

**THE HALVETI-JERRAHIS & THE LEGACY OF SHEIKH MUZAFFER IN
NORTH AMERICA**

JON G. KASPERSKI
Bachelor of Arts, University of Lethbridge, 2019

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AMERICA

JON G. KASPERSKI

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Dr. Atif Khalil Supervisor	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. Hillary Rodrigues Thesis Examination Committee Member	Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. John Harding Thesis Examination Committee Member	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. James Linville Chair, Thesis Examination Committee Member	Associate Professor	Ph.D.

Abstract

This thesis analyzes the legacy of the Halveti-Jerrahi sheikh, Muzaffer Ozak, in North America. Following his death, the Order was split into the Nur Ashki Jerrahi Order and the Jerrahi Order of America, with the former reflecting a more “universalistic” orientation, and the latter a more “traditional” one. Which of the two more accurately embodied his legacy? In order to answer the question, the study draws from personal interview testimonies of Sheikha Fariha al-Jerrahi and Sheikh Muhamad Jamal al-Jerrahi (Gregory Blann), as well as from the teachings of Sheikh Muzaffer. This thesis demonstrates that Sheikh Muzaffer consciously fostered different interpretations of his teachings while also showing it was not his intention to have the Halveti-Jerrahi Order separated. Moreover, the study shows that he grew to embrace the more adaptive interpretations of his message over the more conservative, yet still legitimate perspective of traditionalists.

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Love is at the centre of everything. It is the beginning, the middle, the end. And so really, you would say Sufism is, as Sheikh Muzaffer said, 'the Unveiling of Love' – the realisation that this whole universe is love, that God is love, that we are love. I would say that is the highest aspiration or the highest level of Sufism; to unveil that love and to live that love.

– Sheikhha Fariha al-Jerrahi (2021)

Introduction

Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak Efendi of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order stands out as one of the most important figures of the last century to play a role in the transmission of Sufism to the modern West. When Muzaffer Ozak came to America in the 1970s, he grew to love America. He found it to be a place that offered great possibilities for spiritual growth and fulfilment, not only for the followers he gained, but also for himself. His approach to Sufism in America, while rooted in Islam, was one of “gradualism.” It was a method that emphasized a slow immersion into the mystical life of Islam, not through law (Shari‘a) but the “way of love.” In the flexibility that he exercised with his students and disciples, he was sometimes accused of “innovation” or *bida* by members of his own faith, an accusation in its most severe form that could lead to a charge of heresy. At the same time, he was pressured and even imprisoned by the secular powers of Turkey for his adamant refusal to abandon his religious commitments and practices. While he saw his own teachings to be firmly rooted in the principles of Islam, the dual emphasis in his teachings, on conservation on the one hand and adaptation on the other, on tradition and legitimate reform, caused the Sufi Order that he brought to the Americas to split after his death into the Nur Ashki Jerrahis and the Jerrahi Order of America. Each of the two lineages, while generally respectful of each other and free of outward animosity, understood and implemented Ozak’s teachings in different ways. There are academic works which look at these differences. None, however, have investigated extensively into the figure of Ozak and how he may have viewed and aligned himself in this separation. This study, facilitated by interviews with the current Nur Ashki Sheikhha, Fariha

al-Jerrahi and Sheikh Muhammad Jamal al-Jerrahi (Gregory Blann),¹ who each have a deep understanding of that legacy, attempts to piece together Ozak's vision of the nature, role, and future of the Halveti-Jerrahis in North America.

The first chapter of this study lays out the earlier history of Sufism and essential terminology that will be drawn upon throughout this work. This history will follow the Halveti-Jerrahi chain of transmission (*silsila*) and the passing down of "mystical inheritance" from the Prophet Muhammad onward. This will allow us to understand the Halveti-Jerrahi conception of their place in the history of Sufism. The second chapter will look to the transmission of Sufism to the West, with a focus on some of the earliest and defining characters of the movement. It will also explore the ways Sufism has been defined in its Westward expansion, from early colonialist and Orientalist conceptions of the phenomenon to that of contemporary scholarship. The third chapter examines the dissemination and spread of the Halveti-Jerrahis to North America by their charismatic sheikh, Muzaffer Ozak. This will allow for a clearer picture to be painted about the nature of Ozak and his spiritual pedagogy, not only through an analysis of the limited source material available in English about his life, but also through interview testimonies from Sheikha Fariha al-Jerrahi and Sheikh Muhammad Jamal al-Jerrahi, two important figures of Muzaffer Ozak's lineage. Finally, the fourth chapter explores and posits an answer to the question of where Muzaffer Ozak may have himself leaned towards on the split that would follow his death, between a branch that emphasised a traditional Turkish vision of Sufi teachings (the Jerrahi Order of America) and a less traditional, more Western interpretation (that of the Nur Ashkis).

¹ Blann has been a student of Sufism for over forty years. He has been involved in the Inayati Order and now currently the Halveti-Jerrahis. He has a great scholarly interest in his own tradition; therefore, he has thought deeply on many of the themes asked of him throughout this work. He has found a balanced approach between the Nur Ashkis and Jerrahi Order of America alongside with the mother Halveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes in Turkey, having studied under both Lex Hixon (Sheikh Nur) and 20th Jerrahi grand-sheikh Safer Efendi.

Chapter 1

Sufism and Mysticism

Sufism or *tasawwuf* is the mystical heart of Islam. The word “mysticism” stems from the Greek *mystikos*, which is itself derived from *myein/mouin*, meaning to “close the lips or eyes.” The etymology conveys the idea that mystical experiences and doctrines not only tend to be enigmatic, but that they cannot be easily spoken of or visualized. William James understood mystical experiences to be ineffable, having a noetic quality that is transient, and with respect to which the recipient is passive.² To be ineffable is to be near impossible to talk about because, as James noted, the experience is like describing colour or temperature: no words can perfectly encapsulate its essence.

While there is no perfect unifying statement on the nature of Sufism, according to one frequent definition, it is the path to unification with or effacement in Ultimate Reality. The process or path (*tariqa*) towards unification has various degrees and practices, but the goal is always obtained through the “remembrance of God” (*dhikr*).³ Regarding its etymology, “Sufism” is most commonly held by tradition to derive from the word *suf* or “wool” because of the habit of early Sufis to don woolen cloaks. However, other theories exist about the word’s origin, such that it, for example, stems from *safa*, for “purity,” or from *ahl al-saffa*, “the People of the Bench,” a group of the Prophet Muhammad’s companions who congregated around his mosque in Medina.⁴ There

² William James, “Mysticism,” in *The Study of Religion*, ed. John S. Harding and Hillary P. Rodrigues (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 115.

³ William Rory Dickson, *Living Sufism In North America: Between Tradition and Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 13-14.

⁴ Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 5. Sheikh Muhammad Jamal (Gregory Blann) felt *sophia*; Greek for wisdom, another less widely accepted origin, was very pertinent for Sufism: “Sufism is the way of the heart and the way of love, but it is also the way of wisdom and as you may know the derivation of the etymology of the word Sufism is nebulous. There are several meanings or root words associated with it and one of them is *sophia*. I like that as one of the ways of saying what Sufism is. It is the way of wisdom through the ages.

are however still those within the tradition who think the esoteric significance of *tasawwuf* cannot be explained by etymology and the true meaning of the name was transmitted directly to the Prophet and from him to his intimates.⁵ These variations in notions of the origin of the term *tasawwuf* highlight a key point in the study of Sufism, namely balancing historical and linguistic evidence against the perspectives of the believers themselves. While there may be limited evidence for many beliefs, one must still be aware of the ways those who believe have created a specific narrative which comes to define their place in the world.⁶ There are those, like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who warn about the overuse of historicism and argue that it “must be thoroughly rejected in order to understand the reality of Sufism as understood by the Sufis themselves.”⁷ Striking a balance between the academic and believers’ perspectives is likely to provide us with the most holistic understanding of a tradition such as Sufism. Yet, finding that balance between the insider and outsider voices will be one of the methodological challenges of this study, as, indeed one finds in most academic approaches to the study of religion.

Proto-Sufism

A good place to begin in the overview of Sufism is with Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. While Sufism *per se* was not formally articulated as a distinct mode of piety in this early period, the mystical and esoteric aspect of Islam was arguably present yet not fully delineated. It must also be noted that medieval and modern apologists of Sufism, in both an attempt to legitimize and root Sufism in Islamic revelation, considered Muhammad and his followers to be the first Sufis, even

Whether it is Islamic wisdom or Buddhist wisdom or whatever. It’s all one human wisdom and it comes from a higher source and one love that unities us all” (Gregory Blann, interview by author, January 28, 2021).

⁵ Julianne Hazen, “Contemporary Islamic Sufism in America: The Philosophy and Practices of the Alami Tariqa in Waterport, New York” (PhD thesis, London University, 2012), 59.

⁶ See William E. Paden’s, “World,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Charles S. Willi Brun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Continuum, 2000), 239-49.

⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 165.

though historical accounts and the apologists themselves admit that Sufism emerged as concrete phenomenon some time after the founder of the faith.⁸ This is not to discredit the view that Muhammad (and some of his early followers) had a mystical disposition and were likely prototypes of the mystical path. However, we must be mindful to discern retroactive religious world building on the part of later generations of Sufis. Nonetheless, there are noteworthy instances which highlight the more mystical features within Islam during this early period that might give credence to their claims.

The Hadith of Gabriel, used by William Chittick and Sachiko Murata in their textbook *The Vision of Islam* to guide students through the contours of classical Islamic thought, is one of those highlights.⁹ In the hadith, the archangel Gabriel, disguised as a man but curiously showing no signs of travel, openly questions Muhammad on Islam in front of his companions and Umar, the future Caliph (political successor to the Prophet). Gabriel asks him about three main facets of Islam, namely *islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan*. Muhammad replied that *islam* is described as “right action” and forms the five pillars of Islam: the *shahadah* (the declaration of faith), *salat* (canonical prayer), *sawm* (the fast during the month of Ramadan), *zakat* (Almsgivings), and *hajj* (pilgrimage to the Kaba in Mecca). This domain of the religion is regarded by later interpreters to be overseen by the jurists. *Iman*, in this hadith, is described as “right belief,” and includes the basic tenets of faith. This dimension of Islam lies in the domain of the theologians. The final point which Gabriel asks Muhammad is *ihsan* or “doing what is beautiful.” Muhammad replies, it is “that you should worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you.”¹⁰ This was understood by much of the Muslim tradition to comprise the domain of Sufism.

⁸ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 10.

⁹ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1994), xxv.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

From the point of view of the Sufi tradition when observed through the prism of the Hadith of Gabriel, the outward and more interior aspects of the faith together make up necessary parts of the whole. Furthermore, the notion of being consumed in God's remembrance is shown by the remark of His omnipresence in human life, since "even if you do not see Him, He sees you." This, to the Sufis, is the source of inspiration behind Sufism. For many Sufis, it is believed that Muhammad shared this esoteric knowledge to very few select group of disciples. Among them were his nephew and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), the fourth and final of the "Rightly Guided Caliphs". Ali is regarded in the Halveti-Jerrahi order as the "fountain of the mystics" and all Sufi orders flow from his waters.¹¹ This is evident as he marks the beginning of the chain of transmission or lineage (*silsila*) in nearly all Sufi orders. Since the Shi'a branches of Islam also trace their lineages to Ali and his descendants, this reverence for Ali made Sufis and Shi'as sometimes closely tied throughout Islamic history, if not in practice, at least in theory. In fact, many Shi'a Imams figured prominently in the development of Sufism. Sufi and Shi'a separation, from the Sufi perspective, was often brought about as a need for Sufis to prove orthodoxy to Sunni authorities where they resided when political struggles against Sunnism and Shi'ism arose.¹²

Halveti-Jerrahi Chain of Transmission (*silsila*)

For clarity and a point of reference, we will lay out the *silsila* as completely as possible.¹³ While it is understood that *silsilas* such as these can be dubious in historical accuracy and can

¹¹ Gregory Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Volume I: The Origin and Formation of the Great Sufi Orders* (Boulder: Albion-Andalus Books, 2014), 15, 29.

¹² Mehrdad Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia: Volume 2* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 14.

¹³ The complete *silsila* of Halveti-Jerrahis, as for any Sufi Order is elusive and historically questionable. John J. Curry's, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Halveti Order 1350-1650* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and Robert J. Buckley's doctoral thesis helpfully lay out the Khalwati (Halveti) portion of the *silsila*. Although dates contradict Gregory Blann's version, which he lays out both neatly and sporadically in his two-volume exploration of his own spiritual heritage, Buckley has a more completed version up to Pir 'Umar al-Khalwati (names and dates provided by Buckley are italicized), and Curry has access to swathes of primary Ottoman sources on the Halvetis and its Sa'baniye branch. Regarding date difference,

come with variations even within the same lineage, it is helpful for readers to have this reference.¹⁴

Under the condition we understand, like all *silsilas*, one cannot claim to have the definite list. The chain of transmission offered here is as follows:

Muhammad (d. 632)
Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661)
Hasan al-Basri (d. 728)
Habib al-Ajami (d. 773)
Da'ud at-Ta'i (d. 777)
Ma'ruf al-Karkhi (d. 815)
Sari as-Saqati (d. 871)
Pir Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 910)¹⁵
Sheikh Ebu Ali Ahmed Mamsad'ut Dinuri (d. 912)
Ebu Abdullah Muhammad Dinuri (d. 980-81)
Muhammad Amaviyye bin Abdullah'ul Bekri (d. 990-91)
Sheikh Vejihiddin al-Qadi (d. 1136)¹⁶
Pir Abu-Najib as-Suhrawardi (1097-1168)
Sheikh Qutbuddin Abhari (d. 1221)
Sheikh Ruknuddin Muhammad Nuhas'ul Buhari (d. abs.)

I deferred to Blann as his piece is the more recent and less convoluted. I also preferred his transliteration. Furthermore, it should be noted in Muzaffer Ozak's work *Irshad*, Muhtar Holland, the translator of the text, provides a *silsila* but it only includes those who founded a Sufi Order directly involved in the Jerrahi lineage and none of the intermediary sheikhs.

¹⁴ For another, exhaustive and detailed, *silsila* from Mahmud Cemaleddin Hulvi (d. 1654), see John J. Curry's "Appendix I: The Halveti Silsile According to Hulvi's Lemezât," In *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Halveti Order 1350-1650* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 299-302. Curry also proposes that there may have been of an Ottoman branch and a Timurid branch of the Halvetis which would also add to its complexity (30).

¹⁵ Robert J. Buckley, "The Halveti-Jerrahi: A Sufi Order in Modern Turkey" (PhD thesis, Durham University, 1992), 30; Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Volume I*, ix. The epithet Pir is designated those sheikhs who founded their own order.

¹⁶ Buckley, "The Halveti-Jerrahi: A Sufi Order in Modern Turkey," 29; Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Volume I*, 166. Buckley notes the impossibility of Vejihiddin al-Qadi and Muhammad Amaviyye bin Abdullah'ul Bekri living in the same era. He notes also Muhammad Amaviyye bin Abdullah'ul Bekri is sometimes omitted from the *silsila* entirely which even exacerbates the question of transmission. Therefore, these figures are lost and even in Blann's overview Blann makes no mention of Muhammad Amaviyye bin Abdullah'ul Bekri or any other, citing these nameless sheikhs only as "less distinguished".

Sheikh Sihadbuiddin Muhammad'ut Tebrizi (d. abs.)

Sheikh Sayyid Jemaluddin Sirazi (d. 1255)

Sheikh Ibrahim Zahid Gaylani (d. 1291 or 1305)

Sheikh Saduddin-I Fergani (d. abs.)

Sheikh Ahi Muhammad ibn Nur al-Khalwati (d. 1378)¹⁷

Pir 'Umar al-Khalwati (d. 1397: Founder of the Khalwati Order)

Sheikh Ahi Mirim Muhammad al-Khalwati (d. 1410)

Sheikh Haji Izzeddin al-Khalwati (d. 1410?)

Sheikh Sadreddin al-Hayyavi (d. 1456)

Pir Yahya Shirvani al-Khalwati (d. 1465)

Pir Muhammad Erzinjani al-Khalwati (1472)

Sheikh Tajjuddin Ibrahim Kayseri (d. abs.)

“Kabalki” Sheikh Alauddin Usshaki al-Halveti (d. abs.)

Pir Ahmed Shemsuddin Marmali (Yigitbashi Wali) (d. 1544)¹⁸

Pir Ramazaneddin Mahfi Karahisari (1542-1616)

Sheikh “Mestchi” Ali Rumi ar-Ramazani al-Halveti (d. abs.)¹⁹

Sheikh Fazil ‘Ali Lofchali (d.1684)

Sheikh Ali Alauddin Kostendili (1644-1731)

Pir Nureddin al-Jerrahi (1678-1721: Founder of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order)

Sheikh Suleyman Veliyuddin Efendi (1673-1747)

Sheikh Mehmed Husameddin (Moravi) Merdiyyul-Jerrahi (1675-1754)

Sheikh Mehemed Emin Efendi (1686-1758)

Sheikh Sayyid Abdul-Aziz Efendi (1700-1760)

Sheikh Yahya Sherafeddin Efendi (1650-1770)²⁰

¹⁷ Here we have a over a century discrepancy between Blann and Buckley. Buckley reports he died in 1271-2 instead of 1378.

¹⁸ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Volume I*, 104. Blann mentions some sources say he died in 1489 but 1544 fits the timeline more logically.

¹⁹ Ibid, 119. Blann notes between Pir Razman Mahfi to the beginning of the Jerrahi line there is five total sheikhs. He however omits the mention of two of them and Buckley also makes no mention of them.

²⁰ Ibid, 169. He reportedly became the grand sheikh at the incredible age of 110.

Sheikh Abdusshukur Efendi (1686-1773)²¹
Sheikh al-Hajj Aburrahman Hilmi al-Jerrahi (1688-1800)
Sheikh Mehmed Arif Dede (1747-1822)
Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Zihni al-Jerrahi (1798-1853)
Sheikh Yahya Galib Hayati al-Jerrahi (1832-1897)
Sheikh Mehmed Riza Yashar al-Jerrahi (1845-1912)
Sheikh Ibrahim Fahreddin Shevki al-Jerrahi (1886-1966)²²

Early Figures in the Halveti-Jerrahi *silsila*: Formation and Delineation of Sufism

Having already discussed the significance of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali, we shall turn towards the early world-renouncers of Islam that came after the Prophet Muhammad and the four “Rightly Guided Caliphs.”²³

In the later period of Muhammad’s life, and following his death, Islam saw unprecedented expansion. By 661, not long after the assassination of Ali, the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 CE), came to power with its capital in Syria. With a massive and still expanding empire, the Umayyads became quite wealthy, and many luxuries came to preoccupy those who had access to them. Therefore, in this climate where many in the Muslim community were distracted by material gain, some came to revile this newfound decadence. These individuals came to be known as the *zuhhad*

²¹ Gregory Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Volume II: Turkish Sufism and the Halveti-Jerrahi Lineage* (Boulder: Albion-Andalus Books, 2017), 172. The Jerrahi Order from Abdusshukur to Fahreddin became a hereditary order with the grand sheikh being the son of the previous one.

