Islamic Mysticism and Neo-Sufism

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Following on Professor Boaz Huss's essay on "The New Age of Kabbalah: Kabbalah and its Contemporary Manifestations," this essay surveys Islamic Mysticism and Neo-Sufism. It does not quite parallel the essay of Professor Huss, as it does not discuss all the contemporary manifestations of Sufism, of which there are very many. Neo-Sufism is one form of modern Sufism, distinguished by being transregional, eclectic and hybrid. I will start with a discussion of the possible meanings of the term *mysticism* in an Islamic context, and then move on to a discussion of classic Islamic Sufism. These two parts of this essay will serve as the basis for the third part, in which Neo-Sufism itself is discussed, looking at its origins, its development, and its current forms.

1. The possible meanings of the term *mysticism* in an Islamic context

"Mysticism" is not, of course, an Islamic term. The complex of ideas and practices indicated by the term in non-Islamic contexts are, however, also found in Islam, and I suspect that the mystical experience of Muslims does not differ greatly from that of other human beings. I say that I *suspect* this because, as a scholar, I can never actually *know*. The interior experience of any other human being is hidden from me, and even my own interior experience is not reliable research data. The general view is that we cannot study an experience, but can merely study how that experience is understood, and perhaps how it is produced. That is to say, we can only study related ideas and practices. Despite this, it is dangerous to ignore the mystical experience altogether, because this can suggest that it is all about ideas and practices. In fact, it is about ideas and practices *and* experiences, even if we cannot study the experiences directly

The term "mysticism" has meant many things in Western scholarship, but one of its root meanings, which was current when it was first applied in an Islamic context by French and British scholars in the 1670s and 1680s, is certain varieties of practice aimed at overcoming the separation between the individual soul and God in this existence. In the eighteenth century, this form of mysticism was especially associated with the names of the priest Miguel de Molinos in Italy and of Bishop François Fénelon in France, both of whose doctrines were ultimately condemned by the Catholic Pope. Their theology and philosophy had its roots in a tradition passing back through a fifteenth-century French

monk, Hugh of Balma, to an early Christian theologian, Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite, who was active in the late fifth or early sixth century. One of Dionysius's key texts is *Peri mystikēs theologiasi* (On Mystical Theology). This, like much of Dionysius's work, is very much in the Neoplatonic tradition of Late Antique philosophy: Plotinus and Proclus are here the key names. One way of understanding mysticism, then, is as a development of Late Antique Neoplatonism. There are, of course, also several other ways of understanding mysticism. This is not meant to be an exclusive definition.

Neoplatonism is to be found in early Christianity in Dionysius, and in later Christianity in de Molinos and Fénelon. It is also to be found in Islam. The key Greek texts were translated into Arabic in the ninth century, and their influence on much subsequent Arabic philosophy, both Muslim and Jewish, is very strong. One of the greatest Arab philosophers, Ibn Sina (died 1037), for example, is very much a Neoplatonist. So is Ibn Arabi (died 1240). Ibn Arabi was not a philosopher, although he drew on philosophical thinking and terminology. He was rather a devotional, inspirational writer. He is normally counted as a Sufi. He grew up in much the same place and time as the "Prophetic Kabbalah", which Professor Huss discusses in his essay, had its origin.

The same ideas that seventeenth-century Europeans understood as mysticism, then, are to be found in Islam, and derive ultimately from the same Late Antique sources. The practices, however, are somewhat different. The forms of prayer that de Molinos and Fénelon practiced are not found in Ibn Sina or Ibn Arabi. What is found instead are techniques often involving repetition, similar to those used in the Prophetic Kabbalah. The related experiences may be similar, but this cannot be known.

If we focus on ideas, then, on mysticism as Neoplatonism, we will conclude that mysticism is definitely found in Islam, especially in Sufism. It is, in fact, often said that Sufism is Islamic mysticism, but this is not entirely correct. Sufism *includes* mysticism, but also includes much that is *not* mysticism. And mysticism is also to be found in Islam outside Sufism, especially when we look beyond the Sunni Islam of the majority.

