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Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam

MARTIN VAN BRUINESSEN

The Islamic resurgence, the onset of which may be traced back to the 1967 Middle East war and which has received a strong impetus from the Iranian revolution, has not only brought a wide range of Islamist and neo-fundamentalist movements into the public sphere of the Muslim world, but also appears to have occasioned a revival of Sufism and related devotional movements. In countries as far apart as Turkey and Indonesia, 'classical' Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandiyya and the Qadiriyya remain influential and appear even to find new adherents in circles that previously appeared highly secularized. Besides, various religious movements that are not Sufi orders in the strict sense but share certain characteristics with them and have distinctive devotional and disciplining practices have been experiencing significant growth. As examples one may mention the Nurcu movement of Turkey, Malaysia's Darul Arqam (surviving despite an official ban), and the Tablighi Jama'at, which is of Indian origin but presently one of the most truly transnational religious movements.

Many individual believers who do not themselves follow a specific spiritual discipline, moreover, have taken an intellectual interest in the mystical tradition of Islam, which they believe to be more open, inclusive and tolerant of difference, and which they contrast favourably with 'fundamentalist' versions of their religion. Discussion circles, journals and books disseminate Sufi ideas to larger audiences than ever before. Sufi groups cover the entire spectrum from the strictly *shari'a*-oriented to the latitudinarian, from Muslim puritan to perennialist. There is no strict boundary separating Sufi groups from New Age-type movements—which raises questions of conceptualization as well as sociological explanation.

These and related issues were discussed at the conference 'Sufism and the 'Modern' in Bogor, Indonesia on 4-6 September 2003. Some of the papers discussed 'classical' Sufi orders in modern contexts: the Naqshbandiyya in Republican Turkey (Brian Silverstein), Pakistan and England (Pnina Werbner), the Khalwatiyya in Mubarak's Egypt (Rachida Chih), the Mouridiyya in Senegal (Leonardo Villalón), the Ne'matollahiyya in post-revolutionary Iran (Matthijs van den Bos), and the Qadiriyya wa'n-Naqshbandiyya in Indonesia (Sri Mulyati, Asep Usman Ismail). Others dealt more specifically with the social, political and economic

The conference 'Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam' was held in Bogor, Indonesia, on 4-6 September 2003 and was a collaborative effort of the ISIM, Griffith University (Brisbane, Australia) and the Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) of Jakarta's State Islamic University. The aim of the conference was to explore current developments in Sufism and related movements over the globe.

roles played by saints and Sufi sheikhs in Gambia (Benjamin Soares) and Indonesia (Martin van Bruinessen), where apparently traditional roles appear to be highly functional in modern contexts. Reformist Sufism was the subject of papers concerning the da'wa of Tablighi Jama'at among the lower-caste Meos in Mewat, North-West India (Yoginder Sikand) and the thought of Sa'id Nursi, the progenitor

of the Nurcu movement (Redha Ameer). That Sufism and puritan reform have not always been such polar opposites as has often been claimed was shown in an analysis of Syrian Naqshbandi and Muslim Brotherhood authors (Itzhak Weismann). Contemporary Sufi and Salafi journals in Indonesia (analyzed by Michael Laffan) have indubitably different concerns but ignore rather than oppose one another. From Casablanca to Jakarta, it is among the highly educated that we find an eager interest in 'spiritual' matters that may accommodate Sufism with other religious traditions and disciplines such as Zen and yoga in the Moroccan case (Patrick Haenni on Morocco), *kebatinan*, perennialism and New Age in Jakarta (Julia Howell, Ahmad Syafi'i Mufid and Adlin Sila). The relationship of Sufi movements with the state is in theory problematical, but surprising accommodations occur. Neither the secular Republic of Turkey nor the Islamic Republic of Iran look favourably upon Sufism, but in both countries Sufi orders have found ways to accommodate with the state. In Turkey, where all orders are formally banned, Naqshbandis have remained influential by transforming their organization (from *tarikats* to *cemaats* and *vakifs*) and practices (from traditional *merles* to seminar). The relationship between Sufi orders and the Islamic regime has been complicated but never overtly antagonistic. Elsewhere, Sufis have often been close to the centres of economic and political power. The highest-ranking official ulama of Egypt, as shown by Rachida Chih, tend to be affiliated with the Khalwatiyya order. Living saints, from Indonesia to Senegal and Gambia, are favourite companions of the rich and powerful and have considerable influence in the political process.

The 'classical' orders had always been transnational in the sense that their networks spread across language and state boundaries. Many Sufi teachers attracted disciples from places far apart, who later established branches of the master's order in their regions of origin. However, direct contact and communication between different clusters in these networks were rare. The massive movement of people across state boundaries and the emergence of new diasporas have resulted in new patterns of transnational relations. Perhaps the most spectacular example is that of the Mouride movement, which besides being a major factor in the political and economic life of Senegal is at the same time a remarkably successful network of émigré communities all over the world, in which trade and religious practices are intimately connected. Although spread across Europe and North America, the network consists exclusively of Senegalese Mourides. In this respect, it is similar to the networks of South Asian Naqshbandis in Manchester studied by Pnina Werbner, which remain Urdu-speaking and oriented towards Pakistan (mostly Punjab and NWFP). Somewhat similar, both the Malaysian Darul Arqam movement and the Indonesian sheikh Abah Anom's Qadiriyya wa'n-Naqshbandiyya successfully expanded across state borders but never beyond Malay-speaking communities. The Tablighi Jama'at and Sheikh Nazim's Haqqaniyya Naqshbandiyya have become have gone a step further in shedding their vernacular roots and drawing followers of highly diverse origins. These global movements find their counterparts in others, especially prominent in Indonesia, that celebrate their local character.

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