²² Ibid, 174, 195. Blann attests that from and including Pir Nureddin to 1925 (November 30, 1925 being the date the secular Turkish government banned all tekkes) there have been 18 Jerrahi sheikhs. I have only been able to compile thirteen of them, but these figures appear to be the most noteworthy.

²³ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 23, 33-38; Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 168. It should be noted there were other eminent mystical figures outside the political leaders of Islam in the beginning. Figures such as Salman al-Farsi (d. 656), Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (d. 652-53), Abu Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah (d. 639) (believed by the Jerrahis to be an ancestor of Pir Nureddin), and the Yemeni Uways al-Qarani (d. 657) have been revered by Sufis and often see them as particular archetypes of the mystical path. Not to mention some of the early women of Islam such as Muhammad’s first wife Khadija (d. 693) and his daughter Fatima (d. 632) who was considered by many to be the *qutb* or spiritual pole/axis of her age.

and *nussak*, respectively “ascetics” and “devout individuals.”²⁴ These individuals felt as though the Islamic community had swiftly decayed from the days of the Prophet and believed they must abandon the lavishness of their contemporaries lest they lose attachment to God and be swallowed by sinfulness.²⁵ It is during this period that one finds many donning woolen robes that would be later recognised as the garb of the Sufis.²⁶ These voluntary renunciants or ascetics were seen by their contemporaries in a dim light because of their refusal to wear the cotton and silks of the age.²⁷ In the central parts of the empire (Iraq) these individuals became known as *sufiyya*, which, as we have shown with the etymology above, means “wool wearers.”

Authors note that in this early period the mystics’ relationship to God was more one of servanthood and fear of divine justice than of absorption in God’s love; however, those latter sentiments were still present in some instances.²⁸ Schimmel also argues that this period was concerned with devotion rather than speculative mystical theology.²⁹ Hasan al-Basri is a renowned and pivotal figure in the development of Sufism during the Umayyad period, who is believed by many Sufis to be the patriarch of the Sufi sciences. In the words of Knysh, Hasan al-Basri was seen as the “Archetypical Sufi.”³⁰ Aligning with the zeitgeist of the time, Hasan al-Basri was disheartened at the state of the world. In his sermons he often discussed the Day of Judgement and

²⁴ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 6.

²⁵ Atif Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God: Tawba in Early Sufism* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 3.

²⁶ Since there is no monastic tradition in Islam, some early authorities felt wool to be too Christian and that it resembled its monasticism which is frowned upon in Islam. For an excellent look at early Christian influences and interactions with Islam and proto-Sufism, see Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 16-23.

²⁷ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 7.

²⁸ Ibid. 9; Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 20-23. Green problematizes the notion of these ascetics as constituting a “proto-Sufism.” He rather sees them being quite contrary to one another, given early recorded accounts of Sufis detesting the acts of these ascetics. Green believes these ascetics, rather than evolving into Sufism, were eventually overshadowed by Sufism, which was more sensible, popular, and in line with the *sunna*. The acceptance of these early heterogenous groups into the genesis of the broader Sufi narrative would most likely be retro-active world building rather than a historical reality.

²⁹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 31.

³⁰ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 10.

the dangers of Hellfire for those who continued on the path of worldly pursuit.³¹ While Hasan al-Basri may have been a God-fearing man, he was not meek in front of the worldly political powers of the time. However, when pushed to violent action he would abdicate, seeing violence as another sin that must be avoided.³² Hasan al-Basri upheld many virtues later Sufis would come to write treatises on, and formulate the development of through more organized practices such as embodying a chivalrous nature (*futuwwa*) and self-consciousness of one's own failings over the fault of others.³³ He is seen by many, whether retroactively by Sufi writers or before the term was coined, to mark the beginning of historical Sufism.³⁴

Hasan al-Basri gained several followers such as Abdul Wahid ibn Zayd (d. 793), whose line continues with figures such as the once bandit Abu Ali al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyad (d. 801) and his disciple, the kingship renouncing, Ibrahim b. Adham (d. 778-9).³⁵ While these individuals are important to the further development of Sufism, the Halveti-Jerrahi *silsila* flows from a different spiritual tributary by means of Habib al-Ajami (d. 773). Tradition tells us Habib al-Ajami was essentially a Zoroastrian loan shark, who, when becoming self-conscious of demanding money from the destitute, vowed to change his ways.³⁶ From this, he found his way into the midst of his master Hasan al-Basri. There is an episode in which Habib had to hide his master Hasan from arrest by the Umayyad governor Hajjaj, highlighting Hasan's propensity to draw the ire of the Umayyad rulers.³⁷ The Umayyads, however, did not remain in power for even a century, and were soon replaced by the Abbasids (750-1250 CE) who descended from the Prophet's uncle and who

³¹ Ibid, 11; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 30.

³² Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 11.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 13.

³⁵ Ibid, 16-24; Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 75-78.

³⁶ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 111.

³⁷ Ibid, 113-14.

established their capital in Baghdad. The city would become a major intellectual, cultural, and spiritual hub. Out of its womb Sufism would emerge as a more self-conscious and distinctive mode of piety.³⁸

Habib's student Da'ud at-Tai (d.777) exemplified the saint's lack of reliance on anything worldly, so much so his disciple Ma'ruf al-Karkhi (d. 815) said "the world and its people had no value whatsoever in his eyes."³⁹ Ma'ruf was not only a disciple of Da'ud at-Tai but also of the eighth Shia Imam 'Ali al-Rida. The teachings of Ma'ruf were to be foundational in the beginning of the Baghdadi school of Sufism.⁴⁰ His most eminent disciple was Sari al-Saqati (d. 871), who Knysh notes marks a transition from the early ascetic phase of Islamic mysticism.⁴¹ Knysh writes:

Moreover, his teaching reflects his internal evolution from a conventional ascetic preoccupied with the avoidance of sin and meticulous compliance with the religious and social conventions of the age, to a fully-fledged mystic immersed in the contemplation of God and, therefore, totally oblivious to the world around him. Sometimes these conflicting attitudes are simultaneous, reflecting the growing complexity and agonizing choices face by mystics who wanted to preserve outward decorum, while being irresistibly drawn into an ever-intimate contact with God.⁴²

This complexity is often highlighted in the common dichotomy cited between the composed and sober Baghdadi School of Sufism and the ecstatic and drunken Sufism of Khurasan (a territory which includes modern day Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan), influenced by the utterings of Bayazid al-Bastami (d. 874). However, this kind of Divine drunkenness was quite present in

³⁸ Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 174.

³⁹ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 116.

⁴⁰ Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 173.

⁴¹ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 71. He also attributes this to Bayazid al-Bistami and wrote, "Al-Bistami's teaching therefore may be seen as marking a momentous transition from ascetic preoccupation with the service of God (and the concomitant emphasis world-renouncing piety) to a genuinely mystical experience of the total annihilation of the human self in God."

⁴² *Ibid*, 51.

Baghdad by one of Sufism's most famous characters, Mansur al-Hajj (d. 922), whose timeless declaration, relating to complete annihilation of the self in God, "I am the Truth," still resonates with Sufis to this day.⁴³

The emergence of Sari al-Saqati's nephew Abu'l Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) as a master in Baghdad signals a more formal appearance of the Islamic mystical tradition on the stage of history.⁴⁴ Through Junayd, Sufism became a more tangible and delineated entity with many of his contemporaries and later Sufis calling him the "Master of the Group/mystic way."⁴⁵ As mentioned, the School of Baghdad was known for its sobriety and Junayd was their representative *par excellence*. He believed the ecstatic utterances of Divine Union were an infantile step on the spiritual path and the mature mystic would allow this "divine knowledge or gnosis [to be] stabilized with the soul."⁴⁶ Furthermore, Junayd worried about the perception of heresy by the majority of the clerical authorities who could not understand the mystical realities of those mystics who exclaim seemingly heretical instances of Union with God. He implored a composed demeanour in the face of those who did not understand the deeper meaning of the mystic's ecstatic utterances and practiced the use of *isharat* (subtle illusions) in his writing to further protect himself and his readers from unsympathetic eyes.⁴⁷

Moving onward, and before a discussion on Pir Abu-Najib as-Suhrawardi, it is vital to mention one of Sufism's most recognisable and important names, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d.1111). He has been called "the Islamic figure with the greatest spiritual and intellectual

⁴³ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 173-179.

⁴⁴ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 53.

⁴⁵ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 121.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 127; William Rory Dickson and Meena Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism: From Manhattan to Mecca* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2017), 186-187.

⁴⁷ Khalil, Tawba in *Early Sufism*, 107; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 56.

impact after the apostolic period”⁴⁸ and is “seen by many as Sufism’s greatest champion, [as one] who succeeded in reconciling it with ‘mainstream’ Islam.”⁴⁹ Through the work of Ghazali, he was able to base Sufism as an essential feature of Islam, helping to negate the charges of heresy placed on earlier Sufis and Ghazali is still “to this day [used by those] to defend Sufism before the attacks of some exoteric scholars.”⁵⁰

Abu-Najib as-Suhrawardi (d.1168) is the founder of the Suhrawardiyya order, who upon meeting Ahmed al-Ghazali, the younger brother of Muhammad al-Ghazali, had “wafted upon him the breath of felicity and guided him along the Sufi Path.”⁵¹ Abu-Najib, like much of the Sufi tradition that preceded him, placed a great deal of emphasis on *adab*, which is the art of good behaviour and proper conduct. *Adab*, it should be noted, is related to the word *ma-‘duba* or banquet. More precisely, it relates to how both the host and the guest behave at such an event, showing excellent character in every instance and interaction and how the gathering of a feast is like the gathering of good qualities.⁵² However, importantly for the Sufis, courtesy was not out of mere convention but a virtuous act of perfecting and internalising good character. The Sufis wish to emulate the *adab* of the Prophet and as the hadith states, “Verily God taught me *adab* and He perfected my *adab*.”⁵³ Abu-Najib also wrote about and often went into *khalwa* or spiritual retreats, and this would figure prominently in the later Khalawatiyya tradition (from which the names derives) and onward.⁵⁴ The *khalwa* is traditionally a forty day abandonment of society in which

⁴⁸ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 182.

⁴⁹ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 140.

⁵⁰ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 182.

⁵¹ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 193; Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 195. Blann notes, while al-Ghazali was Abu-Najib’s preeminent teacher, it is his uncle Vejihiddin al-Qadi who precedes him in the *silsila*.

⁵² Atif Khalil, “Sufism & Qur’anic Ethics” in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (London: Routledge, 2020), 166.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 166-167.

⁵⁴ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 196, 204.

the participant undergoes fasting and attempts to put all energy into the Remembrance of God. Blann citing Abu-Najib writes, “every morning [during the *khalwa*], a veil should be lifted and a nearness (to Allah) appear, so that in forty mornings, the forty-fold veil should lift.”⁵⁵

Before undertaking a discussion of ‘Umar al-Khalwati, we should mention, if only briefly, Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 1240). While he does not feature in the Halveti-Jerrahi *silsila*, his philosophy of the “unity of being” or *wahdat al-wujud* features prominently in the Halveti-Jerrahi worldview. This will become especially evident when the Halveti-Jerrahis arrive in North America. *Wahdat al-wujud* refers to the notion that in God’s infinitude nothing can exist as separate from God. Were it otherwise, then God would not be infinite. However, Schimmel clarifies this further when she writes, “in Ibn Arabi’s thought a transcendence across categories, including substances is maintained. God is above all qualities... That means that in their actual existence the creatures are not identical with God, but only reflections of His attributes.”⁵⁶ Therefore, nothing can touch or contain the utter incomprehensibility and intangibility of God. At the same time, these ‘creatures’ can mirror God’s qualities because nothing can exist outside of God’s infinity. Yet, they are importantly not God, creating a fragmented interpretation of God, for that would break the foundations of *Tawhid* or the essential unity of God. Furthermore, *wahdat al-wujud* insists that every “true” religion or authentic mode of spiritual practice can indeed be a path to God. While their forms may differ, the end goal is the same.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 205. The minimum *khalwa/halvet* is three days for new initiates or those unable to undergo the full forty.

⁵⁶ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 268.

The Khalawtis/Halvetis

Turning to the beginnings of the Khalwati (which in Turkish is Halveti) Order, it should be noted that its history ran parallel to the infant yet burgeoning Ottoman empire (1330-1923 CE). Eventually the two would become intertwined creating a truly Ottoman flavour of Sufism. Regarding the founding of the order, this title is shared between two individuals, namely ‘Umar al-Khalwati (d. 1397) and Yahya Jalaluddin Shirvani al-Khalwati (d. 1465). The latter being regarded as the one who founded the actual organisation. As for the former, his “contribution seems to have been mainly along spiritual lines.”⁵⁷ ‘Umar was noted to take his *khalwa* (*halvet* in Turkish) in a hollowed-out tree upon which he gave many spiritual teachings to those who may chance pass his tree.⁵⁸

As mentioned earlier, it was Pir Yahya Shirvani who came to organize the Halveti Order and, while born in Shamakhi in the Caucasus, from his disciples did the order spread and take root in Anatolia and then Istanbul.⁵⁹ This instance was facilitated when Sultan Beyazid II (d.1512), who was initially governor of the Amasya region of Anatolia, invited the order to the Ottoman capital.⁶⁰ Of importance, in order to gain favour with the royal court, much of any remnant folk and Shi‘a tendencies of the Halvetis had to be shed.⁶¹ Furthermore, during the reign of the Beyazid’s son, Selim I (d. 1520), who did not share his father’s affinity towards the Halvetis, the Sunni Ottomans were at war with the Shi‘a Safavids which made dissociation from Shi‘ism even

⁵⁷ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 75; Buckley, “The Halveti-Jerrahi: A Sufi Order in Modern Turkey,” 59.

⁵⁸ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 78; Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire*, 37. Such as saving, and then admonishing, a drowning emir who hunted for sport over sustenance. The tree was even noted to follow ‘Umar around.

⁵⁹ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 86; Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: Vol 2*, 14.

⁶⁰ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 265.

⁶¹ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 99; Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: Vol 2*, 14.

more imperative for the Halvetis. The Ottoman empire often had fluctuations of “Sunnization” depending on the religious disposition of the current leader or when trying to instill religious unity in political conflicts against Shi‘as.⁶² These events eventually led to the removal of five Shi‘a Imams from the *silsila*.⁶³ This period of identity politics was soon alleviated with the onset of the Ottoman Golden Age brought upon by Selim’s son and heir Suleyman the Magnificent (d. 1566). This subsequently brought upon a golden age for the Halvetis, which slowly diminished, however, they are still present today and alive in the numerous sub-orders it begot.⁶⁴

As mentioned, Ibn Arabi’s doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* features prominently in the works of the Halvetis. Still, there were prominent members of the Order who denied the doctrine and preferred to focus on the divide between human nature and God’s. Often then, the preference was to focus on the Sufism of al-Junayd and his sober and balanced mystical approach.⁶⁵ Not that Junayd’s approach necessarily disagreed with the doctrine of “oneness of being,” but rather its assertion was to keep grandiose notions of God’s inherent immanence subdued for those less spiritually astute. This is especially the case when clerical authorities often misunderstood *wahdat al-wujud* to be a form pantheism which affronted absolute monotheism.⁶⁶ The practices of the Halveti included voluntary hunger (*ju*), silence (*samt*), vigil (*sahar*), seclusion (*i’tizal*), the remembrance of God (*dhikr*), mediation (*fikr*), permanent ritual cleanliness, tying (*rabt*) one’s heart to that of the sheikh’s, and of course the aforementioned (*khalwa/halvet*) spiritual retreat.⁶⁷

⁶² Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: Vol 2*, 14

⁶³ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 265.

⁶⁴ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 104.

⁶⁵ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 268.

⁶⁶ Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: Vol 2*, 26; Khalil, *Tawba in Early Sufism*, 107. Junayd still felt the goal was to return to the “pre-eternal Covenant,” but as said, his mystical approach was more subdued (to the uninitiated) in the face of orthodox pressure.

⁶⁷ Buckley, “The Halveti-Jerrahi: A Sufi Order in Modern Turkey,” 60; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 268. Later, Halvetis such as Pir Ahmed Shemsuddin Marmali called for a more balanced approach to the *halvet*, making sure to keep people active in the world rather than abandoning world and social responsibility completely.

The seven stations of the spiritual path of the Halvetis each correspond to a liturgy or one of God's names: 1) no god but God, 2) Allah, 3) He, 4) the Living, 5) the Real, 6) the Everlasting, and 7) the Overpowering.⁶⁸

The Jerrahis

While one may be remiss not to discuss the lives of more of the prominent sheikhs and pirs of the Halvetis, to get closer to the order of interest we shall move to examine to the life and thought of the founder of the Halveti-Jerrahis (or simply Jerrahis), Nureddin al-Jerrahi (d. 1721). Of note, al-Jerrahi is derived from the Jerrah district in which Nureddin was born and also means "the surgeon".⁶⁹ It is often noted by Jerrahis that the coming of Nureddin was prophesized (a prophesy Nureddin accepted) three hundred years earlier by Sheikh Imam Ahmad ibn Uthman Sharnubi, in his book *Tabaqat al-Awliya* (Rank of the Saints, ca. 1585).⁷⁰ While the date prophesized did not correspond to Nureddin's birth (b. 1678), it did with the date Nureddin opened the first Halveti-Jerrahi *tekke* (Sufi lodge, meeting place) was in Istanbul, 1115 AH (1703-4). Furthermore, it was correctly foreseen he would live only forty-four years. Beyond this instance of incredible foresight, Nureddin is thought by the Jerrahis to be the *Khatem al-Mujtahidin* (Seal of Founding Pirs) much in the manner that Muhammad is regarded as the Seal of the Prophets.⁷¹ In this vein, the Jerrahis believed they had succeeded in incorporating aspects from all the major

⁶⁸ Buckley, "The Halveti-Jerrahi: A Sufi Order in Modern Turkey," 61; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 269-70. 1) *al-tahil*, 2) *Allah*, 3) *Hu*, 4) *Hayy*, 5) *Haqq*, 6) *Qayyum*, and 7) *Qahhar*. It is noted that one needs divine grace to be accepted past the fifth station.

⁶⁹ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 127. It is not mentioned here if "the surgeon" serves for any metaphor in the order, but it seems to beg the notion of the experienced and steady hand of the sheikh and the discerning and cutting scalpel applied to those who undertake the mystical path under the Jerrahi tutelage. Sheikh Nur (Lex Hixon) in a poem from *Atom from the Sun of Knowledge* (Westport: Pir Publications, 1993), suggests this notion when he wrote, "Submit to the compassionate and healing surgery of the Grand Shaykh, Nureddin Jerrahi, the surgeon who handles this sword of light" (29).

⁷⁰ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 128.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 129.