Sufism includes mysticism. Some Sufis read Ibn Arabi. Neoplatonic conceptions of mysticism are found among the earliest Sufis in the ninth and tenth centuries. The theoretical framework of Sufism, its metaphysics and theology, are all Neoplatonic. Those Sufis who concern themselves with such things conceive of the Necessary Being as the ultimate cause of existence, and see this world as an emanation of the Universal Intelligence. They believe that by loosening our attachment to the material world we can allow the soul to return by stages to its origin, there to enjoy the contemplation of God, and perhaps to experience re-union with the soul's ultimate source.

Not all Sufis, however, concern themselves with such abstractions. Although some Sufis read Ibn

Arabi, most do not. In fact, in past centuries, most Sufis probably read nothing at all, as they were illiterate. The only text that such Sufis knew was the sections of the Quran that they had learned by heart. Sufism, then, includes mainstream Islam as well as mysticism. Sufism also includes ascetic practice, which is of course often found in conjunction with mysticism, but which can also exist independently. Sufism further includes sociality: it accommodates the general human need to form groups larger than the family for particular purposes, and to act and socialize within such groups. Finally, Sufism includes the veneration of the dead, a near-universal human religious practice that has no formal place in Islamic theology but, despite this, features in many Muslim societies. Sufis venerate their spiritual ancestors, the saints in the religious lineage of the order to which they belong, as well as other saints. The importance of grave-sites varies somewhat from one part of the Muslim world to another and from one Sufi order to another. In South Asia, the tomb complex is central to much Sufi activity.

The standard characteristics of classical Sufism, then, may be said to be five: mysticism, Islam, asceticism, sociality, and saint veneration.

Just as Sufism includes much that is not mysticism, so mysticism is also to be found outside Sufism. Sufism is both Sunni and Shi'i, but is more important among Sunnis than Shi'is. Among the Shi'i minority, especially in Iran, there is also the *'irfan* tradition, where mystic philosophy is taught independently of the other elements found in Sufism. The great name associated with the Iranian *'irfan* tradition is Mulla Sadra (died 1640). Mysticism is also to be found in the theology of smaller Islamic denominations, notably the Druze and the Nizari Ismailis, who derive ultimately from the Fatimid empire of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Fatimids were probably Islam's most esoteric and mystical dynasty. It has been argued that there are actually four religions in the Middle East, not just the commonly recognized three of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, but those three plus Gnostic Neoplatonism. Although none of the Middle East's smaller minority religions self-identify as Gnostic Neoplatonism, there is some merit in this view. Gnosticism and Neoplatonism are, in practice, closely related.

Islamic mysticism, then, is not just Sufism, and Sufism is not just mysticism. But Sufism is certainly the largest and most important form of institutionalized mysticism in Islam.

2. Classic Islamic Sufism

Classic Islamic Sufism became visible for the first time in the ninth century, initially in the areas that are today Iraq and Iran, from where Sufi orders spread across the Muslim world. Indeed, Islam

was brought to many areas, notably South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, by Sufi preachers, often traveling as merchants. The only parts of the Muslim world where Sufi orders are not found today, that is in and around Saudi Arabia, are parts from where Sufism has been deliberately excluded by hostile states over the last century.

Since its spread, Sufism has taken many different forms under different circumstances. Sultans and scholars have been Sufis, and so have bakers and peasants. Sufi orders have grown in great cities, and in small villages. Towns have grown up around the tombs of Sufi saints. Some Sufi orders have been incorporated into the Janissary regiments of the Ottoman army, while others have been companies of merchants, or roaming bands of beggars. Sufis have produced fine poetry in Arabic and Persian. The music of the Mevlevi order was one of the peaks of Ottoman imperial culture. Sufis have occasionally led rebellions, sometimes successfully, becoming kings. Most, however, have been ordinary Muslim believers, living ordinary lives.

