with poetry. Sufis in fact speak mostly of "listening" (*sama*), emphasizing the spiritual role of the listener far more than that of the musical performer, and the focus is upon the words of poems that may or may not be accompanied by musical instruments. Early Sufi poetry in Arabic in Persian is frequently indistinguishable in form and content from secular love and wine poetry emanating from the courts. The difference is that Sufi listeners would refer libertine images and daring

expressions to the passionate relationship with God or the Sufi master. Leading Sufi poets like the Egyptian Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235) made mystical verse into an art form of great density and subtlety; for centuries, pilgrims to his shrine recited his poems at his annual festival. In Persian, multiple genres ranging from the quatrain (rubāʿī) to the lyric (ghazal) and the ode (qasida), along with epic couplet (masnavi), were cultivated by poets in Sufi lodges as well as by court poets with Sufi leanings. Particularly famous poets in Persian include Rumi, ʿAttar (d. 1220), Hafiz (d. 1389), and Jami (d. 1492).

Poetic literature developed in many regional languages, sometimes using language and themes derived from Arabic and Persian models, but frequently employing rhyme, meter, and subject matter of local origin. The Indian subcontinent offered many local languages to Sufi poets, who freely explored the resources of Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, and Kashmiri. Writers like the Chishti poet Muhammad Jayasi (d. 1542) used Hindu figures from Rajput epics to convey Sufi themes. Turkish became a vehicle both in the simple verse of Yunus Emre (d. 1321) and in the sophisticated Ottoman poetry of figures like Shaykh Ghalib (d. 1799). Other major languages employed by Sufi include Malay, Swahili, Berber, and Hausa.

### Contemporary manifestations and situation

The changes wrought by European colonial expansion in Asia and Africa, and by globalization in the postcolonial period, have had major effects on Muslim societies. The overthrow of local elites by foreign invaders removed traditional sources of patronage for Sufi orders and shrines. Under the suspicious eyes of European colonial administrators, hereditary administrators of Sufi shrines in India became integrated into landholding classes, while the extended networks of Sufi orders furnished some of the only centers of resistance

against European military aggression, as in the Caucasus, North Africa, and Central Asia.

Sufi responses to colonialism thus ranged from accommodation to confrontation. As with traditional religious scholars, so too for Sufis it was necessary to come to terms with new roles dictated by the technological and ideological transformations of modernity.

One of the first notable features of modern capitalism and technology introduced into Muslim countries by colonial regimes in the nineteenth century was Arabic script printing, whether in movable type or lithography. Printing, along with the expansion of literacy by colonial regimes, not only facilitated the workings of administration for the government, but also permitted the dissemination of formal religious knowledge among Muslims on a scale never before attempted. On one hand, the replacement of manuscript culture with identical printed books doubtless encouraged the scriptural authoritarianism that arose with Salafi reform movements. On the other hand, Sufi orders, with their large guaranteed markets, were major patrons of printing. The spread of previously esoteric Sufi texts to a broad reading public amounted to a publication of the secret. Postcolonial governments, modern universities, and academic societies also sponsored the printing of books related to Sufism. Parallel with the printing phenomenon is the rise of audio recordings of Sufi music distributed on global scale, initially for ethnomusicological audiences, but more recently for popular world music and fusion recordings. Major recording artists with Sufi connections include Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Senegalese musician Youssou N'Dour.

As Sufism became publicized on global scale, likewise major ideological shifts occurred in Muslim countries, through which the term Islam increasingly became a symbol of anticolonial identity. Salafi reform movements, often described as fundamentalist, opposed Sufism as a non-Islamic innovation based on idolatrous worship of saints. Just as

European Orientalists detached Sufism from Islam, now Muslim fundamentalists came to the same conclusion. Sufism has now become a position to be defended or criticized in terms of ideological constructions of Islam. In the most recent forms of representation of Sufism, Internet advertising paradigms and polemics have become the norm. Transnational Sufi movements, with the help of technically educated members in Europe, North America, or South Africa, maintain websites both for informing the public and for maintaining connections for a virtual community. Some Sufi websites also engage in extensive polemics against fundamentalists, who are often dismissed with labels such as Najdi (Wahhabi).

Through encounters with colonial missionaries and through migration to Europe and America, Sufis have become engaged with non-Islamic religious traditions in various ways. Some Sufi teachers, such as Hazrat Inayat Khan (d. 1927), decided to present Sufism to Europeans and Americans as a universal mystical teaching with no essential connection to Islam. The traditional Sufi emphasis on universality provided a conceptual basis for this ecumenism, although non-Muslim membership in Sufi orders had been decidedly rare prior to the twentieth century. Now there are significant numbers of self-professed Sufis in Europe and America who do not consider themselves Muslims. At the same time, other Sufi movements from Iran, Turkey, and West Africa include varying degrees of emphasis on Islamic identity and traditional custom. The relationship between Sufism and Islam is thus debated and contested both in its traditional homelands and in its new locations.

Another recent shift of emphasis in Sufism concerns women's public participation in Sufi activities and what may be called feminist interpretations of Sufism. American women are now trained to perform the Mevlevi turning dance in public ceremonies, and to take on the role of shaykha or female spiritual leader. While such prominence of women was not unknown in traditional Muslim societies, global changes in the roles of women are bringing

women to the fore in Sufi organizations to a remarkable extent, in countries like Turkey and Pakistan as well as in America and Europe.

As with religious matters everywhere, Sufism in the end is governed by the state. The dervish orders in Turkey were outlawed by decree of Kemal Ataturk in 1925 as part of official secularism, and the revival of the Mevlevi "whirling dervish" performance was permitted only on condition that it be a nonreligious activity, destined especially for foreign tourists. Sufi groups in Iran keep a very low profile under the watchful eyes of the Islamic regime. Sufism in the former Soviet republics, like most other religious activities, was practically extinguished under Soviet rule, although some informal networks survived. The Sufi-oriented Darul Arqam movement in Malaysia was banned in 1994 for its political activities. A Lebanese Sufi group of African origin, the Ahbash movement, promotes a program of religious pluralism and peace within the framework of the secular state. Government bureaucracies closely control Sufi shrines in Egypt and Pakistan, both because of the extensive revenue gathered at the shrines and to monitor the large crowds that attend. Despite the vicissitudes of foreign invasion, the collapse of traditional social structures, the imposition of European education and culture, and the rise of the secular nation-state, Sufism in many different local forms persists and survives both among illiterate members of the lower class and among urban elites. Whether defended in traditional languages as part of classical Islamic culture or attacked as a non-Islamic heresy, Sufism still forms part of the symbolic capital of majority Muslim countries. As a form of religious practice spread to Europe and America by transnational migration and through the global marketplace, Sufism is seen both as an eclectic form of New Age spirituality and as the mystical essence of Islam. The globalizing fortunes of Sufism over the past two centuries are one more indication why it is no longer possible to speak meaningfully of a separate Muslim world.

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