Orders found in the Ottoman empire. This is why the Jerrahi *dhikr* is an amalgam of litanies of the other Sufi Orders, and in the eyes of the Jerrahis it embodies an unsurpassed form of *dhikr*. In the words of Blann, “The tidal wave of spiritual gifts and acknowledgments coming from the other orders is ample testimony the Jerrahiyya was intended as a vast spiritual treasure-house, a synthesis and summation of all the preceding *turuq* (Sufi Orders), imbued with the power to reflect the essence of the entire mystical inheritance.”⁷²

Pir Nureddin’s path was not initially along mystical lines. In 1669-7 CE he was academically gifted in the outward sciences of Islamic law and was prestigiously offered a position of judge in Egypt.⁷³ Nureddin’s ship was delayed and his uncle, seeing Nureddin’s mystic spark, took him to the Khalwati-Jelveti *tekke* by his house. Nureddin was instantaneously drawn to Sheikh Salami Efendi and he began to delve more deeply into Islam’s interior aspects. Nureddin underwent his spiritual training under Sheikh ‘Ali Alauddin Kostendili and was declared a sheikh himself at twenty six and established the Jerrahi *dergah* (main Sufi meeting place) in Karagmuruk on the 27th of Rajab, 1115 AH (1703-4 CE).⁷⁴ After eighteen years serving as Sheikh, Nureddin passed away on Monday on Eid al-Adha, 1133 AH at the prophesized age of forty-four.⁷⁵ His funeral was officiated by his sheikh, ‘Ali Alauddin and Nureddin was laid to rest in the *tekke* at the foot of his mother’s grave.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid, 139. Of side interest, it is noted on the Jerrahi Order of America’s website, jerrahi.org, that each Sufi order in the Ottoman empire attracted a different segment of society. The Halveti-Jerrahis attracted the sultan and administrators, the Mevlevi: intellectuals and artists, the Bektashi: the military (Janissaries), and the Naqshbandi: the clergy.

⁷³ Ibid, 132.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 134, 137.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 148.

⁷⁶ Buckley, “The Halveti-Jerrahi: A Sufi Order in Modern Turkey,” 103.

Over the next century, and especially in the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman empire began to see rapid decline. With incursions from Napoleonic France, the Russian Empire, and popular uprisings in Greece, the once mighty Empire of the Ottomans was being laid low. Furthermore, the traditional standing army of the Ottomans, the Janissaries, who became strongly attached to the Bektashi Order, was disbanded by Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) in 1826.⁷⁷ The sultan saw them as becoming too independent from his command and he further sought to modernise the military during this purge. This led to a banning of all Bektashi meeting places and the imprisonment and execution of their sheikhs, however, this was officially veiled as a charge of heterodoxy rather than their association with the Janissaries.⁷⁸ While the Jerrahis were not involved in this purge, it led to increasing suspicion against the Sufi orders. Furthermore, during 1802-5 in Arabia the Wahhabi movement began to dominate the peninsula. The wish was a return to the age of the *al-salaf al-salih*, that is the age of Prophet and Islam's immediate successors. They were literalists in their interpretation of the Quran and sought to annihilate anything that was seen as an innovation (*bid'a*) brought upon by later Muslim communities who were regarded as corrupted by time or by non-Islamic cultural and religious influences.⁷⁹ Sufism was seen as one of those corruptions. The final nail in the coffin for Sufism in the region could be attributed to the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I and the rise of secularism in post-war Turkey. Significant changes occur in the history of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order as it enters the modern period under the guidance of Sheikh Ibrahim Fahreddin Shevki al-Jerrahi.

⁷⁷ Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: Vol 2*, 1, 204-209.

⁷⁸ John Robert Barnes, *An Introduction to Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 87.

⁷⁹ Natana J. DeLong-Bas, "Wahhabism and the Question of Religious Tolerance," in *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia*, ed. Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 11-12.

Sheikh Fahreddin was born in 1886. He functioned as the grand-sheikh of the Halveti-Jerrahis from 1912-1924. He is noted to be the last of the Jerrahis to make the full *halvet*. The spiritual retreat was thought to be not as viable and necessary for future generations of the order. He provides a poignant description of the ordeals of the *halvet* saying that in the beginning of the retreat he wished he were dead. However, his tune changed so quickly that on the second day he said, “even someone armed with a club couldn’t have driven me from that cell.” This was quite a testament to the spiritual awakenings that could occur in the spiritual retreat.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, it is during these fateful years that Sheikh Fahreddin watched the dissolution and near demise of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order. Once an open, empire-wide community, it dwindled into an underground Order.

In 1918, the Turk peasantry were able to regain some of the losses suffered after World War I and under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1938-1953) established the contemporary Republic of Turkey. This led to many reforms, many of which cast aside the old Islamic order, such the replacement of the Shari‘a with westernized laws, the removal of Arabic in preference for the newly Latinised Turkish script, and the banning of traditional dress. The new Turkish Republic sought to shed all “superstition” and religious traditionalism. This was because the reformers felt these antiquated beliefs were what allowed the empire to cave so easily against Western European powers.⁸¹ The Sufi Orders fell into this category. Furthermore, in response to this widespread, forceful removal of traditional Islamic features of Ottoman society the Naqshbandis alongside the Kurds revolted only to be further suppressed.⁸² This further antagonised the new secular government. Some 60,000 people were recorded to have had some affiliation with

⁸⁰ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 191.

⁸¹ Barnes, *An Introduction to the Religious Foundations of the Ottoman Empire*, 152-153.

⁸² *Ibid*, 153.

a Sufi Order in 1910. Furthermore, over 2000 people still lived within the *tekkes* in 1885.⁸³ Despite their numbers, nearly all the Sufi *tekkes* in Istanbul were converted or destroyed by the late 1930s early 40s.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Fahreddin was able to keep custody of the Jerrahi Dergah even after it, along with the other Sufi meeting places, was banned on November 30, 1925. Against the odds, the *dergah* survives today, although it is now a centre for cultural musicology.⁸⁵ The evening before the police locked down the Jerrahi lodge, Fahreddin reputedly lit a single candle and prayed at the tomb of his founding pir, Nureddin.⁸⁶ Even after the closure of the lodge, the Sheikh continued to hold small gatherings with an elect few. In 1966, he passed away, but not before giving his knowledge to an initially legalist minded imam, Muzaffer Ozak, the man who would bring the Halveti-Jerrahis new life in North America.

⁸³ Kia, *The Ottoman Empire: Vol 2*, 27.

⁸⁴ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol II*, 195-6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 196-7. Many Sufi traditions and practices have been now designated as cultural heritage in Turkey, however, their religious significance remains for those who look.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 195.

Chapter 2

Sufism in the West

Sufism began to spread in the West a little more than a century ago.⁸⁷ Of course, the mystical tradition of Islam had been engaging in subtle and nuanced ways with the West since the medieval period as ideas percolated from Muslim lands into Christendom. Later, European colonial powers, in their spread into Muslim lands, would come into contact and even conflict with the Sufis present there. Along with the colonial powers came those (retrospectively named) Orientalists who understood Sufism through the filter of both an imperial relationship with the Islamic world, and the theological baggage of a medieval past, where Christianity and Islam stood as religious and political adversaries. These Orientalists, seeing Sufism as a mature and profound spiritual tradition, through the likes of Ibn Arabi and Rumi rather than extensive engagement with living Sufis, felt it impossible that it could have naturally grown out of a legalistic “religion of the sword.” On another front, certain Islamic “fundamentalist” groups, both influenced by modernity and reacting to Western political encroachment, sought to eradicate what they considered Sufi innovations (*bid'a*) and their degradation of orthodox Islam. Even so, there were those, even in Europe, such as René Guénon (d. 1951), who countered these claims and found Sufism to be intrinsically bound to Islam. Others, such as Inayat Khan (d. 1927), appreciated Sufism’s organic relationship with the faith, but opted to present it in more universal terms to the West. Thus, we can already see the complexities by the middle of the 20th century that plagued attempts to decipher

⁸⁷ The use of the West and Western denotes Europeans and North Americans. I consider this to still be a lay over of Orientalist othering of whoever or whatever is not very Euro-American. This of course is what Edward Said devoted the book *Orientalism* to the challenging of European colonial study of the “Orient” and how it came to paint it to the detriment of those who came under this umbrella term. This othering led to the perception of Europe as the superior, scientific, and rational as opposed to the inferior, spiritual, exotic, and religiously informed populaces of the “Orient”. This leads to inaccurate essentializations of both parties. In the case of this study, the West is an often-used categorisation by scholars and thinkers, however when allowed, avoiding these generalisations is ideal.

the true nature of Sufism, and its relation to Islam, by Sufis and non-Sufis, insiders and outsiders to the Islamic tradition.⁸⁸

The Example of Jalal al-Din Rumi

As noted earlier, it is difficult to formulate an agreed upon definition of Sufism, a fact exacerbated by the spread and transformation of Sufism in the West. To begin, as William Rory Dickson observes, the Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi has become integrated and naturalized into North American popular culture.⁸⁹ Celebrities such as Brad Pitt brandish his poetic writings as tattoos. What might explain this popular Western co-opting of one of Islam's greatest mystic poets? The answer is not simple.

As noted by William Chittick, "Rumi's voluminous works present a kaleidoscopic image of God, man, the world, and the interrelationship of these three realities."⁹⁰ Rumi speaks of God in universal, subtle, and non-apparent ways. To those unfamiliar with how Sufis reference the Divine, they might believe they are not talking about God at all but a lover. Often Rumi's poetry can read like passionate love letters to a beloved, but it is not human love rather the love one has and how one yearns for God, the ultimate Beloved. Therefore, Rumi, by choice of modern Western translators, consciously or unconsciously, can easily fall into Rumi being presented in a way which omits or ignores the religious themes and Islamically rooted nature of his poetry. Chittick is adamant that "The reader can only benefit from Rumi's poetry to the extent that [they are] already

⁸⁸ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 9. Schimmel notes the first "comprehensive book on Sufism" was penned by F. A. D. Tholuck in 1821.

⁸⁹ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 2; Celia A. Genn, "The Development of a Modern Western Sufism," in *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 257. Rumi's popularity makes him the prime subject of many scholars' initial exploration of Sufism's perceptions and engagement by Westerners.

⁹⁰ William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 7.

familiar with the teachings it contains...”⁹¹ However, to the dismay of those familiar with Rumi’s true intentions, this highlights the oft perceived notion that Sufism is always equated with an Islamically absent universalism.⁹² In other words, Islam is not a necessary aspect of Sufism. However, we shall see this is not the case and that this perspective of Sufism in the West has not been constant for it has undergone numerous and various reinterpretations.

Changing Perspectives on Sufism

The contemporary West’s perspectives on Sufism notably differ from the colonial perspectives in the early part of the nineteenth century. From the Caucasus to South East Asia, and to North Africa, Sufi orders and charismatic Sufi leaders often fought against colonial incursions into these regions.⁹³ While the dynamics of these resistance movements are not pertinent to our study, they pointedly illustrate that Sufism has not always been seen as an inherently “pacifistic” religious approach.⁹⁴ As Dickson says, “Sufi orders [in the colonial period] became associated not only with the bizarre and exotic, but also with militancy and fanaticism.”⁹⁵ In contrast to the universalism found in the writings of Ibn Arabi and Rumi, which focus on God as the Beloved,⁹⁶ Sufis were among the more notable challengers to colonial authorities in the Muslim world.⁹⁷ As Knysh writes:

⁹¹ Ibid, 10.

⁹² Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 2.

⁹³ Ibid, 34.

⁹⁴ See Martin van Bruinssen, “Sufism, ‘Popular’ Islam and the Encounter with Modernity,” in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, and Martin van Bruinssen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 128-134.

⁹⁵ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 34.

⁹⁶ Mark Woodward et al., “*Salafi* Violence and *Sufi* Tolerance? Rethinking Conventional Wisdom,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 6 (December 2013): 58. Notably, these figures would not denounce war or violence if necessary. This goes back to Prophet himself who laid out rules of engagement in war and only when war becomes an inevitability. However, to colonial powers, the juxtaposition of the literary Sufi and the Sufi on the ground would seem stark and they would likely not entertain the thought that even these Gnostics would entertain military force.

⁹⁷ William Rory Dickson and Meena Sharify-Funk *Unveiling Sufism: From Manhattan to Mecca* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2017), 55-56.

The fact that Sufi leaders and institutions were blacklisted by both Russian and French colonial authorities as actual or potential troublemakers seems ironic today when numerous political scientists and policy makers routinely depict Sufism as a pacifistic, inward-oriented (and thus politically harmless) alternative to Salafi-Wahhabi social and political activism.⁹⁸

To further put this in perspective, when we turn to Sufism's often espoused antithesis, Salafism, we are conscious of it by Salafism's most extreme ideological adherents – those which are violent and politically active in contrast to peaceful and apolitical adherents to the same worldview.⁹⁹

As noted by Woodward et al, “Like *Sufism*, *Salafism* is not inherently political. *Salafi* moral authority flows from the claim that it seeks to restore Islam to its pristine condition. If this claim is accepted, *Salafism* becomes a powerful basis for social mobilization including colonialism...”¹⁰⁰

Scholars of Sufism and Salafism have taken note of the increasing dichotomy between these two especially in post 9/11 America.¹⁰¹ Furlanetto, looking at Sufi literary influences on Transcendentalist American poetry and writing, notes that “Sufi poetry has been increasingly constructed as antipodal to rampant post 9/11 Islamophobia.”¹⁰² Hermansen notes, while the public discourse around Sufism as being the natural counterbalance to Islamic fundamentalism was reserved for “neo-con think tanks and government policy,” it did not affect academic studies in this same way.¹⁰³ Authors such as Woodward et al, have continuously shown the fallacy of the “Salafi violence and Sufi tolerance” dichotomy historically, yet it appears that outside of academic

⁹⁸ Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 198.

⁹⁹ Atif Khalil and Shiraz Sheikh, “Sufism in Western Historiography: A Brief Overview,” *Philosophy East and West* 66, no. 1 (January 2016): 194-196.

¹⁰⁰ Woodward et al, “*Salafi* Violence and *Sufi* Tolerance?”: 65.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 58.

¹⁰² Elena Furlanetto, *Towards Turkish American Literature: Narratives of Multiculturalism in Post-Imperial Turkey* (New York: Peter Lang AG, 2017), 165.

¹⁰³ Marcia Hermansen, “The Academic Studies of Sufism at American Universities” in *Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*, ed. Mumtaz Ahmad, Zahid Bukhari, and Sulayaman Nyang (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 99.

circles, in public and governmental views, these two characterizations remain uncontested. As noted by Woodward et al, the dichotomy often comes down to fanciful claims of the theological root of violence regarding the Salafis and tolerance regarding Sufism rather than looking at socio-political contexts and behaviour.¹⁰⁴

This dichotomy was heightened by Salafi denouncement of Sufi innovation (*bid'a*). This notion was expounded and became the common rhetoric and understanding of Sufism for many Muslims and non-Muslims as oil wealthy Saudi Arabia campaigned through education initiatives to present its Salafi-Wahhabi doctrine as correct Islam.¹⁰⁵ Following 9/11, Sufis, self-cognizant or otherwise, took this opportunity, to retain this distinction and recast themselves as purveyors of true Islam and the opponents of Salafi fundamentalism.¹⁰⁶ As Dickson notes, “Sufism went from being a bad word, often unspeakable in public Muslim forums, to being more frequently affirmed as an integral part of a tolerant, orthodox Sunni Islam.”¹⁰⁷ And Knysh states, “In sum, the phenomenon called “Sufism,” which has been painstakingly and elegantly designed by the human imagination, or rather, by a long series of individual imaginations, is real in the sense that it has long ranging and tangible sociopolitical, practical, cultural, and institutional (material) implications.”¹⁰⁸ It is important we understand these nuances early so we do not fall into essentialist readings of Sufism. Instead, we should trace the process that came to inform both Sufi self-understanding in the West, and the way Sufism has come to be viewed by the West in recent decades.

¹⁰⁴ Woodward et al, “*Salafi Violence and Sufi Tolerance?*”: 75.

¹⁰⁵ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Some Salafi groups also took the post 9/11 environment to reaffirm themselves as apolitical and non-violent. See Stephane Lacroix for one such example. Stephane Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism,” in *Global Salafism*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁷ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 34.

Sufism's recasting, as it were, has had the effect of resketching Sufism's relation to Islam as it is understood outside academia. This should not be surprising as Sufism, like all things, is constantly being reframed, reiterated, and redacted depending on who is speaking about it. For, as Carl Ernst observed, "teaching or writing about Islamic religion [within which Sufism is included] is inescapably caught up in political controversy" and even within our attempts at neutrality in an academic context, "the non-political image of Sufism is illusory."¹⁰⁹ For instance, we often do not think of intra-Sufi conflict. However, as Woodward et al notes, it is not until the 1970s that Sufis turned their attention to challenging the Salafis instead of themselves.¹¹⁰ After more militant Sufi groups, at least in the perspective of the West,¹¹¹ came to terms with or avoided the eyes of colonial powers, it was militant Salafis who became the dominant force who embodied violent Islam in the Western consciousness.¹¹² In the words of Woodward et al, "By the end of the colonial period in the 1960s, the image of the *Sufi* orders as pacifists had effectively replaced the earlier image of the *Sufis* as *jihadi* empire builders."¹¹³ Therefore, the less than peaceful past of Sufi engagement with colonial powers was transformed and solidified into a peaceful and pacifist one, and held in contrast to the Salafis. Knysh sums up the Western academic narrative nicely when he says:

In other words, like all historians, students of Sufism are on a mission of emplotting disparate events and statements related to the object of their concern in order to convey their personal understanding of it, on the one hand, and perhaps also to teach us a certain moral-ethical lesson, on the other. This being so, they are usually deeply, inextricably, and passionately invested into their own storytelling.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Carl W. Ernst, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the Teaching of Sufism," in *Teaching Islam*, ed. Brannon Wheeler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108.

¹¹⁰ Woodward et al, "*Salafi* Violence and Sufi *Tolerance?*": 72. This included much of the same contentions that define the Salafi/Sufi conflict such as religious authority, salvation, control of mosques, control of the rhetoric, etc.

¹¹¹ They could very well be thought of as liberators, but we are not attempting to value or devalue their conflict but rather lay out how they would be perceived by the West. In Islam and in Sufism, violence is acceptable if the cause is considered just and too many colonial incursions would be seen as a just cause.

¹¹² Woodward et al, "*Salafi* Violence and Sufi *Tolerance?*": 72.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 2.

Scholars must carefully read the story of Sufism and understand the influences, perspectives, and situations of its interpreters, advocates, and challengers, to provide the most accurate picture possible. If we refrain from doing this, we are left with essentialized and often black-and-white pictures of reality when shades of grey are more appropriate. With this understanding of the complexities of the history of Sufism in the West in mind, we can turn to the West's spiritual engagement with Sufism.