Classical Sufism, then, was a very widespread phenomenon, well integrated into Muslim society. It was, however, also often controversial. Some individual Sufis and some Sufi orders ignored aspects of the Sharia, the code by which pious Muslims live. Sufi poetry, with its images of love and intoxication, was often risqué, and could appear scandalous. There were concerns about the mixing of the sexes at the festivals held to mark saints' anniversaries. Some Sufi practices, and some Sufi theology, seemed to have little justification in the Quran and *hadith*, the canonized texts of Islam. The veneration of Sufi saints and living Sufi masters looked to some like the worship of beings other than God, which Islam very specifically prohibits.

Initially, these were the concerns of a minority. Sufism was part of the religious establishment and close to the political establishment, and challenges to Sufism were also challenges to the establishment. In the early fourteenth century, one of the most outspoken early critics of the Sufis, Ibn Taymiyya (died 1328), ended up in jail in Damascus for his pains, deprived of writing instruments. During the nineteenth century, however, those Muslim states that had escaped occupation by European powers launched reform programs comparable to Japan's Meiji Restoration in an attempt to maintain their place in the world. The religious establishment was irretrievably weakened by these reform programs, and the concerns and values of the political establishment shifted. Sufism seemed inextricably associated with the old order, a superstitious relic of ignorance, an obstacle to progress, rather as the Kabbalah seemed to the Jewish reformers of the Haskala, as Prof. Huss reminds us. Its critics were now generally welcomed by the new establishment. Progressive lawyers with degrees from French universities had little understanding of, or sympathy with, its ideas or worldview. If anything, they were more inclined to pay attention to the scripturally-based criticisms of religious revivalists such

as the Wahhabis in the Arabian peninsular. By 1950, Sufism in the Muslim world was a shadow of its former self, ignored or actively undermined by new state elites and their religious establishments, and attacked by religious reformers. It was found increasingly in poor and rural circumstances. Western scholars awaited its final demise, defeated by modernity.

Modernity, however, turned out to be more complicated than was thought in 1950. As the Iranian Revolution clearly showed, Islam was not being rationalized into insignificance. The resurgence of Islam, initially most visible in politics, soon became visible also in society. Somewhat unevenly from country to country, personal religious practice became more careful, and public piety became the new norm. Some Sufi orders began to expand again, sometimes in classic form and sometimes in new forms. Perhaps the most successful of all orders that kept close to classic forms was the Boutchichiyya (Budshishiyya) in Morocco, which today has a major presence. The Boutchichiyya is courted by the Moroccan state partly as an alternative to the political Islam and Salafism that the state sees as its major enemy, but also because it is too big and influential to be ignored. The Gülen movement in Turkey, in contrast, does not at first sight seem to be a Sufi order, but is understood by some as a repackaging of Sufism in new forms. This point can be argued, but there is definitely something to it. The Gülen movement has become so big and influential that it seems to have come to challenge the Turkish government and state, leading to a large, if partly hidden, conflict that it currently seems to be losing.

The Boutchichiyya and the Gülen movement are both examples of modern Sufism. The Boutchichiyya is modern because, although in many ways hard to distinguish from a major Sufi order of 1750, its senior ranks contain too many French-speaking former socialist intellectuals, too many holders of PhDs from Western universities, and too many yoga practitioners, and its structures are too complex. It displays, however, all five standard characteristics of classical Sufism: mysticism, Islam, asceticism, sociality, and saint veneration. The Gülen movement is modern because its repackaging of classic Sufism is so general that it is not obvious that it is even really a Sufi order any longer. Like the Boutchichiyya, however, it too displays all five standard characteristics of classical Sufism, though saint veneration is somewhat less emphasized.

3. Neo-Sufism

Neither the Boutchichiyya nor the Gülen movement are really comparable to the eclectic, syncretic, and hybrid contemporary Kabbalah that Professor Huss discusses. What is comparable is Neo-Sufism, which differs from other forms of modern Sufism in that it is inherently transregional, eclectic

and hybrid. The slow merging of formerly separate regional systems into one single global system is one of the most significant dynamics of recent centuries, and is one major driver of modernity. The regional system of the Muslim world was of course never totally independent of other regional systems. It drew on the Late Antique world for its philosophy, as we have seen, and it traded with both China and Europe, coming to make its own paper after Chinese models and its own firearms after European models. Contacts *within* the Muslim world were, however, very much more frequent, intense, and important than contacts with other regional systems. During the nineteenth century, this changed. From the perspective of Cairo, Paris and London replaced Istanbul and Fez as points of reference. Small transregional spaces opened up. One such space, the Islamo-Western, was inhabited by Muslims who knew French or English and had spent time in Paris or London. A parallel space, the Western-Islamic, was inhabited by Westerners who knew Arabic, Ottoman or Persian and had spent time in Cairo, Istanbul, or Bombay. Later, as the cost of travel dropped dramatically during the second half of the twentieth century, these original transregional spaces became much larger. Today there are estimated to be some 450,000 Egyptian Americans, and around 3,000,000 Turkish Germans. Inhabitants of nineteenth-century transregional spaces, in contrast, numbered in the hundreds, or perhaps the low thousands.

Transregionalism is an interesting phenomenon as a driver of modernity. It is also interesting in the case of Neo-Sufism because the transregional is necessarily eclectic and hybrid, since the relevant regions are defined culturally and religiously. I follow standard usage by referring to them as the Western and Muslim worlds, but in fact "Western" really means Latin Christian. What we now call "West" corresponds closely to the region where the Latin language and Church were once dominant, plus the overseas territories of that region. This was a region dominated by Christianity, though some Jews were also present.

Historically, the first transregional space to develop neo-Sufism was the Western-Islamic space inhabited by Westerners who knew Persian and had spent time in India. What developed in this space during the late eighteenth century was an understanding of Sufism as a form of perennial religion. The idea that mankind has a single original, perennial or primordial religion is a very old one. A form of it exists in the three major monotheistic religions, all of which find their origin in the first man, Adam, and see themselves as the continuation of the earliest human religion. The conception of the perennial religion, however, differs from this in that the perennial religion is seen as a secret, separate from these well-known monotheistic religions. Some early European versions of perennialism emphasized chains of transmission within Judeo-Christian mythology, for example starting with the sons of Noah after the flood and passing through the Knights Templar to the present, or through the

medium of the Kabbalah, as Professor Huss reminds us. Other versions, especially popular during the Renaissance, emphasized writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, thought to have survived from pagan antiquity. Still other versions, especially popular among British scholar-officials in Bengal during the late eighteenth century, sought to bring the religions of India into a unified scheme. These efforts were the direct ancestors of today's respectable academic discipline of the History of Religions. The great name here is that of Sir William Jones (died 1794), who is also generally credited with founding the science of Comparative Linguistics. These early scholars sometimes made path-breaking discoveries, as when Jones identified the Indo-European language family, but sometimes got things wrong, as when Jones identified the origins of the Japanese in "Hindus of the martial class."

Jones wrote relatively little on Sufism, but his view of it, expressed in 1789, was nevertheless influential, in two respects. Firstly, he saw Sufism as perennial religion, as survival of the "primeval religion" of Iran, developed by Persians and Hindus, and transmitted to ancient Greece. Secondly, he saw the essence of Sufism as a pared-down monotheism almost identical to the religious system then known in England as Theism. Theists, who included Jones's father's friend Sir Isaac Newton, believed in one God as creator, but did not accord much importance to the details of Christian mythology, including Jesus. They believed in the importance of love of God, but not especially in the details of Christian ritual. Finally, they emphasized the importance of "a fraternal affection for the whole human species." This seems to have been the personal creed of Jones himself.