Initial Sufi/Western Engagements in the 19th Century

While Sufi ideas had been seeping into the West since the Middle Ages, the exploration of these earliest instances are not pertinent to our study.¹¹⁵ We will begin when the popular engagement and interest with the “‘mystical’, ‘esoteric’, ‘transcendental’, and ‘Eastern’” by Westerners arose from the “Occult Revival” of the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁶ Organisations such as the Theosophical society, founded by Helena Blavatsky (d. 1891) and Henry Steel Olcott (d. 1907), were among the cornerstones of this revival movement, and many focused mainly on aspects of Buddhist and Hindu universality. However, the first unambiguous and genuine Western contact with Sufism occurred in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁷ This pioneer was Isabella Eberhardt (1877-1904).¹¹⁸ Noted as an adventuring journalist, albeit perhaps to some a turncoat who sided with Algerians over the French colonialists, Eberhardt was eventually accepted into the Qadiri Order in Tunisia. This was notable as it was one of, if not the, earliest instance of a Westerner being initiated into a Sufi Order. However, this was short lived as she was killed in a flash flood

¹¹⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 7-8.

¹¹⁶ Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Hulya Kucuk, “A Brief History of Western Sufism,” *Asia Journal of Social Science* 36, no. 2 (2008): 295. Kucuk notes that there were earlier intimate contacts with Sufis such as Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890) but this was facilitated by him feigning being Muslim and no initiation occurred.

¹¹⁸ Kucuk, “A Brief History”: 295.

four years later at the age of twenty-seven.¹¹⁹ Another figure, Rudolf Freiherr von Sebotendorf (1875-1945), who was himself swept up in the “Occult Revival,” upon travelling to Turkey came into contact with the Bektashi Order among other groups such as the Kabbalists and Masons. He attempted, as was the trend of the time, to combine these numerous traditions into his own framework for Western consumption, an endeavour that was ultimately fruitless and largely forgotten.¹²⁰

The First “Wave” of Sufism in the West

While these initial instances of Western engagement with Sufism were minimal if not unremarkable, it is during the 1910s that two figures catalyzed the spread of Sufism in the West: Hazrat Inayat Khan, a musician and pir of the Chishti Order in India (d. 1927), and René Guénon (d. 1951), founder of the Traditionalist school of thought and member of the Shadhili Sufi Order. Guénon and the Traditionalists wrote incisively about the perceived degradation of the West and its loss of tradition. Thus, the first of three distinct “Waves” of Sufism began.¹²¹

René Guénon’s Traditionalism

Before we begin our brief look at the life and philosophy of Guénon, it should be noted that in his opinion, the first “effective” engagement between Sufism and the West was through the Swedish painter Ivan/John Gustave Agueli (d. 1917). Agueli had been initiated into a Sufi order in Egypt and wrote numerous articles on the subject of Islam and Sufism; it was Agueli himself who in 1912 had initiated Guénon into the Shadhili Sufi Order.¹²² Both had been initially

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Gisela Webb, “Third-wave Sufism in America and the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship,” in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2006), 87-91. This is a three-stage temporal framework developed by Gisela Webb to trace Sufism spiritual engagement with the West.

¹²² Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 70.

influenced by the Theosophical Society among other occult groups, and thus subscribed to the zeitgeist's belief in the inherent unity of the world's various religions.¹²³ Both Agueli and Guénon, however, felt there was a degradation and that occult spiritual movements haphazardly combined certain aspects of religious traditions without subscription to the key practices and laws of those religions which Guénon felt were essential. Furthermore, they felt the West had lost its essential religious character and that in the wake of modern European scientism, materialism, and technological misuses, Christianity had atrophied from what was once a fruitful religious and spiritual tradition.¹²⁴

In Yannis Toussulis' work *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology*, he notes Guénon considered his formulation of universalism to be more "advanced." Toussulis writes, "The works of Guénon and Schuon [a notable follower of Guénon's teachings] suggest that simpler universalistic and popularizers of Sufism have either willfully ignored the obvious, bending of Sufism to their own purposes, or have simply postponed a confrontation with Islamic formalism."¹²⁵ This would include the perspectives of their alienated origins, namely the Theosophical society, and while there were no interactions between them,¹²⁶ Hazrat Inayat Khan and other Western Sufi groups embraced this "simpler" form of mysticism compared to the more mature, at least as perceived by Guénon, that there is an esoteric core but that it can only be acquired from the exoteric foundations of the world religions which cannot be altered.¹²⁷ This

¹²³ Kucuk, "A Brief History": 296.

¹²⁴ Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 70.

¹²⁴ Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 41.

¹²⁵ Yannis Toussulis, *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 2010), 20.

¹²⁶ Kucuk, "A Brief History": 301.

¹²⁷ Toussulis, *Sufism and the Way of Blame*, 19-20; Maria Hermansen, "Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America: The Case of American Sufi Movements," *Muslim World* 90, no. 1-2: 159 citing William Chittick in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World IV*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford, 1995), 107-8. Considered these two figures in a similar way as in the medieval period of Guénon and the "sober" mystic versus Inayat Khan as the "drunken" one.

belief came to be known as Traditionalism, the belief that one must return to the primordial traditions which have yet to be corrupted and where spiritual growth can flower.¹²⁸ The religious traditions of the East still retained this character.¹²⁹ Islam, in the thought of Guénon, was the most appropriate tradition for Western seekers as it shares much with Christianity and yet he felt Hinduism, especially Advaita Vedanta, whose language was somewhat foreign to the West, would be his champion to show the ill fate of the West's abandonment of tradition.¹³⁰ This is because Guénon felt that Islam, even with the benefit of being similar to Christianity, had its downside because it invoked said similarity, as a religion of the Book it would repel the Christian adverse Europeans. Furthermore, Islam's longstanding tension with Europe would also repel European interest. Advaita Vedanta, on the other hand, in its foreign and unfamiliar concepts and terminology would foster more interest and engagement.

However, for the majority of Westerners, the ability for them to make anything out of 'Eastern' traditions within their Western frameworks was difficult if not impossible in Guénon's world view. He felt Europe had lost touch with its own Christian religious heritage, making it impossible to study religions of the East which still retained their sacrality.¹³¹ In short, Westerners interested in Eastern religion lacked the faculty to decipher Eastern religious traditions, and were even oblivious of this fact. While Edward Said, often seen as the champion against Orientalism, understood this epistemological blindness as "horizontal," namely, being unable to relate to the Other in any terms that are not "self-serving and self-privileging," Guénon's perspective was instead, as Khalil and Sheikh argue, "vertical" in nature.¹³² What this means is that for Guénon the

¹²⁸ For a critical look at tradition see Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 62-64.

¹²⁹ Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 70.

¹³⁰ René Guénon, *The Essential René Guénon: Metaphysics, Tradition, and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. John Herlihy (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009): xix.

¹³¹ Khalil and Sheikh, "Sufism in Western Historiography": 206

¹³² Ibid.

non-Western Other could not be understood because the West had lost its own capacity to understand the Sacred by turning away from its own religious heritage.

Orientalism and the Notion of Sufism as Separate from Islam

Guénon, not only swimming in what he perceived as modern decadence, was caught up in a milieu of Orientalist thinkers and theories he felt were degraded by the abandonment of tradition. Some common strains of Orientalist thought in the nineteenth century saw Sufi poetry, with its themes of revelry, love, and jubilation, as a matter of fact, could not possibly be indebted to the “unimaginative, ossified, legalistic, and ritual-bound religion [of Islam], fundamentally incompatible with the higher yearnings of the spirit for God.”¹³³ Moreover, the roots of Sufism were understood by Orientalists to be heavily indebted to Christian mysticism, numerous Greek philosophies, and Hinduism.¹³⁴ This interestingly paralleled, albeit in alternate ways, the accusations of *bid'a* against Sufis by Salafis. Even living Sufi traditions were regarded as degradations and shadows of what Orientalists understood through reading the likes of al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and Rumi. Knysh remarks that even today scholars have a preference to study Sufis aligned with this lofty spiritual pedigree rather than those Sufis who are just caught up “in the messiness of everyday human existence.”¹³⁵ As noted by Knysh, “In their [i.e. the scholars’] view, the ‘irrational and naïve superstitions’ associated with Sufism on the ground [living Sufis] turn out to be incompatible with the lofty sophistication of Sufi ontological and gnoseological discourse enshrined in Sufism’s literary corpus.”¹³⁶ The written Sufi’s mystique is contrasted with the ordinary and grounded Sufi found in the world.

¹³³ Ibid: 198.

¹³⁴ Ibid: 196. Today’s detesters of Sufism in the Islamic world often make these claims to show how Sufism is foreign to legitimate Islam.

¹³⁵ Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 49.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

While in our contemporary environment we can look back and see the blatant inaccuracies and prejudices of the Orientalists, Alexander Knysh reminds us “the Orientalists *inevitably* couched the original Sufi ideas and practices into the cultural codes intelligible to their own societies”¹³⁷ and that “Presenting Sufism on in its own terms... was simply not an option for European and Russian scholars of Islam.”¹³⁸ It had to be translated or “imagined” into something that was digestible, understandable, and relatable to European sensibilities.¹³⁹ What Knysh is getting at is that while we can and reasonably should criticize Orientalist scholarship, we should not forget that they had to navigate the difficult process of taking a religious outlook that was completely new and foreign to them and make it intelligible through the tools that were available to them. In doing so, they laid the necessary foundation for the development of Sufi studies. It was only inevitable that later scholars would have to correct, criticize, refine, and build upon their work. In other words, the Orientalists, even in their errors, mined an imperfect marble slab of Sufism out of a mountain for us today to carve into a more refined and accurate presentation of it, shedding away the biases and misrepresentations.

Sufi Romanticism

It is noted, however, that there is still some sentimentality in the study of Sufism and while scholars of course refrain from outwardly speaking it, the *idea* of Sufism is steeped in an idealized, “frozen in time,” spirituality. In other words, there can be a tendency to have blinders on the vitally human and contemporary aspects of Sufism over the lofty concepts and claims of medieval mystics of a bygone age. As Ernst writes, “Yet the classicist bias of Orientalism, and the strikingly similar “golden age” historiography of fundamentalism, have conspired to keep Sufism separate from

¹³⁷ Ibid, 3.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 4.

modernity.”¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, regarding this sentiment Knysh writes, “The Romantic, intellectualist, liberal-minded vision of Sufism continues to rule supreme in the Western mentality, overshadowing Sufism’s more quotidian aspects that are not as congenial to the tastes and expectations of, for the most part, liberal Western audiences attracted to the exotic promise of ‘Islamic mysticism’.”¹⁴¹ In relation to this trend, as noted by John J. Curry and Erik S. Ohlander, the period of Sufism between its heyday in 1200s CE to its re-emergence in the Western imagination in the 1800s CE is “still mired in broad, overly-essentialist readings of Sufism and its institutions... [and even legitimate inquiries] are still largely episodic and localized.”¹⁴² This period has notably less immediate allure and literature from the lofty figures of Islam’s medieval period to Sufism’s emergence and engagement with the West. Curry and Ohlander feel this also is a consequence of Sufi Studies “Whose interests were often more philosophical than historical.”¹⁴³ Therefore, there is a greater need for historiography and ethnography in Sufi studies allowing us to look to the everyday happenings of a Sufi Order and of practitioners and students rather than Sufi teachers and textual analysis.¹⁴⁴ Not to say these latter categories are without value but perhaps it is time to step out of the library and into the lived experience of Sufis.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Ernst, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism,” 109.

¹⁴¹ Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 41. Knysh, however, does have qualms with Ernst as Ernst presents the responsibility of this separation as solely from fundamentalists and Orientalists but Knysh understands this as also a process Sufis themselves have been fostering and still do. Knysh writes, “medieval and Muslim writers both sympathetic and unsympathetic to Sufism tended to detach it from the rest of the Muslim tradition by presenting it being its culmination or aberration” and “On balance, one can submit that the biases of Orientalist scholarship although obvious to everyone with a modicum of knowledge of the subject, are no more or less severe than the biases of Sufis writing about their own doctrines and practices today as in the past” (Knysh 2-4). In other words, Sufis are just as guilty of sowing separation in relation to their non-Sufi counterparts for centuries while also at the same time proving orthodoxy in instances people accused Sufis of being un-Islamic. A trend which has continued.

¹⁴² John J. Curry and Erik S. Ohlander, “Introduction,” in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200-1800*, ed. John J. Curry and Erik S. Ohlander (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Dickson, *Living Sufism* 211; Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ I would like to note, perhaps to deal with the slight grief that comes with failed projects and aspirations, the initial plan for this thesis was to do a comparative study of the lived experience of Sufi students and practitioners of the Nur Ashki Order and the Jerrahi Order of Canada. This ambitious plan of fieldwork was subverted by the Covid-19 pandemic. I wished to study how the two sub-orders adherents expressed their Sufi spirituality, outside the

Although my own project is vulnerable to falling into these habits, I hope to examine spiritual figures such as Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak and his living disciple Sheikha Fariha and Sheikh Muhammad Jamal, as people with their own internal struggles. I also wish to demonstrate that vibrant, nuanced, and mature mystical teachings can, and always have, intertwined with very human realities. I also note, today's scholarship acknowledges that Sufism is both a product of Islam and informed by natural intellectual exchanges with its companion religions throughout its history. As Knysh notes, "the presence of extraneous elements in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam [and Sufism] must not be taken as a sign of their 'slavish dependence' on outside influences... Rather, it is their absence that would have been truly puzzling, for ideas do travel, intertwine, and crossbreed."¹⁴⁶ Toussulis echoes this when he writes, "Sufism is a multiplex phenomenon that takes on different shapes and forms, historically, socially, and individually" and that we should avoid at all costs "Such fallacies [that] include the notion that Sufism entirely transcends Islam, or, conversely, that Sufism is simply and purely Islamic."¹⁴⁷ However, the polemics around what makes a "true" or "authentic" Sufi is still present and as Dickson rightly suggests, "Sufism is better understood as an inherently fluid and diverse tradition that takes a multiplicity of forms."¹⁴⁸

Hazrat Inayat Khan's Universalism

Returning to the 'founders' of Western Sufism, Hazrat Inayat Khan arrived in Manhattan in 1910 along with his musicians and instruments in tow; his goal was to bridge the gap between

confines of Sufi groupings. For an example of such scholarship see Markus Dressler, "Between Legalist Exclusionism and Mysticist Universalism: Contested Sufi Muslim Identities in New York," *The Muslim World* 100 (Oct 2010): 431-451.

¹⁴⁶ Knysh, *A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 134; See Yannis Toussulis for a dedicated chapter on the critique of Traditionalism in *Sufism and the Way of Blame*, 19-38.

¹⁴⁷ Toussulis, *Sufism and the Way of Blame*, 36-37.

¹⁴⁸ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 5.

Sufism and the West.¹⁴⁹ He would continue this religio-musical tour intermittently up until 1926 (the musical aspect fading around the end of WWI) and in that time he would establish the Sufi Order of the West which was notably the only apparent form of Sufism up until 1960.¹⁵⁰ Inayat Khan described his teachings as “the Sufi Message.” Aware of the West’s ignorance or perhaps even aversion to Islam, he spoke of Sufism with little reference to its Islamic origins.¹⁵¹ This interestingly parallels those Orientalists who saw Sufism as being foreign to Islam and while Inayat Khan would not have thought this was the case, he felt that highlighting Sufism’s universal aspects was more suitable for Western mentalities. This also aligned with the Theosophical outlook which responded enthusiastically to universalistic teachings.¹⁵² As Kucuk notes, “It is striking the two earliest forms of Western Sufism [Guénon and Inayat Khan] both started within a few years of each other, but had no contact at all.”¹⁵³ She also characterizes the divergent strains of these early Western Sufi schools as that of Guénon representing the “densely intellectual” and Inayat Khan as the “populist [who used] music to attract people.”¹⁵⁴ Therefore, we see an inherent tension between Guénon’s perspectives and Inayat Khan’s, which come to inform future perceptions and categorisations of Western Sufism. However, it appears the populist and universalistic message of Khan gained more traction than Guénon’s tradition-oriented intellectualism.

Inayat Khan’s universalism fit well with those Westerners who sought a spiritual fulfillment that was not steeped in dogmatic teachings and which could be easily integrated into

¹⁴⁹ Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 40. In my interview with Sheikh Muhammad Jamal he affirms such notions. “So when Hazrat Inayat Khan came to this county, he found out very quickly that if he spoke about Islam people would sort of recoil and people would say ‘Murshid you cannot talk about Islam’ (chuckle) even though they were theosophists. And so, he said in some of his higher papers that he had to veil Islam.”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 42.

¹⁵² Ibid, 43.

¹⁵³ Kucuk, “A Brief History”: 301.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

their modern lifestyles.¹⁵⁵ This of course would be the antithesis of Guénon's thought. Even if he could get past the fact that the Sufism being expressed by Inayat Khan was authentic and not simplified and bastardized for a Western audience, in Guénon's view it would be impossible for it to be of any value to Westerners, imbedded as they were in a culture that in his eyes was, due to its materialism, antithetical to higher realization. To him, since Westerners had lost the language to speak, think, or even comprehend their own religion (Christianity), how could they accurately understand Sufism or any other Eastern tradition. However, Inayat Khan would disagree with such sentiment. For him, a teacher must simply adapt his teachings to the environment. To quote his own words, "Sufism is a religion if one wants to learn religion from it; it is a philosophy if one wants to learn wisdom from it; it is mysticism if one wishes to be guided by it in the unfoldment of the soul."¹⁵⁶ Perhaps a more poignant distinction is when Inayat Khan said, "If anybody asks what Sufism is, what kind of *religion* is it, the answer is that Sufism is the religion of the heart."¹⁵⁷

Second and Third "Waves" of Sufism in the West

During the counterculture movement of the 1960s, Sufism had a resurgence in the North American scene. Disenchanted by the current trends they saw in the world, young people in America began to critique and abandon the status quos of their parents and current authorities to explore other routes and ways of being. A product of this newfound explorative spirit led to interests in "Eastern" traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sufism. This second "wave" of Sufism, also expressed in terms of universal and syncretic interactions, was the zeitgeist of this

¹⁵⁵ Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 43.

¹⁵⁶ Inayat Khan, *The Heart of Sufism: Essential Writings of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, ed. H.J. Witteveen (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999), 5 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 47.

“New Age” spirituality.¹⁵⁸ However, this did lead to the critique of the eclectic mixture of traditions taught by seemingly unscrupulous and unqualified *gurus*. Nonetheless, one cannot deny the vitality and genuine spiritual seeking and experimentation of this decade. Furthermore, this set the stage for the third, and more Islamically rooted, “wave” of Sufism in the 1970s.

The third “wave” was notably less bombastic, in terms of an overt cultural phenomena, but its effects on Sufism were not similarly muted. Many of them came from established orders like the Mevlevis, Naqshbandis, Alamis,¹⁵⁹ Shadhilis, and Halveti-Jerrahis. Their exponents include figures such as the Guénonian-influenced Frithjof Schuon and his own notably eclectic Shadhili tradition, Sri Lankan Guru Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, and Muzaffer Ozak of the Halveti-Jerrahis.¹⁶⁰ As noted by Dickson, “Most of these Sufi teachers continued to emphasise the universality of Islam. They remained grounded, however, in some form of Islamic practice and tended to take a more traditional approach to the Sufi path.”¹⁶¹

Muzaffer Ozak does fit into this mold but if we look to his biography and the words of his students and successors it was not as simple of a balancing act as it might appear. As we have shown, trying to condense and petrify Sufism to one specific set of doctrines and practices is to miss the point. In the figure of Muzaffer Ozak there came together the traditional Islamic imam and the Islamic universalist, a fusion of aspects from both the “advanced densely intellectual” universalism of the Traditionalists, and the “simpler populist” universalism of Inayat Khan.

¹⁵⁸ Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 48. For a more in-depth overview see Dickson’s chapter “Currents of Sufi Teachings,” in *Living Sufism*, 81-124.

¹⁵⁹ An excellent doctoral thesis on the Alamis in Waterport NY is Julianne Hazen’s, “Contemporary Islamic Sufism in America: The Philosophy and Practices of the Alami Tariqa in Waterport, New York” (PhD thesis, London University, 2012).

¹⁶⁰ See Hermansen, “Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America,” *Muslim World* 90, no. 1-2 (2000): 161-177 for an overview of these and other Sufi groups.

¹⁶¹ Dickson and Sharify-Funk, *Unveiling Sufism*, 50.

Sufi Categorisations in the West

Now that we understand the trajectory and main proponents of Sufism in the West, we can turn to their later categorization by scholars. There are two notable categories of Sufi Orders in America presented by Marcia Hermansen and Alan Godlas.¹⁶² Hermansen presents the categories as if they replicate one's garden.¹⁶³ First there are the hybrids which combined, in various ways, Islamic teachings and American cultural sensibilities. Second, are the perennials which as we have seen are the expression of a universal origin and relation between all religious traditions. Third are the transplants who are usually ethnically homogenous and as such retain the Sufi space as a traditional haven from outside cultural influences. Just as Toussulis felt universalism has at least two formulations, the "advanced" universalism of Guénon and the "simple" universalism of Inayat Khan, Hermansen sees perennialism in a similar vein:

The Sufi-influenced intellectual movement that deliberately espouses the "perennialist" title, as articulated by René Guénon and later Frithjof Schuon and his intellectual circle, seems to have advocated adherence to the Shari'a at least in principle. But, at the same time, this orientation acknowledged the possibility of an individual following any one of the traditional religious paths as a legitimate way to realization... Some of the other perennial groups who call themselves 'Sufi' in the West have taken another position, which is that spiritual practices from various religious traditions may be combined since they all emerge from the same true source which is, in fact, primarily esoteric and gnostic rather than exoterically religious. Thus it is necessary to differentiate the strain of perennialism that maintains adherence to the Shari'a from other "perennial" Sufi-inspired movements in the West, which take a more "universal wisdom" approach to spirituality. It should also be noted that the former group's focus on "intellectual discernment" or gnostic perennialism has a certain appeal today, even in Muslim societies.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² There are others, such as Ron Geaves and Mark Sedgwick, who record similar categories to Hermansen and Godlas. See Ron Geaves' typology in Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer, eds. *Sufism in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality* (New York: Routledge, 2009) and Mark Sedgwick's in "Western Sufism and Traditionalism," Traditionalists.org.

¹⁶³ Hermansen, "Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America": 159.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid: 159-160.

Godlas' typology is similarly split in a tripartite fashion as follows: Islamic Sufi Organisations, Quasi-Islamic Organisations, and Non-Islamic Organisations.¹⁶⁵ "Islamic" are those traditions in which Shari'a and adherence to Islam is a vital characteristic. "Quasi-Islamic," a notably broad and somewhat ambiguous category, is a blend of Islamic and non-Islamic interactions and proclivities by sheikhs, their teachings, and students alike. The final category is the "non-Islamic" which utilises Sufi teachings but separates it from the Islamic context.

However, Dickson, who spent his research exploring these categories during fieldwork among numerous Sufi Organisations around North America, noted that there are those operating in seemingly Islamically rooted Sufi communities, "Islamic" Sufis, doing things one would assume to find in a more "hybrid" or "perennial" group. And there were Sufis who did not identify that Sufism was Islamically rooted, believing that being separated from Islam was essential for their Sufi teachings. Yet, under brief examination it appeared that they were actually aligned strongly with Islam, the Shari'a, and traditional orthodox Sufi practices.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, those Sufi groups that could be designated as "hybrid," "perennial," "quasi," or otherwise counteracted these statements, wondering why the universal and the Islamic should be separated since in their understanding the Islamic framework includes idea of "the universal."¹⁶⁷ They pointed to the nature of revelation and prophethood noting that there have been 124,000 prophets for every major human collective. The Truth has been universally given in different times, languages, and cultures. Dickson concluded, "After finding so much of one category in the other, strict borders between

¹⁶⁵ Alan Godlas, "Sufism – Sufis – Sufis Orders," accessed November 27, 2020 www.islam.uga.edu/sufismwest.html

¹⁶⁶ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 208-209.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 40, 180, and 203.

the two no longer seem tenable – the universal and Islamic were often so intertwined... that labels no longer made much sense.”¹⁶⁸

How to Categorise Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak?

Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak could be understood as a microcosm of this perspective since he contained within himself all these realities and had to navigate them in presenting the Halveti-Jerrahis to a Western audience. Regarding the “quasi” Islamic category, Godlas notes that “although the shaykh himself or herself adhered or adheres to the Shari‘a, the practice of Islam was not made a condition for receiving instruction on following the Sufi path.”¹⁶⁹ This seems to encapsulate Ozak, even though Godlas understands him as belonging to the “Islamic” section of his typology. While I do not disagree that Muzaffer Ozak, as a former imam and coming from the Ottoman-Turkish heartland of the Halveti-Jerrahis, is of course Islamic, his teachings changed depending on his crowd and environment. He fostered varying ways to teach and express Sufism depending on the culture.

Muzaffer Ozak, if his teaching method were to be forcibly placed within one of the aforementioned categories, would likely align with the hybrid version. Yet in doing this, he is also sympathetic to universalism and is also without question “Islamically” oriented. Furthermore, when we consider the parting of the Nur Ashki and Jerrahi Orders, one might even say that he contained within himself these diverging realities in a hybrid framework. But neither of these two trajectories with the personality of Ozak need to be understood as inherently or essentially in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 210.

¹⁶⁹ Godlas, “Sufism – Sufis – Sufis Orders.”

conflict; neither needs to be viewed as either non-Islamic or averse to universalism.¹⁷⁰ And this certainly was how Ozak himself appeared to have seen matters.

¹⁷⁰ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 209.

Chapter 3

Muzaffer Ozak's Early Life and Teachers

Sheikh Muhammad Muzaffer Ozak (1916-1985) was the nineteenth grand-sheikh of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order. He is often referred to by the epithet *Efendi* which, in his native tongue (Turkish) means 'Master'. Much of what we know of Muzaffer Ozak's early life is found in the brief autobiographical section in his book *The Unveiling of Love*, anecdotes of those who knew him, and the more recent biography, *Lifting the Boundaries: Muzaffer Efendi and the Transmission of Sufism to the West*, compiled by Jerrahi sheikh, Sheikh Muhammad Jamal (Gregory Blann). What we know of Muzaffer Ozak's teachings relies heavily on a few select pieces. To bolster this and get a more in-depth view of his teachings, his perspective on how to present Sufism in the West, and the lineage he left, we will use interview testimonies by members of his spiritual lineage including Sheikha Fariha and Sheikh Muhammad Jamal.

Blann notes numerous cases of diverging accounts regarding Ozak's early life. Ozak himself crafted his autobiography on distant memory alone. Yet, these histories and accounts are the most complete and accurate ones we have of his life. The accuracy here is not really of vital concern, but rather what these stories (misremembered, retold, created or otherwise) inform us of how Muzaffer Ozak became the man who brought the Halveti-Jerrahis to North America. Furthermore, the goal is to highlight events which came to mold and form his teachings and practices.¹⁷¹ In view of this, certain life events, including the more mystical aspects of his journey to Sufism (such as prophetic dreams and uncanny happenstances) will not be the focal point of the

¹⁷¹ A vitally missing portion of Ozak's early life is exactly what teachings did his teachers instill in him that led to his later perspectives and what were the teachings crafted from his own disposition. While this will be explored in this (and more so the following) chapter, he was considered radical not only by secular standards but by his Muslim contemporaries and Sufi students, both positively and negatively. So, it is a blind spot that we do not know how this perspective formulated before his interactions and teachings were broadly disseminated in America.

ensuing analysis. Not that these are not of value, but there is little need to ruminate over what can be discovered by oneself through his works, such as *Irshad* and *The Unveiling of Love*, among others, which have been translated into English.

Muzaffer Ozak placed his birthdate as December 7, 1916 in Istanbul.¹⁷² This is an example of diverging accounts. Ozak recalls a story of a great fire in his infancy, which Blann notes could make his birth date years earlier according to historically recorded fires in Istanbul.¹⁷³ His father, Mehmet Efendi, came from a military family that served the Ottoman Empire in the 1878 Russian-Turkish War and were driven out of their home in the Balkans. Notably, Mehmet ended the tradition of military service in his family and became a religious scholar and merchant, something which his son would continue.¹⁷⁴ Muzaffer Ozak's mother, Ayesha Ozak Hanim, was the daughter of a sheikh whom Mehmet met when he was posted for teaching in Plevna, Bulgaria.¹⁷⁵ It is through his mother that Muzaffer has the name "Ozak," which refers to *sayyids* or descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his nephew Ali and daughter Fatima. Mehmet was no meagre religious teacher. He was actually charged with teaching the children of the then Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid.¹⁷⁶ This posting was however at the eve of the empire, and Mehmet was charged by the emerging Turks of the Committee of Union and Progress and exiled to Sinope where he later died. This was due to his close involvement with the old Ottoman tradition, which was seen by some as a reason for the fall of the Ottoman empire to Western powers.

¹⁷² Gregory Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries: Muzaffer Efendi and the Transmission of Sufism to the West* (New York: Pir Press Inc., 2015), 4.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 4, 19. However, Muzaffer Ozak was twice enlisted in the Turkish army during World War II. However, his second posting was that as an imam of a hospital, therefore keeping in line with his religious expertise.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 5.

Muzaffer Ozak's family was placed in the care of Mehmet's colleague Sayyid Sheikh 'Abdul-Rahman Samiyyi Saruhani Usshaki-Halveti (d. ca. 1928) who acted as a father-figure for Ozak, until the age of twelve, when Sami Efendi, as he was referred to, passed away.¹⁷⁷ It would not be unreasonable to suggest Sami Efendi acted as catalyzing influence in Ozak's life, directing him towards Sufism. In Ozak's autobiography, he speaks of him with immense regard, saying, "of all the venerable people I have met, I profited most from the one who was benefactor and first Sheikh of my tender years."¹⁷⁸ Sami Efendi was a sheikh in three Sufi Orders: the Usshakiyya (a Halveti branch like the Jerrahis), Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya.¹⁷⁹

The next important spiritual guide for Ozak was Gumuljineli Mustafa Efendi.¹⁸⁰ It is important to know this was a time when religious functions and teachings were restricted by secularist rule. Spiritual teachers in Istanbul were stripped of legal forums to teach and often imparted instruction secretly in their homes or in small groups in other public places. Mustafa Efendi took the then teenage Ozak to the Fatih Library to meet Fahreddin Efendi, who as previously noted, was the eighteenth grand-sheikh of the Halveti-Jerrahis when the *tekke* closed in 1925.¹⁸¹ Fahreddin would later become one of the most influential people in Ozak's life, a theme I will turn to shortly.

Another important factor in Ozak's life, is when he was bestowed a large number of books. These were given to him in the wake of the Turkish government censoring religious and Arabic texts in favour of secular Turkish books written in Latin script. He became a custodian of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Muzaffer Ozak, *The Unveiling of Love*, trans. Muthar Holland (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1981), 4. However, at this point he is not a formal member of any Sufi order.

¹⁷⁹ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 7; The Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya also have a sizeable following in the West. Oluf Schonveck, "Sufism in the USA: Creolisation, Hybridisation, Syncretisation?" in *Sufism Today*, ed. Catharina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), 179.

¹⁸⁰ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 12.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 13.

traditional religious texts as the Turkish state continued to distance itself from that same past. The influx of these books allowed him to open a bookstore which he maintained until his death. Here he would often meet with those who came to find him in Istanbul throughout the years, such as the important Tahir Efendi (d. 1957).¹⁸²

Upon the return from his first Hajj in 1949, Ozak returned to his usual routine at the bookstore. During this post-pilgrimage period, in what Ozak describes as entanglement of fate in the unseen world, he met Sheikh Ahmad Tahir ul-Marashi, the head of the Halveti-Shabani Order outside his bookstore.¹⁸³ If Sami Efendi was the flint, then Tahir Efendi was the one who fueled the flame of Sufism in Ozak's heart. He became his dervish. For seven years, Tahir Efendi would impart teachings to Ozak in his bookstore and served as his spiritual guide until 1957 when he passed away. This left Muzaffer without a guide; and even though he had undergone seven years of tutelage, he was not yet raised to the level of sheikh.

An interesting feature of Muzaffer Ozak was his initial aversion towards Sufism. In the biographical accounts, he looked at the mystical with some measure of disdain in his early years as an imam. Ozak said this on the eve of his transition after his meetings with Tahir Efendi:

I was swimming in the shariat (Turkification of Shari'a), obeying what is prescribed as lawful and unlawful in the Qur'an... [T]here is a certain heaviness to the shariat the sacred law of Islam, insofar as it functions to rein in the ignoble tendencies of the lower self. When I entered the mystic path of Islam, this slightly bitter taster of the shariat became sweeter. So that which, taken by itself, seemed bitter to the lower self, has become sweetened by the honey of mysticism on the Sufi Way.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid, 69.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 29.

Ozak recognized that the Shari‘a to one less spiritually astute has a sort of bitterness, but only because one has not yet evolved beyond the “lower self.” The remark reflected his own cognizance of the natural aversion people might feel towards the Shari‘a. And this coloured his own ideas about how he felt Sufism should be best spread to an audience not from a traditionally Islamic milieu. Blann notes that Ozak’s earlier Turkish works focus more on the Shari‘a, while his *Irshad* and especially *The Unveiling of the Love* focus much more on the Tariqa.¹⁸⁵ This is because he felt his Turkish audience needed to be reminded of the Shari‘a after it had been lost due to secularisation, while his later American audiences would respond much better to the “mystic way of love”.¹⁸⁶ Blann notes:

When he was writing in Turkey, he was trying to emphasize the shariat and tell people to come back from the secular Ataturk trip you’ve been on and re-embrace traditional Islamic values. When he came to America it had to be come to the tarikat, come to love, come to mercy. A different message in a different culture.¹⁸⁷

This highlights Ozak’s keen sense of what needed to be said to whom. This will be explored in more detail in the next section, this passage from *The Unveiling of Love* highlights his spiritual views, and is worth sharing for now:

During my four visits to the United States, I have met with thousands of people, among them priests, rabbis, spiritual teachers, professors, students, artists, musicians – people from all walks of life, men and women of all ages... I have observed these people one by one; they are all lovers of God, Glorified and Exalted is He. In heart and form they are as pure, as clean, and as beautiful as their faces show... They were longing to speak with me of God and of Love.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ *Irshad* is one example that clearly shows Ozak had a mastery of Islamic law and theology along with Sufism. Much like Ghazali, he was able to harmonize the outward and inner forms of Islam. Blann puts it nicely in his interview: “You have to really know the software inside and out before you can successfully change it without doing harm to it. That’s part of the secret otherwise who are you to change anything. In less skillful hands the changes may not work very well” (interview by author).

¹⁸⁶ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 20.

¹⁸⁷ Blann, interview by author

¹⁸⁸ Ozak, *The Unveiling of Love*, 16.

However, Blann notes this was not always Ozak's sentiment and it was a perspective he grew into as he aged and travelled:

He really grew from his earlier books in Turkey. Early on in talks with his dervishes, he would occasionally disparage the limited beliefs of the other world's religions, like, "imagine Hindus worshipping a cow," or "Christians worshipping three gods." When he came to America and encountered Sheikh Nur (Lex Hixon) and people like that [who embraced and saw beauty and unity in multiple religious traditions] he seemed to grow beyond some of that. It wasn't his thing to practice other religions, but he began to emphasize the acceptance of all the prophets and the 'People of the Book' more and more.¹⁸⁹

Blann's observation highlights an aspect of how the student influences the teacher and the mutual growth that arises from the student-teacher relationship. As Blann put it, it was "Like Shams and Rumi, who both taught each other. Who was teaching who?"¹⁹⁰

Following Tahir Efendi's death, Ozak began to search for a new guide which led to an interest in the Rifa'iyya and Qadiriyya Orders, but he was undecided.¹⁹¹ In a dream, it is said he was visited by Sheikh Fahreddin of the Jerrahi Order whom he had met many years prior. Ozak then decided after a few days of deliberation to seek out Sheikh Fahreddin. When he arrived at the house of Fahreddin Efendi he was met by Safer Efendi who would later become a close confidant of Ozak and Ozak's successor as grand sheikh after his death.¹⁹² Safer Efendi then took him to meet Fahreddin Efendi. However, Fahreddin waited for an auspicious dream before allowing Ozak into his ranks and even later declared Ozak was personally invited by Hazrati Pir Nureddin, the founder of the Halveti-Jerrahi Order.¹⁹³ This is important in Sufism, since as we have seen, the

¹⁸⁹ Blann, interview by author.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 33.

¹⁹² Ibid, 34, 47. Safer Efendi was grand sheikh from 1985-1999.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 36-37.

students and the orders themselves seek legitimacy and a personal connection to God through the means of their respective sheikhs, returning to the order's founding sheikh, and from there, to the Prophet Muhammad, through a chain of transmission (*silsila*).¹⁹⁴ His relationship with Fahreddin would last nine years from the summer of 1957 until 1966 when Fahreddin passed away.¹⁹⁵ Before Fahreddin's passing, in 1959, Ozak was dedicated as the acting sheikh as the aging Fahreddin spent more time at home (which happened to be the Jerrahi *dergah*).¹⁹⁶

In 1960, during unrest in Turkey, Ozak was detained for a short period on suspicions of espionage by General Gursel of the Committee of National Unity when he took over governmental control through a military coup. The basis for this was due to a prediction made by Ozak, which was circulated due to its accuracy, that the Democratic Party of Prime Minister Menderes was to fall by a coup.¹⁹⁷ While not only being suspect of espionage, this highlights the marginal place Sufi practices and sentiments had in the secularized Turkey. This made it even more meaningful when Fahreddin Efendi died and Ozak opened the doors to the *tekke*. *Tekkes* had been banned but he got around it by opening it as a public building.¹⁹⁸ This highlights a strong-willed aspect of Ozak which is attested to by his followers. One such anecdote from Blann highlighted Ozak's fighting spirit against such restrictions:

Muzaffer Efendi really opened up the tarikat in Turkey and yet those restrictions persisted. He was even arrested. And his son told me – I didn't put this in the book – one time when they were threatening to arrest him he said, “You can hang me, but write it on my chest it was because I said *la ilaha illallah*.” He was a very fearless warrior.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Ozak, *The Unveiling of Love*, 158.