Theism was given scope for development by globalization, as increasing knowledge of non-Western cultures and histories helped Theists such as Jones to theorize a wider History of Religions that went beyond the narrow limits of Christianity. It was also, however, a response to globalization, as increasing knowledge of non-Western cultures and histories was, along with advances in the natural sciences, an important factor in leading Western intellectuals to doubt previously accepted narratives. Jones' understanding of Sufism, then, was a consequence of globalization in two different ways.

The picture of Sufism given by Jones in 1789 was developed and deepened by other English scholar-officials in India over the following forty years. The consensus that resulted was that Sufism was only accidentally associated with Islam, and was in fact a survival of the perennial religion, of very ancient origin, perhaps in pre-Islamic Iran. Sufis were thought to pretend to follow Muslim practices so as to avoid difficulties, but in fact to follow a variety of Theistic mysticism, aiming at the Divine essence, not concerned with dogmas, superstitions, and rituals. This view of Sufism became quite general in the West during the nineteenth century, further encouraged by the publication of

translations of Sufi poetry, which, as has already been mentioned, is often risqué, and may not appear particularly Islamic. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, scholars using methods similar to those we use today began to correct this picture, but the Neo-Sufi views of Jones and his colleagues proved more influential for the general public. These were the views of Sufism that were accepted in the late nineteenth-century alternative religious milieu that grew up around the Theosophical Society of Helena Blavatsky (died 1891). The Theosophical Society was, of course, the focus for the development of so much subsequent alternative religiosity.

The view of Sufism that started with Jones and ended with Blavatsky was a view, not a practice. For over a century after 1789, there were no Neo-Sufi groups in the West. Then, in 1911, the first such group was established in Paris by a Swedish-French painter who had spent time in Egypt, Ivan Aguéli. Aguéli was active in the avant-garde Parisian milieu of the time, where surrealist artists mixed with occultists, Theosophists, anarchists, feminists and proponents of animal rights. Then, in the new Europe that emerged after the First World War, other Neo-Sufi groups were set up. In 1918, a German who had spent time in Turkey, Rudolf von Sebottendorf, established a Sufi-inspired group in Munich. In the 1920s, an Indian musician who had spent time in America, Inayat Khan, established a so-called "Sufi Movement" in London. In 1922, a Greek-Armenian-Russian religious teacher, George Gurdjieff, established a partly Sufi-inspired group in Paris. Finally, in 1934, a German-Swiss commercial artist who had spent time in Algeria, Frithjof Schuon, established a Sufi order in Basel, Switzerland.

Most of these Neo-Sufi pioneers were inhabitants of Western-Islamic transregional space. Khan, in contrast, was an inhabitant of Islamo-Western space. His understanding of Sufism, however, derives from the Western-Islamic space, probably from contacts and reading in New York before the First World War. Gurdjieff, in turn, demonstrates the problem with binary systems of analysis. His native Russian Armenia does not fit into either the Islamic or the Western region. Though Christian, it was never Latin.

These early Neo-Sufi groups were very diverse. Aguéli's group did not survive long enough to develop a clear profile, but probably mixed Sufism with French esotericism. One of its members, the French writer René Guénon, later developed a distinctive view of perennial religion and temporal cycles that drew heavily on Neo-Hindusim. Guénon, however, moved from Paris to Cairo, where he lived as a Sufi. His writings remain very influential today. Aguéli's group, then, had only one of the five standard characteristics of classical Sufism: mysticism. To this Guénon added Islam.

Von Sebottendorf quickly lost control of his group, which is remembered not because of Neo-Sufism, but because one of its members founded what became the Nazi Party. The only characteristics

of classical Sufism of which there are any trace in his group are mysticism and perhaps sociality.

Inayat Khan's Sufi Movement became increasingly Theosophical in its emphasis, with the Islamic elements that had been present at the start becoming less and less important. By the time of Inayat Khan's early death in 1927, the only standard characteristic of classical Sufism that remained was sociality, perhaps with some small degree of mysticism. The Sufi Movement spread widely during the interwar period, supported by wealthy followers in the Netherlands. By the start of the Second World War, it had followers in the Netherlands, France, England, and the United States, and a small presence in several other countries. It remains in existence today.

Gurdjieff's group, which became known as the Fourth Way, used Sufism primarily as legitimization and inspiration. Most of the Fourth Way has other origins. The Fourth Way, however, does display three of the standard characteristics of classical Sufism: a form of mysticism, asceticism, and sociality. By the start of the Second World War, the Fourth Way was established especially in France, England and the United States. It, too, remains in existence today.

Finally, Schuon's order, which became known as the Maryamiyya, drew primarily on Guénon for its theology, but was close to classical Sufism in its practice. It displayed all five standard characteristics of classical Sufism: mysticism, Islam, asceticism, sociality, and saint veneration. Islam was understood within the framework of Guénon's thought, as a means to an end rather than an end in itself, but was still present. The saints who were venerated were Schuon himself and, unusually for a Muslim group, the Virgin Mary. By the start of the Second World War the Maryamiyya was established in France as well as Switzerland. It, too, remains in existence today.

At the start of the Second World War, then, Neo-Sufism was a small but well established hybrid phenomenon, with origins mainly in the Western-Islamic transregional space. Its understanding of Sufism derived ultimately from Jones in 1789, and included other later elements: Theosophical for Khan and the Sufi Movement, theosophical and psychological for Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way, and Guénonian for Schuon and the Maryamiyya. In terms of practice, the Maryamiyya approached the norms of classical Sufism, the Fourth Way drew on Sufi inspiration for its so-called Sacred Dances, and the Sufi Movement drew little from classical Sufism save a few terms.

All these early Neo-Sufi groups survived the Second World War, and expanded during the 1960s and 1970s, as alternative spirituality expanded throughout the West. Most adjusted to the hippy generation, but not all. The Maryamiyya regarded the social revolution of the 1960s and 1970s as yet one more sign of the spiritual and intellectual decline of humanity. At the other extreme, one Californian branch of the Sufi Movement established "Dances of Universal Peace" that rivaled the Hare Krishna Movement for the attention of the hippies of San Francisco.

Neo-Sufism in the 1970s changed in response to the hippy generation, and also in response to the growing importance of Sufi teachers from the Islamo-Western transregional space. It also changed in that the United States became more important. During the interwar period, Neo-Sufi groups generally became established in Europe and then spread to the United States; during the 1970s, the United States was the point of origin of many new Neo-Sufi orders, including the first, established in Philadelphia by a Sri Lankan Tamil, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, in 1971-73. He was followed in 1976 by a Turkish Mevlevi shaykh, Süleyman Loras, and then in 1978 by another Turkish shaykh, this time of the Jerrahi order, Muzaffer Ozak. Meanwhile, Neo-Sufism in Europe was also changed by the arrival of Turkish teachers: Ali Bülent Rauf in 1973, and Muhammad Nazim, a Naqshbandi, in 1974. In 1983 an Iranian shaykh who had had Western followers in Tehran, Javad Nurbaksh, a refugee from the Iranian revolution since 1979, arrived in England.

Most of these Sufis from the Muslim world were initially welcomed by existing Neo-Sufi groups or their offshoots, notably by various branches of the Sufi Movement. Followers of the Fourth Way were also sometimes important facilitators. In many cases, issues then arose over the question of the relationship between Sufism and Islam, and eclecticism reduced somewhat. Ali Bülent Rauf and Javad Nurbaksh in England supported the Neo-Sufi understanding of Sufism as something separate from Islam, but even they ended by partially Islamizing their followings, given that their own ideas and practices were firmly rooted in classic Sufism. The other shaykhs all followed and taught mainstream Islamic norms of behavior, and so ended up with predominantly Muslim followings. No-one was required to convert to Islam to join their orders, but most who joined their orders did, in the end, convert to Islam, sometimes following liberal interpretations, and sometimes following more strict ones. Even so, Neo-Sufi ideas and emphases often remained.