¹⁹⁵ Blann *Lifting the Boundaries*, 41.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁹⁹ Blann, interview by author.

After the death of Fahreddin in 1966, there was turmoil surrounding his succession. Some nominated Safer Efendi who had been Fahreddin's disciple for many years more than Ozak; however, Safer Efendi nominated Ozak to be the next grand sheikh.²⁰⁰ Yet, there was still another who had an even stronger claim. That was Husameddin Efendi, who was the maternal half-brother of Fahreddin and had been with him the longest. It was decided, as no conclusion could be made, they will each deliberate and return later. A week later Husameddin dreamt he was unsuccessfully leading prayer and was visited by the founding saint Nureddin, who took him aside from leading prayer and replaced his position with Ozak.²⁰¹ After this, Husameddin declared Ozak as the rightful heir to the Halveti-Jerrahi Order and he became the eighth Khalifa and nineteenth sheikh after Nureddin al-Jerrahi.²⁰²

Teachings of Muzaffer Ozak

Now I shall turn to the teachings of the Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak. At the heart of his message is the belief that “[t]he universe ... [is] ... a Sufi lodge, and everything in this universe, alive or inert, is continuously remembering its Divine Source.”²⁰³ He also understood there to be a complete union between the Shari‘a and the Tariqa (Sufism). While he felt each was a necessary component of the other, he also believed that the order in which they were presented had to depend on the audience. He would occasionally say that one need not even strive for the Shari‘a. He even guided others with questions of spiritual guidance back to trusted religious personnel from their original faith, if they were not Muslim.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, when he heard how the Sri Lankan Sufi master, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, taught all his students basic *Tawhid*, “there is no god but God,”

²⁰⁰ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 51.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 52.

²⁰² Ibid, 53; Ozak, *The Unveiling of Love*, 11.

²⁰³ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 142.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 204.

which primed them slowly for the introduction of the Shari‘a, he jokingly remarked that is what he should have done originally.²⁰⁵ However, he noted in America it was the spiritual path that attracted people initially. He observed, “But these days, it is reversed, at least in America. The *tarikah* has become the path that leads people to the *shariat* of Islam”.²⁰⁶ This also lends itself to the theory that Sufism was a main missionary force which melded with the cultures and slowly introduced Islamic reform. In Blann’s words, Ozak was a gradualist in his teaching approach:

Muzaffer Efendi adhered to the shariat. He always wanted to be clear on that, but he was a gradualist with Americans who were new to Islam. So, when someone first takes hand in Islam or if a child does, they basically wait until the age of seven before you start doing the five times a day prayer and so forth. There is this idea that when you first take hand, especially if you are not in a culture that was already brought up with Islam, you’re like a newborn. You don’t know the ropes and you can’t get all of this information all at once. You have to study it and gradually let it blossom in your being. So, for instance he would say you don’t have to start out with five times a day prayer. If you can, do one or two and if you haven’t learned the Quranic *suras* you should learn the *Fatiha* which is basic. It is only seven verses, very easy to learn, and say it in Arabic... Learn some of those to start out with and then find verses in the Quran that you resonate with and learn those. When you first start out, instead of saying a verse you could just say Allah, Allah, Allah, Allah and then do your prostrations and gradually build up. And if you can, do five times a day Alhamdulillah; if you can’t then do what you can.²⁰⁷

Ozak never wanted his students to feel pressured, indicating that these teachings took time and people were at varying levels. Blann tells us, “He was very big on quoting the *Sura Baqara* where it says, ‘there is no compulsion in religion.’ You can’t force it on people. It won’t work that way. People have to go into it at the level they are at and, inshallah, with God’s help, their understanding will grow, and they go up various levels.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 205.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 199.

²⁰⁷ Blann, interview by author.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

A related tale which Ozak liked to tell, was how the Prince Vladimir I (d.1015), great grandson of the Rus Viking Rurik (d. 879),²⁰⁹ sent his envoys to gather representatives of the major Western religions to his court, since he wished for a new religion. When the Islamic representative spoke, the Prince was moved to conversion but since the Shari‘a denounced the drinking of alcohol, an important aspect of the Prince’s subjects’ life and culture, he refused and became Byzantine Christian.²¹⁰ Ozak used this story to show how initial instances of aversion towards aspects of the Shari‘a should not be met with disqualification to those who desire other aspects of Islam, or more specifically, Sufism. For he noted, Shari‘a could have a bitter taste to it and naturally the ‘sweeter aroma’ of Sufism would be much more attractive. If the Islamic ambassador simply accepted this cultural contingency, Ozak surmised all of Russia would have been Muslim and the drinking would eventually die out with Islamic teachings.²¹¹ Relating to this Blann observed in a personal interview:

His emphasis was on the love and the tarikat, so it was the Sufism and the Way of Love that attracted people more than the shariat at first at least. Then you start realising that the five times a day prayer, fasting during Ramadan, the *zakat* (generosity), all these things are ways of self remembering and becoming closer to one’s own divine centre. He emphasized the tarikat and the spirit more than the letter of the law and he did not accept more restrictive or compulsory interpretations of Islam as being true to its spirit. So, there is something they say in, I think, the 10th century that they closed the door of *ijtihad*, which means exercising your own interpretive mental faculties in respect to the sacred law. Each person should be able to understand the religion in the highest way that they can but the lawyers the *hodjas* would say we are making the interpretations for you and making the final *fatwas* and now we’ve done it all and we are closing the doors of *ijtihad*. In recent years a number of Muslims have begun to say that if the imams and jurists of 10th century closed the doors of

²⁰⁹ Alexandr Rukavishnikov, “*Tale of Bygone Years: the Russian Primary Chronicle as a family chronicle*,” *Early Medieval Europe* 12 (2003): 58 <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uleth.ca/10.1111/j.0963-9462.2003.00121.x>. The story told seems to be an altered rendition of the event described in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* or *The Tale of Bygone Years* (ca. 12th century). Vladimir I did convert to Byzantine Christianity becoming the first Christian in his line. In Ozak’s rendition it is the message of gradualism which is pertinent here rather than historical legitimacy.

²¹⁰ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 205-206. Blann also reiterated this story in our interview as it highlights Ozak’s propensity for gradualism (interview by author).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

ijtihad then they need to be reopened because it is questionable whether they ever had divine permission to close anything like that.²¹²

The idea of the gradualist approach has important implications because as seen in the last chapter Sufi groups are often categorised by their universalist tendencies or their Islamic rootedness. Furthermore, gradualism is not necessarily the same as hybridity as gradualism suggests shifting from one form to another while hybridity denotes continuous mixing.²¹³ Therefore, the gradualist approach in Sufism is both Islamically rooted and lends itself to growth towards more traditional Islamic forms, but initially in a way which promotes a more universal and therefore a more widely digested presentation of it. Of course, down the line this can lead to a hybrid Sufism. However, this gradualist approach was not appreciated by all of Ozak's students, or perhaps more precisely, they did not appreciate the possibility that the universal beginnings would overturn a traditional conclusion. This will be explored further in the following chapter on how this gradualist approach led to the splitting of the Halveti-Jerrahis in America.

Muzaffer Ozak in America

Ozak was given the opportunity to travel around the world. He traveled to Germany six times, England twice, the Netherlands and Belgium twice, France four times, the United States four times and numerous countries in the Balkans.²¹⁴ Muzaffer Ozak's first trip to the United States was on March 11, 1978. He was sponsored by John and Dominique de Menil who were notable art enthusiasts and also interested in interfaith engagements. Their daughter Phillipa de Menil

²¹² Blann, interview by author.

²¹³ Marcia Hermansen, "What's American about American Sufi movements?" in *Sufism in Europe and North America* ed, David Westerlund (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 43-44. She notes gradualism is a vital aspect of Sufism's spread in North America. She however uses gradualism and hybridisation interchangeably and does not appear to provide any distinction between the two processes.

²¹⁴ Ozak, *The Unveiling of Love*, 12.

(Sheikha Fariha), who would become one of Ozak's students and would become a sheikha in 1980, and her mother were interested in bringing the Whirling Dervishes of the Mevlevi to America, and through shared contacts, came to meet Tosun Bayrak (d. 2018),²¹⁵ a baba of Ozak's. He suggested they meet his spiritual teacher Muzaffer Ozak.²¹⁶ During this trip, Lex Hixon (Sheikh Nur), who became one of Ozak's successors in America, first met Ozak on April 12, 1978 when he hosted Ozak on his radio show *In the Spirit*.²¹⁷ Hixon interviewed many prominent spiritual figures, which highlighted his eclectic religious interests and his universalist worldview. He was already initiated in Vajrayana Buddhism and Vedantic Hinduism, yet he noted that the meeting with Ozak was a rare and moving spiritual experience for him.²¹⁸ As Sheikha Fariha put it:

I think in the first time of meeting Efendi, Nur right away just like caught fire with this initiation. Somehow it also confirmed all of his own earlier insights on the Unity of Being and how it manifests in many forms. As you know, he was initiated into many different, maybe five, of these major traditions. He already, his view was universal. But Efendi really, I would say experientially brought him to the centre. So, like to the root of all the varieties of these experiences.²¹⁹

After this Hixon would continue to learn and become more active in the Jerrahi Order and is considered by some to be a leading figure in adapting Sufism further to a Western milieu. Sheikha Fariha considered him to be a "fantastic filter," refining and removing the Turkish cultural aspects that were present in the Jerrahi Order, further refining what Ozak began:

Nur is a tremendous key for modern times for contemporary culture because we are all of the sudden all in this arena with all the different religions and different cultures, different races, different experiences, different points of view and how all of this is going to be resolved and harmonized. I think Sufism is a great key and I think Nur is a key to

²¹⁵ Tosun Bayrak was a Turkish-born accomplished artist and academic in New York. In 1970, becoming disillusioned with what he referred to as his egotistical and worldly pursuits he came to meet Muzaffer Ozak and became his student. After Ozak's death, he ultimately became sheikh of the more traditional Jerrahi Order of America while Lex Hixon became the sheikh of the more westernized Nur Ashkis.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 86-87.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 88; Hixon, *Atom from the Sun of Knowledge*, v.

²¹⁸ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 88.

²¹⁹ Fariha, interview by author (January 6, 2021).

contemporary Sufism. He will be more and more seen. His importance will be more and more recognized as time goes on.²²⁰

When Ozak was invited to Hixon's house it highlighted the interplay of the Islamically rooted but now openminded Ozak and the pluralist Hixon. Blann tells the story:

When Muzaffer Efendi came to [Hixon's] house and saw all the artifacts of different religions. He had a painting of Sri Sarada Devi on the wall. [Ozak] said, 'what is your experience of all these religions?' and [Hixon] said 'its like the branches of the tree and I like to explore all those branches.' And Efendi said, 'that's a great description but I prefer to stay in the trunk.' The trunk and the branches all contain the same sap; it is just where you put your energy.²²¹

Ozak accepted Hixon's pluralism and even allowed him to continue this practice as he saw fit. As noted in *Lifting the Boundaries*, Hixon said:

My sheikh (Ozak) actually gave me the responsibility to express [Islam] in the culture in whatever way I was inspired to do so. He never gave me any limits or guidelines other than his intense love of Islam... So, for instance, in our Order in New York City I accept and initiate into our Order people who are Jews or Christians or Buddhists. They don't have to become Muslim. This is a rare thing among the Sufi Orders. Only occasionally, under certain cultural conditions has this happened, and then maybe either privately or secretly...²²²

Hixon thinks this is perhaps influenced by the plurality and the right to freedom of religion in the United States. He does not go so far as to say that this is a specific "American Sufism."²²³ But America, for him, allows for an environment for the "most mature expressions to come forward in any [...] great tradition".²²⁴ Ozak explained "when the *tarikah* comes to a country, its culture

²²⁰ Fariha, interview by author.

²²¹ Blann, interview by author.

²²² Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 177.

²²³ Blann in our interview felt that Sufism cannot really be defined nationalistically: "I've heard discussion with people who say there is no 'American Sufism' just Sufism. I think it would be debatable to call it American Sufism the reason is because the *tarikah* assumes the flavour in each culture... Maybe the American spirit of religious freedom is part of it, but I think it goes beyond anything nationalistic for sure."

²²⁴ Ibid.

doesn't need to be discarded; the *tarikāt* just makes some corrections and adaptations to the culture."²²⁵ Sheikha Fariha affirms this sentiment and said, "So, it is not just that he came to adapt a classical Sufi tradition to the West but also there is a part of our own limited culture that needs to adapt to a sacred tradition."²²⁶ The religion also adapts to the culture. It is a two-way street. Ozak also explained this with the often-invoked analogy of the vessel and the water by the early Sufi, Junayd of Baghdad.²²⁷ Water in the analogy is Islam and the vessel are the particular culture into which the water is poured. While the water is shaped to fill the receptacle, it never loses its essence. Furthermore, no matter how long the water remains in a receptacle it will never solidify into the shape of the receptacle and can easily be poured into another vessel of a different shape. Therefore, as attested by Blann, Ozak understood this principle to highlight the essential unity of religions:

Muzaffer wasn't a pluralist but he accepted the Quranic principle to accept all the people of the book and all the prophets as bringing the one essential message of unity. He used to say if you say you are a Muslim, but you don't accept the Torah and you don't accept the Gospels you cannot be a Muslim. You have to venerate Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the other prophets of Israel: Abraham; the father of the three religions, Moses and he said I see no reason why this can't be extended to include the Buddha and others.²²⁸

This is furthermore affirmed by Sheikha Fariha who highlights that even outside mystical formulations Islam is itself inherently universalistic:

Well Islam itself is a universal. I mean the Quran says that the Prophet came not to overturn things really but to reaffirm and open up, and he himself is the last brick in the wall of prophecy... It brings anew of course, and it [the Quran] is an immensely dense and mystical text and has different levels of meaning that can only be accessed through the heart and not even by just approaching it through the mind. But yes, Islam is universal script and may be the last [of the] great revelations. It's like a sibling. The last sibling sees all the ways and they're all there already. Whereas the first sibling doesn't see yet all the other siblings

²²⁵ Ibid, 211.

²²⁶ Fariha, interview by author.

²²⁷ This teaching was highlighted by both Fariha and Blann.

²²⁸ Blann, interview by author.

coming. But no other scripture speaks of the other traditions like Islam does or the other prophets. So, universality is inherent in the tradition but not all proponents or representatives bring that out. And some stay very, very narrow.²²⁹

While Ozak acknowledged an essential unifying essence of religion, he still was weary of how spirituality was being perceived and practiced in America. For the most part, Ozak extolled the United States for its freedom of religion and believed that it had the ability to be a force for spiritual growth. He even stated, “the knowledge that which had for so long shined upon the East had changed its direction and was now shining on the West.”²³⁰ Conversely, he saw many self-serving and materialistic practices being exalted in the consumerist culture of the West. Sheikha Fariha highlights some of the areas where he did not see the American culture that highly:

Because we have invested ego, we just don’t see it, but we see the limits of other people’s cultures. We have blinders on when we look at our own. It is more difficult to detect. One of these was waste. It really pained him to see how much waste there was in our culture [and] in our society. [The waste of] food and materials and the unconsciousness about that. Another thing was relation to parents. Sacred culture has great reverence and respect for parents, grandparents, the family. He found here, of course, broken ties and broken bonds between children and parents. That was another painful place.²³¹

Big business and consumerism were of chief concern and he saw many complicit in it. Furthermore, Ozak worried about spiritual idleness in America and that many do not understand the diligence it takes to partake in the spiritual journey. Rather, people will try to use Sufism for their own personal gain instead of for *dhikrullah* or the “remembrance of God.”²³² This could be seen as a cause of anxiety for Ozak as the Tariqa-first approach could lead to this and perhaps, as we shall see later, this was felt even stronger by some of his more traditional minded students.

²²⁹ Fariha, interview by author.

²³⁰ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 212. Blann mentioned this again in our interview.

²³¹ Fariha, interview by author.

²³² Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 194.

In America, as we have previously seen, the *tarikāt* comes before the *shariat*. This was a continuous dilemma for the sheikh. While we have seen Ozak was extremely accepting, he still worried about those who entered the spiritual path and disregarded the religion to which it is bound. Ozak would often say when asked questions about the relation of Sufism and Islam, one must always enter through the main door.²³³ This front door leading to the ground floor of the *Shari‘a* which leads up to the second floor of the *Tariqa*. To go through the back, or worse, climb through a window, is inappropriate and could be indicative of malintent. Ozak uses this story to highlight his concern that those who come just for the spiritual path, but ignore the religion, are just the same as someone avoiding coming through the front door. Otherwise, he says, it is hard to tell if someone is sincere in their approach.

If someone is insincere in their approach and hopes to skip by the religion or if they are idle and self-serving, this can lead, in Ozak’s eyes, to spiritual complacency.²³⁴ He fears those who practice and pray only for themselves are making idols of their egos.²³⁵ Furthermore, he finds many people may not truly understand the gravity of the spiritual path; they would, however, if they could truly “cut the idols in [their] hearts.”²³⁶ Ozak felt they do not understand a battle must be waged with the spirit and the intellect to stop this. They may, yet again, stray from the path and fall into their idleness and insincerity but will then again feel an ache and look for a new spiritual path.²³⁷ Ozak understood these people, or the nature of the world today in general, as flies

²³³ Ibid, 197.

²³⁴ Ibid, 208.

²³⁵ Ibid, 256.

²³⁶ Ibid, 257.

²³⁷ Robert Frager, a student of Ozak’s and founder of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, in the introduction to his book *Love is the Wine: Talks of a Sufi Master in America* (Chino Valley: HOHM Press, 2009), highlight this apprehension of Ozak. Frager writes, “I asked him [Ozak] about a particular Sufi meditation practice, and Sheikh Muzaffer replied, ‘Will you leave your religion when I die?’”. Frager goes on to point out this was a sort of test to see if his sincerity and love was towards Sufism and the love of God or if he was merely absorbed in the presence and love of Ozak (xi).

desperately trying to get in a jam jar. But once we are in, we only think of getting out.²³⁸ In other words, Ozak saw restlessness in those unable to see past self-interest. However, he believed through the spiritual path if one is sincere and puts in the effort, they can taste the jam instead of flying aimlessly around it.

For Ozak, the world was at the tipping point. The future held much promise but risked greater degradation if its trajectory was left unchecked. Often, he was asked how we were to save our world. Ozak realized it was a fruitless and unwise task to try to force change on people; rather, he merely wished to guide. Regarding this, he says:

Our actual generation is what it is. To change it is an almost impossible task. So... if you wish the Truth for other people, then the best thing to do is to try and work within the education system, and to work on one's own children. Of course, you cannot fight on behalf of future generations without doing battle with the existing generation. You don't have to change the life of people in this generation who are already set in their ways. Instead of asking the smoker to quit, if you ask them to help keep their child from ever starting to smoke, they might well go along with that. People are more receptive to that kind of approach.²³⁹

If we recall, this is exactly what he felt was the major flaw of the Muslim missionary who attempted to convert the Rus. The missionary did not look to the possibility of future generations, rather, only at the flaws of the current one. Therefore, Ozak felt we can change the future and we still must challenge the current generation, but we must challenge them with our intellect. Through our words "is how the battle is waged. From this dialogue, the ones who are destined to understand and see the truth are going to see the truth, and the ones who are not so destined will not see it."²⁴⁰

In other words, Ozak wished to plant the seeds of change, true to his gradualist mentality.

²³⁸ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 235.

²³⁹ Ibid, 234.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 233.

In Sufism, there is the notion of taming the ego (*nafs*), one's self-serving, self-centered tendencies. Some Sufi authors describe the goal as killing the ego. However, Ozak saw it differently. He said, "One doesn't want to slay, annihilate or cripple the self... Someone may speak in terms of killing the *nafs*, or annihilating the ego or the lower self, but this is not really appropriate. The goal is not to kill, but to improve."²⁴¹ This quote highlights much of what we have discussed. Ozak brought Sufism, not to do away with the original traditions, religions, and cultures of the places he visits, rather, he wanted them to experience the Halveti-Jerrahi Way while allowing for their own cultural interpretations and trepidations towards it. He did not wish to pressure or belittle those who genuinely came to learn or experience what he had to teach. He wanted to plant the seeds of change without having to cut down a forest in front of him which was the established culture. He wanted to provide the world with the spiritual path of the Jerrahis which he held so dear and did not want to withhold entrance on the principle that "people should enter the house through the main door".²⁴² While he noted issues that could arise from this, he, unlike the aforementioned Muslim missionary in Russia, knew his teachings had more power and worth if allowed to gestate at a rate that was comfortable for his students.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 252.

²⁴² Ibid, 197.

Chapter 4

The Nur Ashki Sufi Order and the Jerrahi Order of America

After the death of Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak, two branches²⁴³ of the community he founded would form: The Nur Ashki Sufi Order²⁴⁴ formerly led by Lex Hixon (Sheikh Nur) and the Halveti-Jerrahi Order of America formerly led by Tosun Bayrak (Sheikh Tosun). As Margaret J. Rausch rightly observed, these two “can be considered two significant, but distinct, components of Muzaffer Effendi’s legacy.”²⁴⁵ Her chapter then continues by looking at how each of their websites presents a different stream of that legacy.²⁴⁶ The Nur Ashkis under Sheikha Fariha continued to promote the theme of ‘gradualism’ and openness perpetrated by Ozak, and Hixon’s own universalistic understanding of Sufism and Islam. Markus Dressler put it nicely when he said, “In the case of the Nur Ashki Jerrahis, however, their universalism does not appear to be of a transient nature [that is universalism that flows into particularism], but rather expresses a redefinition of Sufi Muslim identity within a religiously pluralist environment, attracting an audience that values religious openness more than dogmatic fixation.”²⁴⁷ The Jerrahi Order of America, on the other hand, stress what appears to be a more culturally specific Islamic identity, and require a more formal entry into the faith. They are also closely aligned with the parent Halveti-Jerrahi Order in Istanbul. Xavier and Dickson offer this pertinent distinction:

²⁴³ Genn, “The Development of a Modern Western Sufism,” (265-266). She notes this is not unusual and goes on to show the sub-orders formed after the death of Hazrat Inayat Khan who was mentioned previously. Much like Muzaffer Ozak, Khan was a unifying figure even when tensions arose and only after his death did the Inayati Order split.

²⁴⁴ This name was taken after the death of Lex Hixon.

²⁴⁵ Margaret J. Rausch, “Encountering Sufism on the Web: Two Halveti-Jerrahi paths and their missions in the USA,” in *Sufism Today*, ed. Catharina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg (London: I.B Tauris, 2009), 161.

²⁴⁶ This is a bit out of date as the website used in the study for the Nur Ashkis has changed from www.nurashki.jerrahi.org to www.gardenofmysticlove.com. But her findings would remain quite the same on examination.

²⁴⁷ Dressler, “Between Legalist Exclusivism and Mystical Universalism”: 442.

Although Ozak’s universalism (or perennialism) is shared between the two Jerrahi groups, they understand the *implications* differently. Whereas in the Nur Ashki order, acknowledging the truth of other religions translates into a more multireligious orientation (though still under the umbrella of Islamic identity and practice), within the Jerrahi Order of America, this understanding is bracketed within a more exclusively Muslim orientation.²⁴⁸

Furthering the explanation above, Blann noted, again showing the subtle but important distinction, “Sheikh Nur called it [what Ozak was presenting] universal Islam. I remember Tosun Baba saying, ‘it is already universal Nur you don’t have to say that’, and Nur said something like ‘I kind of think I do’.”²⁴⁹ The closing section of this study hopes to add more on this dialogue by examining testimonies of Ozak’s lineages. More specifically, it will explore how his legacy was perceived, how members of one branch of the Order understood the splitting of the Halveti-Jerrahis in America, and where Ozak might have aligned himself, in their eyes, in relation to these two branches. The evidence suggests that since Ozak fostered multiple perspectives, it was only inevitable that the Order he helped transmit to the Americas would split after his death and different perspectives formulated.²⁵⁰

Criticism of Muzaffer Ozak

Sheikha Fariha affirms Ozak’s commitment to the Shari‘a. However, she explains that at least for some, his conception of the Shari‘a would not have been normative. Indeed, for many

²⁴⁸ Merin Xavier and William Dickson, “Between Islam and the New Age: The Jerrahi Order and categorical ambiguity in the study of Sufism in North America,” *Religious Compass* 15 (2021): 7.

²⁴⁹ Blann, interview by author.

²⁵⁰ Hermansen in “Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America,” looked at Gisela Webb’s studies on the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship show a similar split which align nicely to the two formulations and understandings of Ozak’s message by the two Jerrahi subbranches. “According to Gisela Webb, tension arose in the Fellowship community after the teacher’s death. This centered on the issue of whether Bawa intended a gradual movement toward the practice of Islam ‘as an outer manifestation of inner maturity and discipline or a concession to the human need for cultural forms, despite the ‘illusory’ quality of all religious distinctions’” (Hermansen, 173, citing Gisela Webb, “Sufism in America,” in *America’s Alternative Religions*, 256).

conservative Muslims, it might even have appeared to reflect a complete disregard for the Shari‘a. However, Sheikha Fariha argues that the Shari‘a itself can be perceived and represented in alternate ways and that there is not necessarily a single interpretation or conception of it that must be followed:

Sheikh Muzaffer was very much a person of what we call the Shari‘a but his Shari‘a was different from what you would call a conventional Shari‘a. He was often highly criticized by the people of convention as was Rumi, as were all the great ones... Hafez. I mean they were all slandered basically and so was Sheikh Muzaffer by those who could not understand him, and he really brought Divine Presence. He had become one with God. We can say God is everywhere but there is a human ability to embody that full presence. He had, little bit like Jesus [the feeling that] when you’re sitting in his presence you really feel like you are sitting with God.²⁵¹ You are not going so much by the mental structure of the religion [rather] it’s by the living essence of the Way. I don’t even want to call it a religion anymore. He was great follower of Muhammad the Prophet (peace be upon him). In fact, he also exuded the essence of the Prophet or his fragrance let’s say. And had many dreams with him and was a very important representative of the Prophet in modern times, but just as religions tend to narrow down their prophet or their leader to [a] certain [...confined embodiment...], these beings were themselves openers of the Way. The Prophet in the embodiment of a modern saint can look very different in the mind of conventional *ulama*.²⁵²

Blann similarly discussed this:

So, people did criticize Sheikh Muzaffer Efendi, that gradualist view. Lots of times it was people from Turkey that would come and say, “Oh I know you. You are just the book seller from the bazaar, but you can’t change Islam like this.” Efendi was very strong in arguing his own position and he felt it wasn’t right for people to come and try to fight against him when he is spreading Islam. His emphasis was on the love and the tarikat, so it was the Sufism and the Way of Love that attracted people more than the shariat, at first at least.²⁵³

Blann and Fariha highlight that Ozak’s methodology was difficult for his contemporaries to understand. Sheikha Fariha notes that the Shari‘a can be different between individuals and that it

²⁵¹ Buckley, who was studying the Jerrahis in Turkey when the succession occurred, notes that the loss of presence was palpable when Safer Efendi took over from Ozak. This is not a slight against Safer but a testament to the sheer presence of Ozak to which many who met him attested (Buckley 215-216).

²⁵² Fariha, interview by author.

²⁵³ Blann, interview by author.

does not denote a stagnant monolithic entity that cannot be interpreted and enacted in alternate ways.

When the law does stagnate, it is necessary, as she said, to break convention. Blann highlighted this as well saying in another portion of his interview that “religion always has to be renewed and that’s basic”— that it is in the nature of religion to have internal paradigm shifts.²⁵⁴ Both Blann and Fariha appeal to the idea of prophecy in Islam as a renewal of the faith through a messenger who speaks in the language of their people, until the seal of prophecy.²⁵⁵ Of course, some would point to the notion that Muhammad is the Seal of Prophecy and therefore any further modification of Islam is forbidden. Yet from a Sufi perspective, the inner essence of Islam can never be truly sealed. Furthermore, Sheikha Fariha clearly states that one could sense a power or aura in Ozak, and that from her perspective he had truly become one with God (the ultimate goal of Sufism) and transcended any limited religious forms. To confine Ozak or any prophet or saint to a particular perspective would, for her, reflect our own limitations or limiting tendencies; it would also overlook that these figures, for her, were openers of a more universalistic vision of reality.

Ozak was quite comfortable with his own formulations of Islam. And, as we have seen, this confidence rested in his extensive knowledge of both the inward science of Sufism and the outward sciences of law and theology. He detested the criticisms that were brought before him because he was able to spread Islam to such a wide and varied audience in a way his more form-oriented contemporaries could hardly have thought of attaining. He just did it in a way that promoted the language of the Tariqa over the Shari‘a. His revolutionary spirit in transmitting a

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Blann in our interview acknowledged that there have been other religions that have come after Islam and this reality cannot be dismissed as illegitimate even though coming after the seal of prophecy.

fresh vision in the wake of such criticism, Sheikha Fariha suggests, emulated that of the Prophet Muhammad.

Where Would Muzaffer Ozak Align? Perspectives of Sheikha Fariha and Sheikh Muhammad Jamal

As the previous chapter explored, it seemed as if Ozak, while imploring “gradualism” among his American followers, also understood that there would have to be compromises with such an approach. After an initial reading into this, one could say he was torn about the right way of presenting Islam and Sufism, which of course he saw no distinction between, Sufism being the truest expression of Islam. However, when Sheikha Fariha and Sheikh Muhammad Jamal (Blann) were asked their perspectives on this they felt understanding Ozak as “torn” or “struggling” between the more universalist vision and the more traditional one was inaccurate:

The word “torn” stood out. I don’t think that is the right word for Sheikh Muzaffer. He, even in his own culture, broke many of the so-called norms, and I think that this is part of a true spiritual power and opening. So, every, [what] we would call a saint—[what] we call “friends of God” in Islam—has this nature to break convention and to bring the Truth through. And the Truth is always new in a way. It’s interesting because the truth both confirms a deeper truth such as a new saint coming, [a] spiritual innovator. “Innovator” is the wrong word for Islam but there is a good innovation. Usually, the hadith talk about the bad innovation but later the Prophet went on to say whoever brings a good innovation into the tradition [will] be rewarded for it as long as it lasts. It is the nature of truth to overturn conventions and norms. Truth does not live by norms. Human society tends to build just like coral reefs. There is the living creature and then it forms these coral reefs [the ossified remains being the law]. Of course, societies need these ... laws, and all of these things, in order to proceed. It can’t remake itself in every generation, but spirituality can and in a sense must.²⁵⁶

Sheikha Fariha clearly points out that Ozak was not torn and tensions that seemed to arise were due to the nature of the spiritual path which must often break norms and shake up the status quo.

²⁵⁶ Fariha, interview by author.

She explains that Truth inherently needs to challenge these and is not bound to them—Truth here being, in its Ultimate form, in Rumi’s terms, “attainment to God,” or even the Principle of God.²⁵⁷ She uses the analogy of the coral reef to show that laws have a stabilising function and are the more overt representations of the organism (i.e., the Islamic tradition) which is continuously building upon its own skeleton but it is not the living creature itself, or in Sufi terms the essence. She of course, like Ozak, is not promoting doing away with the law or its customs, especially those that have been beneficial, spiritually speaking, for the communities that employ them. However, Truth should not be confined to such constraints. She further reminds us that there is this inherent tension between innovation (*bida*) and prophetic reform in Islam, and that innovation in any form can be met with apprehension. She mentions that Ozak broke many cultural norms in his teaching of Sufism not only by it being taboo in a secularized Turkey but also among Turkish Muslims and Sufis themselves. Dickson in his own conversation with Sheikha Fariha was told that Ozak was trying to balance both the secular reality of Turkey by “inviting secular singers into the *tekke*” while also denouncing the overly secular by “printing Qurans.”²⁵⁸ This is further evidence of Ozak as someone who tried to the best of his abilities to harmonize opposing forces. Blann even said, “He’s like a modern *pir*, so to speak, although, there are people who would not like to use that term because Pir Nureddin Jerrahi is considered the last *pir*.” That is to say, he brought such a fresh and new approach to the Jerrahi order, and being as tolerant of new ideas as he was (so long as they did not conflict with his understanding of the Shari‘a), it was almost as if he had redefined and recreated ‘the original Halveti-Jerrahis,’ an Order that was rooted for centuries within a very specific geopolitical and cultural horizon. Some saw this in a positive light, while others did not.

²⁵⁷ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 10-11.

²⁵⁸ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 141.

When Blann was presented the same question, he shared a strikingly similar sentiment to that of Fariha in that Ozak did not struggle to maintain these various views:

That split happened I think inevitably. You say Muzaffer Efendi struggled but I don't see him so much as struggling with it as having to deal with more culturally conservative dervishes and Babas who may have resisted some of the adaptations that he was feeling guided to implement. He actually stopped going to Spring Valley, Chestnut Ridge his last year because I think, I wasn't there but what I have been told by several people who were there is that Efendi felt it was getting too formalized and they just weren't moving along in the way [he wanted]... he was relaxing into a much more intimate expression of Islam with people and less emphasis on formal bowing and so on, what Sheikh Nur sometimes refereed to as 'the shariat of the tarikat' And some people thought that he had come under the influence of the Americans and went a little crazy at the end (chuckles) adapting too much. That's one position some took after he passed along with a retreat back toward the way things were before he started innovating. Like I said, I don't think he saw these as innovations or *bida*, rather they were adaptations that were in accord with the spirit of Islam.²⁵⁹

This worry that Ozak was becoming influenced by his American followers was not unreasonable. As Ozak himself said, "My impression of the Americans was so favorable and I found them to be so warm-hearted, hospitable, and such intense spiritual seekers that I really fell in love with them. They obviously attached themselves to me as well, so now they just push and pull me here and there and I have no say in it. Wherever they take me, I go..."²⁶⁰ He even exclaimed that "the Americans have stolen me away!" and that here in America was his comfort.²⁶¹ Therefore, to more traditionally minded followers this might have caused a great deal of anxiety and even as Blann attested, some may have felt that he truly had been stolen away by American sensibilities and that his adaptations were becoming too far removed from traditional Ottoman Sufism, the kind that many conservative students cherished. However, Ozak was not unaware of his absences and how these absences affected his Turkish students and associates. As he put it, "You know how it is when a

²⁵⁹ Blann, interview by author.

²⁶⁰ Blann, *Lifting the Boundaries*, 175

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

father leaves his family even for a short while and his children cry and lament. I have thousands of children in Turkey and each time I leave for America they lament.”²⁶² Therefore, while it does appear that Ozak was more inclined to the present Nur Ashki vision, he knew that there were those who wished for him to stick to traditional forms. As Sheikha Fariha notes in Dickson’s piece, which she reaffirmed during our interview, “It is only in America that the spiritual freedom Ozak longed to share could be expressed fully.”²⁶³

Both Fariha and Blann are interestingly promoting the notion that anyone with any true spiritual power or opening must have the capacity to discern a “good” innovation that allows the Truth to manifest itself, from a false, harmful one. In Sufism, this positive relaxation of strict adherences is called *ruhsa* (dispensation or indulgence).²⁶⁴ Both Fariha and Blann were cognizant that innovation is often perceived negatively in Islam. However, as we have seen, Ozak aligned himself fully with the Shari‘a, and any adaptations he had made never went, in his own eyes, against its essential principles. From their perspective at least, Ozak was embracing a more intimate, culturally flexible, tolerant, and communal Sufism suitable for America. In the perspective of Sheikha Fariha, he was radical in this approach. He was not meek in presenting Sufism in the way he felt was appropriately aligned with Islamic teachings, and which allowed for a more intimate engagement with its essential truths, free of the pageantry of the outward forms. In another way, and more aligned with how Ozak would have expressed it, he wanted an engagement of hearts and an unveiling of love:

That was his way and he was radical.²⁶⁵ He was radical in his own culture and he was radical in Western culture, yet he found many correspondences with Western culture and

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 141.

²⁶⁴ Blann, *The Garden of Mystic Love: Vol I*, 197.

²⁶⁵ Blann notes how radical Ozak was perceived, “In one talk that I came upon recently [Sheikh] Nur was saying, ‘Muzaffer Efendi was way more liberal and open minded than I could ever be, he was a thousand times more open

some of those were spontaneity and informality. He himself didn't like formality.²⁶⁶ So that he found very refreshing here and very natural. Certainly, we didn't have any practice in sacred culture really where you would behave in a very formal way. So even our naïve take was refreshing to him.²⁶⁷ Another place of correspondence was the gender thing between women and men. He himself at some point in his life, as you read in the book [*Lifting the Boundaries*], was called 'imam of the women' but women would flock to hear him give the call and this was also the Prophet's characteristics. He was criticized, [and] the Prophet himself was criticized for being too much with the women, sitting too much with the women, which is interesting so there is definitely a thread there. So, Efendi was very comfortable with having women around and when he was in America the women were just as much around him then. Except, of course, when the prayer lines formed then the women were always in the back.²⁶⁸

For Sheikha Fariha, it is clear that the criticisms towards Ozak were similar to those that were made against the Prophet in the earlier years. Ozak, and more so later Hixon, really began to integrate and develop women's participation in the Order.²⁶⁹ As she describes it:

minded.' This is notable coming from Hixon who was a practitioner and admirer of so many different religious traditions, but he is highlighting his perceived constraints to certain socio-cultural perspectives. The ability of Ozak to come from such a different cultural milieu to America with open arms transcends anything Hixon believed he could have achieved (interview by author).