By the late 1980s, then, Neo-Sufism existed in various forms, and had spread to most Western countries, including much of South America. Since then, as mentioned above, transregional spaces have expanded enormously, and the distinction between regions has declined. In the 1920s, it was possible for a Westerner to visit the Muslim world once in a lifetime, but unusual. In the 1970s, it was possible for a Turkish shaykh to fly to New York occasionally, but still unusual. Today, a return air ticket from Germany or the Netherlands to Istanbul costs around €160, a Skype call costs nothing, and much the same TV channels can be watched in Paris as in Casablanca. Many among the large Muslim minorities now found in most Western countries have transregional family and social networks. These conditions and these networks facilitate the spread of many types of Sufi order from the Islamic world into the West. Modern Sufi orders such as the Boutchichiyya and the Gülen movement have a transregional presence, and so do some Sufi orders that would not necessarily be

classified as modern, such as the Mourides of Senegal or various orders based in rural Pakistan. These orders are in all respects classic Sufi orders, and have little in common with the eclectic and hybrid Neo-Sufism that this essay has been addressing. They do, however, inevitably come into some contact with Neo-Sufism in the West, and it will be interesting to see how relations between these new entrants into the transregional Sufi field and older Neo-Sufism develop over coming years.

4. Conclusion

If mysticism is understood in terms of Neoplatonism, it is found in Islam, especially in Sufism, though it is also found outside Sufism, in the Iranian *'irfan* tradition, and among small denominations such as the Nizari Ismailis, the Druze and the Alawis. The existence of mysticism in Islam is explained by the transmission of much the same ideas as those that lie behind it in the West, but it is important not to ignore the mystical experience, even though this is not accessible to standard scholarly methods.

Classical Sufism, with its five standard characteristics of mysticism, Islam, asceticism, sociality, and saint veneration, became very widespread in the Muslim world, and was found amongst rich and poor, educated and uneducated, urban and rural. The Sufi orders suffered, however, from the reform process of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reaching a low point around 1950. Since then, some modern Sufi orders, such as the Boutchichiyya and the Gülen movement, have recovered and expanded. In recent years they have also expanded transregionally into the West, but this is incidental. The form of Sufism that is intrinsically transregional, eclectic and hybrid is Neo-Sufism.

Neo-Sufism's understanding of Sufism originated in eighteenth-century globalization, in Western-Islamic transregional space, most notably in the understanding of Sir William Jones of Sufism as perennial religion and as Theism. This developed into a general understanding in the West of Sufism as perennial mysticism, an understanding that was right in terms of the mysticism but wrong in terms of the perennialism, as Islam is one of the chief characteristics of classical Sufism. It was an understanding that also ignored asceticism, sociality, and saint veneration.

This eighteenth-and nineteenth-century understanding of Sufism was put into practice during the early twentieth century, and lay behind the earliest Neo-Sufi groups, of which the Sufi Movement, the Fourth Way, and the Maryamiyya have survived. These groups, especially the Sufi Movement and the Fourth Way, provided fertile ground in the 1970s for new Neo-Sufi groups, led this time by Sufi shaykhs inhabiting Islamo-Western transregional space. Although some of the resulting groups adhered to the original view of Sufism as perennial rather than Islamic, most taught standard Islamic practice, and so ended up with followings that were, in one way or another, Islamic. The result was

four varieties of Neo-Sufi groups: original non-Islamic, original Islamized, later non-Islamic, and later Islamized. In recent decades, this picture has been complicated by the dramatic expansion of transregional space, and so the expansion into this space of other Sufi orders, some modern and some less modern.

Neo-Sufism, then, is a consequence of globalization, first visible in 1789. It shows how different regions, cultures and religions can interact peacefully, producing new and hybrid religious syntheses appropriate for new times and new needs. In today's often dark times, when conflict between regions and religions is often in the news, Neo-Sufism is perhaps a cause for some cautious optimism.

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