²⁶⁶ Hermansen mentions, that Ozak's successor, Safer Efendi, was perceived as stricter than Ozak (Hermansen, "Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America," 164-165). However, Buckley asserts "that the distance between the sheikh and the dervish was much less" when Safer was sheikh (Buckley, 216). Furthermore, Buckley notes that Safer was more attuned to the democratization values of secular Turkey, therefore more approachable and seen as more an equal, and Ozak was steeped in the old Ottoman hierarchal tradition (Ibid, 216). These seemingly contrary accounts can be resolved if we understand that Hermansen is understanding this strictness by Safer Efendi as the returning of more formality to the *tekke* and that she is looking at Ozak's American lineage. Buckley, on the other hand, is looking at the *tekke* in Istanbul and, as we know in Turkey, Ozak had a more traditionalist approach, while in America this was not what he wanted.

²⁶⁷ Sheikha Fariha told a humorous yet telling tale of how accepting Ozak was of American naïveté. "But he did, I remember in Houston, the Rothko chapel, there was a woman who came, a young woman in short shorts, who came in for the service who went into the men's circle, just stepped right in and the Babas were gritting their teeth and he just made a clear sign to let her be. And it happened a few times actually in *dhikrs* where women would step in and he would just not mind it" (interview by author).

²⁶⁸ Fariha, interview by author. While this present work is not focussing heavily on women's engagement with and in Sufism in North America, those interested should look to Dickson's section on it in *Living Sufism in North America* pages 152-167. This is a field that begs for more scholarly attention. Blann notes that "In [the Jerrahi community in] Boulder, they decided to have side by side prayer of the men and women because some of the women felt that they just couldn't stay in the back rows. They felt that this is something that does not really violate the shariat by having two different ranks of prayers side by side (interview by author)." These are still ongoing discussions and different communities are finding different and more ways of equalising men and women in Sufism and Islam.

²⁶⁹ For more perspectives specifically from Sheikha Fariha on women in the Nur Ashkis, see Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 152-154.

He [Ozak] also put the hat on women in a very playful way. He didn't do it formally like Nur did, but he would put the white male hat on my head and on the heads of a few other women who were sitting close to him at times when he was in his sofa chair. Sheikh Nur took these small seeds as indicators and expanded on it. So, Nur invested women, gave hand (to 'give hand' is the sheikh extending their hands to the one 'taking hand,' formally inviting them and accepting them into the Order) to get initiation into the Order with the giving of women the hat. This is radical in terms of the Istanbul male culture.²⁷⁰

Sheikha Fariha later notes that there was “a sort of tug of war” when it came to *dhikr* as many of Ozak's Babas wished not to disrupt the traditional *dhikr* for the inclusion of women. She also relays that “He even let women in [*dhikr* in Turkey]. When he stepped into the role there weren't even women coming there doing *dhikr* or they were somewhere else in the *tekke*. I think he's the one who invited them in.”²⁷¹ They attempted some work arounds with trying to integrate women, but it was always in ways which did not penetrate the male *dhikr* circle. Again, Sheikha Fariha believes if it was not for the apprehension of the Babas that Ozak would have been more than accommodating of complete integration. When Sheikha Fariha was asked where Ozak pulled more strongly in this tug of war, she replied that he was definitely more sympathetic to the Western interpretation:

I think actually that Sheikh Muzaffer was much more on the side of the more Western interpretation. Oh yeah, yep that was very clear. I was there and could see. He himself did not approve of an overt Turkification of the tarikat. I mean he really put his eggs in Nur's basket. He saw that Nur was really his main inheritor. And not his only, I mean a great sheikh has many inheritors and each one interpreting uniquely to themselves. Nur was the main inheritor, so he really entrusted the way to Nur and Nur's own forms.

Kasperski: So, could you almost say the multiple lineages allow for it to speak to a wider audience?

Sheikha Fariha: Exactly. As I said a great Sheikh will have many tributaries. That's one [Sheikh Nur's] interpretation. You know the Spring Valley [Jerrahi Order of America] wants to stay very close to the outer form so it is basically like a transplant²⁷² and the New

²⁷⁰ Fariha, interview by author.

²⁷¹ Blann, interview by author.

²⁷² As Blann put it, “Muzaffer Efendi deeply understood that you just can't transplant Turkish Sufism to another culture without making allowances for the indigenous culture. Its true with plants, if [you] bring a plant from one

York *tekke* under Nur's guidance, after Efendi's passing, but even during Efendi's lifetime (emphatic), that's what I'm saying, it was **not** Spring Valley. What Efendi established in his travels. First in the *tekke* on Mercer Street and then in the Yonkers house was not Spring Valley at all. No. Of course the *ilahis* were in Turkish not English but the mood, the atmosphere, the ease, the relaxed atmosphere of men and women, the women close to the Sheikh, the levity, that all was little different. Spring Valley was stringent, a little more uptight, [and was] trying to hold on to the outer elements. You didn't have to wear a scarf around Efendi. No one felt those kinds of obligations.

Sheikha Fariha agrees that a great spiritual teacher will have many spiritual tributaries and that it is a sign of a great teacher to speak to such a broad audience. However, she is adamant that what she experienced during Ozak's lifetime was not a transplanted Ottoman/Turkish Sufism coming to America, but a more relaxed, adaptive, flexible, and accommodating expression of it. While not downplaying the other inheritors of Ozak's vision in America, she does preface this by her belief that Hixon was the one who aligned more closely with the message that she witnessed during Ozak's time in America. Sheikha Fariha goes on to say that it was almost surprising how stark the difference was to the traditional formulations when it did present itself:

We didn't even realize we were so sheltered in a sense from it. Although I did go many years [to Turkey] and was immersed in that traditional culture, but somehow in America things were just done differently. I think it is very Sufi to follow the natural way and what the culture has of good you preserve, and you highlight, and what the culture has that is not good, it usually fades away.

Her understanding of Sufism flowing naturally along the contours of the culture it finds itself in aligns, as we saw in the last chapter, with Ozak's own anecdotes, as seen by Islam's failure to missionize Slavic Russia and Junayd's analogy of the water and the vessel (as we saw earlier).

culture to another that horticulturally there is some adaptation that has to happen for the plant to thrive" (interview by author).

Was the Separation a Conscious Act?

While Blann noted that the separation was not by design, he does not deny its inevitability. As argued by Dickson, “He might have consciously fostered two slightly different approaches,” depending on which sheikh Ozak felt was spiritually best for the individual.²⁷³ However, as both Fariha and Blann point out, in North America at least, Ozak desired the Jerrahi Order to go along the lines that the Nur Ashkis under Hixon envisioned. Rather, Ozak was having to care for and not neglect his traditionally minded students. In other words, the more universalistic and less formal expression of the Jerrahis in America, from the perspective of Blann and Fariha, was not the outlier. The central issue was not with American consciousness and cultural attitudes being unable to correspond to Ozak’s vision. Rather, it was the conservatively minded Jerrahis who were not comfortable with such a vision. Moreover, Blann notes “Muzaffer Efendi seems to have had [a] mandate from, let’s say, on High. He interpreted the hadith that said, ‘the sun of Islam will rise in the West’ at some point at being around his time and he felt that he had the spiritual duty and responsibility and permission by Allah to facilitate this”.²⁷⁴ As Blann states, this can cause discordance from the ‘guardians of the faith’:

When a fresh dispensation is brought in, there is a certain tendency of the guardians of the faith to say, ‘wait a minute, you are innovating’ and of course Islam has this directive forbidding *bida* but then you have to look at what you are actually changing. It is true that it can be a slippery slope and if you change one thing you start changing others and pretty soon you have nothing left. Yet, I don’t think that is what has happened in the Jerrahi Order. There are just different styles or *meshrebs* (temperaments) and Muzaffer Efendi was very clear [that] it’s ok for different leaders and teachers in the order to have different styles and he recognized that if a more conservative Muslim came that wanted a very traditional training he would send them to Tosun Bayrak in Chestnut Ridge and they were happy with that and if somebody, a Jew or Buddhist, was interested at looking at Islam but did not want to give up their past he would send them to Sheikh Nur and would say ‘that is your dervish, you guide him because you will understand them, you will be able to be on the

²⁷³ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 111.

²⁷⁴ Blann, interview by author.

same wavelength.’ There is a process of [attuning] to really be attuned to your sheikh or it doesn’t work.²⁷⁵

This highlights nicely the multiple perspectives that Ozak’s students harvested from his teachings and how Ozak did consciously foster them. It is interesting because Ozak seemed to highlight that the sheikh/dervish relationship is a two-way street and both have to harmonize with the other, instead of the student being subservient to the sheikh in a one-way relationship. Sheikha Fariha explains that in the Nur Ashkis this more democratic engagement is the norm, and it is not so much her as the Sheikha who enacts change, but the community in tandem with her guidances:

My own [teachings] are based on my teacher, my master [Nur]. And of course, I made... I don’t know if I... the community let’s say have made several small steps in the direction of Western culture... I am not sure if it [the following] is a cultural thing or my own personal inclination. Although I do speak, and I do give talks but there are times where it is really more of a sharing and that is very Western. You don’t see it that much in the East. Usually in the East the sheikh talks and the dervish listens. The active/passive principle. Not passive necessarily but receptive. I think here we are developing more of a sense of a communal wisdom and we see that happening.²⁷⁶

While Ozak did embody that almost transcendental figurehead, it appears as he was easing into a more relaxed environment, he saw that a more communal engagement was desirable. As such, Hixon and later Fariha really enacted this in the Nur Ashki community. Sheikh Muhammad Jamal also shares in this communal vision. Yet, he notes that Ozak knew the fostering of these disparate perspectives, the more open, universalism of Hixon and the traditionally minded Bayrak, led to tensions between members, and he tried to maintain cohesion among both traditional and more liberal students:

So, the split didn’t happen by design or intention, but I think it may have been inevitable. There was a lot of effort to stay united for many years. There were episodes where Sheikh

²⁷⁵ Blann, interview by author.

²⁷⁶ Fariha, interview by author.

Nur and Tosun Bayrak, who was the first khalifa of Muzaffer Efendi in America; both of them threatened to leave or just give it up because the energy wasn't what they wanted and Muzaffer Efendi would try and pull them back and he would make these long *duas* where he would say 'Ya Allah may Nur Baba and Tosun Baba stay on their post' and he would pray that for other khalifas. We always want to keep things united but as you can see in the book *Garden of Mystic Love* there is a splitting [among the Sufi Orders] that happens over and over again.²⁷⁷

Again, while the split was not intentional, it appears Ozak nonetheless did foster an environment within the Jerrahi Order that promoted multiple and varied perspectives, yet he wanted to stay within a single framework. However, it was evident during Ozak's lifetime his khalifas already had their preferences and made it known if they were not being met. As Blann put it, "one must find out what works for the psyche of its people." Furthermore, Ozak saw that just like Sufism one could not come and supplant the culture already present, but moreover, one could not assume that a person could abandon their particularities as well. Each student needs a teacher who can bring about the most in them. Blann goes on to point out that the separation while not planned was necessary to let both the Jerrahi Order of America and the Nur Ashkis to enact their own ways without being limited by the other:

Sheikh Tosun said, 'people come and look on the internet and read something on the Nur Ashkis and they come up here and they think we represent all those ideas which we don't. It would be better if you had a different name so people would know the difference. You know, do what you want to do but we should have this distinction.' So, I think that was another reason the Orders had to split to clarify and be more comfortable with each one going their own way and accessing their own divine guidance and then people can go to the one they like.

Dressler notes that the current sheikh of the Jerrahi Order of America, Sheikh Yurdaer, considers Hixon as creating his own sect separate from the Jerrahi Order. Dressler later notes that Sheikha Fariha dismissed these claims and did gain permission (affirming the Nur Ashkis as legitimate)

²⁷⁷ Blann, interview by author.

from Grand-Sheikh Tugrul in Istanbul.²⁷⁸ While authors like Dressler indicate that perhaps there are attempts to delegitimize the Nur Ashkis by the more traditionally minded, Blann acknowledges that they may have their disagreements but ultimately for each community to express their vision of Ozak's legacy, each needed to detach itself from the other in order to fully blossom and appear comfortable with the other, at least outwardly.²⁷⁹

Sufism on the World Stage

The final perspective of Ozak's lineage to be explored is what they believe Sufism's role should be on the world stage. This subject also follows the trends noted between the two branches of the Nur Ashkis seeing a more universalistic embracing vision of the future, while the more conservative minded Halveti-Jerrahi Order of America and the Halveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes in Istanbul retaining a more traditional understanding of Sufism. To begin with the latter perspective, Sheikha Fariha states:

Sufism is a table which all other traditions can honourably join together but not that everybody has to become Sufi. I am speaking more of a perspective of unity and plurality at the same time. Unity does not mean I have to be like you and that is exactly what Spring Valley maybe modeled, when you copy the form, the image. But the unity that is in the heart of all, the essence of all, it inevitably manifests in countless ways. It is said God never repeats anything. There are no two things in the universe from the beginning of the universe to the end of the universe that are the same. And therefore, diversity is part of God's nature and therefore to be diverse is good to allow that. But then you need to figure out how to bring that diversity into communion and I think Sufism has a great key here, as does the Prophet, as does the Quran.²⁸⁰

Sheikha Fariha interestingly brings up this notion of unity and plurality, that Sufism, at least her formulation of it, can be a harmonious place of unity among traditions without requiring a

²⁷⁸ Dressler, "*Between Legalist Exclusivism and Mystical Universalism*": 440.

²⁷⁹ Blann made clear to mention that he respected the Spring Valley community: "I have been there many times and they are a beautiful and friendly group of people and I love them too. Sheikh Nur felt the same way. He said we definitely respect the people of Chestnut Ridge and Istanbul and we honour [them] (interview by author).

²⁸⁰ Fariha, interview by author.

dissolution of plurality aligning with her teacher Sheikh Nur.²⁸¹ This does not insinuate that the Nur Ashki formulation is an amalgam of many various religious traditions. It is still Islamically rooted, but it does allow for appreciation and acceptance of the various religious traditions of the world even allowing them to participate within the Nur Ashkis.²⁸² Furthermore, Sheikha Fariha is adamant that Sufism aligns well with the modern Western mentality. When asked if she believes if Ozak would still feel the spiritual receptivity he felt of his American students back in the 70s, she replied:

Of course. Of course! I think Sufism is going to become a leading movement just as Buddhism was 30 years ago. I have no doubt. Islam is very suited, actually (laughs), to Western mentality, not the way it is practiced but the principles of Islam. So, I am even going even earlier. Beyond Sufism in a way. Although I usually don't separate Islam and Sufism because Sufism is the real expression of Islam of the Quranic wisdom. I feel Sufism is very suited to the Western heart and mind. It has so many aspects that fit so easily and well to this culture.²⁸³

Blann when asked the same question both affirmed and even presented the perspective that Ozak has never truly left his guiding post:

We feel that for those whose heart is open to it, Muzaffer Efendi is still guiding in the presence with divine permission. So, I believe the answer is yes, he definitely would still be mining that spirit in America of spiritual liberty, spiritual freedom.²⁸⁴

However, Blann also reports a meeting he was present in with Sheikha Fariha and the current Grand Sheikh, Tugrul Efendi, where Fariha expressed her perspectives on the dissemination of Sufism to the masses in America. Tugrul Efendi had a more limited vision:

I was at a meeting of Dergah al-Farah where Sheikha Fariha and Tugrul Efendi, the current grand-sheikh, met with their dervishes and Sheikha Fariha was expressing what she thought was the understanding that she got from Muzaffer Efendi and Sheikh Nur that we want to make the message of Sufism open to all hearts without exception and Tugrul Efendi said, 'no, the tarikat is only for people who go deeply. The masses will never accept mysticism. There are people who are mystics and people who aren't. Let's face it.' I can see both sides

²⁸¹ Dressler, "Between Legalist Exclusivism and Mystical Universalism": 443.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Fariha, interview by author.

²⁸⁴ Blann, interview by author.

of that, but it again gives you a little insight into some of the perspectives of these two sides... Each teacher has to find their own orientation of how they want to express the teachings, so I have found [in] the combination [of] the universal and the dervish Sufism ... [a] nice balance for myself.²⁸⁵

Turgul Efendi here is hearkening to the notion that the mystical path is not for the masses since he believes it cannot properly be digested except by those who “go deeply.” This aligns with Ozak’s concerns of spiritual idleness and that people do not understand as Ozak said, “You have to make certain efforts, and bear certain pains” on the spiritual path.²⁸⁶ The spiritual path is not a lackadaisical venture which anyone can join, without sacrifice.

These anecdotes perfectly highlight how Ozak’s legacy has been interpreted and enacted by two different and even somewhat opposing perspectives. Sheikha Fariha, from her predecessor Hixon, is perceiving Ozak’s message as one of openness to all who express true interest. As Dickson notes, the Nur Ashkis feel this “powerful thirst for spirituality and mysticism,” which in the American context makes the need for outward forms less vital for a mature engagement with Sufism.²⁸⁷ While the more conservative minded Tugrul Efendi, with which the Jerrahi Order of America would align, have attached themselves closer to a perspective that is cautious of seekers who perhaps expect to reap the fruits of the mystical path without the effort. Neither of them, from the point of view of Ozak, would necessarily be wrong. For Blann, in fact, his own ideal way of teaching students involves a mixture between more liberal and conservative Jerrahi views, all the while understanding that “these two orders are two wings of the Jerrahiyya and they both look to Pir Nureddin Jerrahi and to the whole lineage with whom they are fully aligned.”²⁸⁸ More

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Frager, *Love is the Wine*, 16.

²⁸⁷ Dickson, *Living Sufism*, 144.

²⁸⁸ Blann, interview by author.

importantly, they have pointedly highlighted the silver lining that Muzaffer Ozak instilled in his students: a deep love of Sufism that did not bar them from embodying the tradition in their particular ways. Yet, from the anecdotes present above it appears Ozak was aligning himself more and more with the vision of Sufism “unbounded” of or “freed” from inapplicable, irrelevant traditional formulations, and strict, unthoughtful adherence to the outward forms.

Conclusion

The experience of the Halveti-Jerrahis in North America illustrates how Sufism can be interpreted in a myriad of ways. These different perspectives do not always easily coexist with one another. As we have seen, even in a single Sufi Order operating with undisputed leadership, members of the community will attach themselves to certain aspects of their master's teachings and, while not necessarily ignoring other aspects, define themselves uniquely in light of their own vision of how to embody their master's teachings. Muzaffer Ozak did not come to America with the goal of transplanting Turkish forms of the Halveti-Jerrahis. Rather, it seems, while he was devoted to certain fundamental Islamic principles, he was excited by the creative interpretations and adaptations of his teachings at the hands of many of his American followers, so long as they remained faithful to the essence of his message, that Sufism is the way of love.

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