

Sufism, spirituality and consumerism: the case study of the Nimatullahiya and Naqshbandiya Sufi orders in Australia

Milad Milani¹ · Adam Possamai¹

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015

Abstract This article is a comparative study of two well-known Sufi orders, the Khaniqahi (Nimatullahi) and Haqqani (Naqshbandi). This is a preliminary work that draws on in-depth qualitative interviews to examine the process of self-representation and localisation of Sufism in Australia. Despite the fact that these Sufi orders each have established global networks and cyberspace presence, they also demonstrate strong local identities and indications of adaptation and appropriation. Recognised Sufi orders have historically operated through a complex local social network, often with links *into* local politics. This initial study, based on fieldwork analysis across Sydney and Melbourne, offers insight into the changing attitude of two contemporary Sufi orders of Australia on issues to do with religion, spirituality, consumerism and westernisation.

Keywords Sufism · Australia · Westernisation · Religion

Introduction

In the past, Sufism has been typically represented in Australia as either a peaceful spiritual movement of mediation (Bendle 2003) or a covert Islamic fundamentalist infiltration scheme (Stenhouse 2007). More research needs to be conducted to understand how Sufism has adapted to and evolved in this country. This article will contribute to this endeavour.

Sufism is a historical trend within the Islamic heritage that has its own unique culture of practice. Outside of Muslim countries, Sufi practices and traditions have also been taken out of an Islamic context and reworked by non-Muslims. Sufism is thus a profusely divergent tradition with a variety of interpretations as to the function and

✉ Milad Milani
m.milani@uws.edu.au

¹ University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia

identity of Sufis and Sufi orders. Indeed in her analysis of Sufism in Islamic Southeast Asia, Howell (2014) claims that ‘it will be evident that there is not one Sufism rehabilitated for modern life, but many carryovers and partial appropriations, each of which seeks to shape a distinctive way of being properly, and richly, Islamic in the midst of modern life’. This article will examine the way two Sufi orders, namely the Khaniqahi Nimatullahi and the Naqshbandi Haqqani, have adapted to, and how they are practising their faith in, the Australian context.

These groups are only two manifestations of a variety of branches of the Nimatullahi and Naqshbandi umbrella that exist globally. One of the reasons for examining the Khaniqahi and Haqqani orders in particular is that these two groups appear to have made a somewhat dramatic shift in their approach to both Sufi identity and Islamic orthopraxy as they have adapted to a modern context. They are therefore especially interesting in a study of contemporary Sufi groups in Australia. From initial research on their presence on Australian websites (Milani and Possamai 2013), it appears that these Sufi groups have undertaken significant changes in their approach to Sufi praxis. The Khaniqahi have, for instance, modernised dramatically within the past decade, making significant modifications to their customs. The Haqqani have developed in different ways, adopting business (and even corporate) fronts in presenting a fully integrated community of Muslims who, nevertheless, maintain a stricter sense of adherence to Islamic practices than the Khaniqahi.

These two orders have similar historical roots. The Nimatullahi and the Naqshbandi orders originated in fourteenth-century Iran and gradually became established in the Ottoman and Safavid empires, respectively. Their long and complex history in the early modern period is marked by their distinguished ability to mobilise the social mechanisms of their time. Today, the orders inherit a complex network of infrastructure and governance that is both socially and politically savvy, and they are actively engaged with religio-cultural and technological changes. While the orders were impacted by modernisation and secularisation processes in twentieth-century Turkey and Iran, today, they define their relations to the West and to the ‘authenticity’ of their tradition in distinctly different ways in Australia.

This article will first give an account of these two groups in Australia and in the West and will then proceed to the analysis of 14 interviews conducted with members of these two orders. This analysis will show how both Sufi groups in Australia retain a sense of traditional authenticity while at the same time demonstrate a desire to move with the times. The article will explore these very tensions between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, and the way in which they appear to have found some measure of resolution within Sufism in contemporary Australia. It suggests that the achievements of Sufi groups in Australia, as centres of multi-ethnic and multi-faith populations, point to their potential to offer a practical platform for dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Australian context

Juliane Hammer (2006) notes that pre-modern Sufi ideas, practices and structures have changed as both a part of the modernisation process and as a result of the migration of Muslims and Sufi groups to the West. Speaking about the US case, she explains that

there are Sufi groups that are not bounded by the Islamic tradition and instead make reference to a universal expression of mysticism in their discourse. This section aims to contextualise the study of Sufi groups in Australia, with reference to previous scholarship about such groups and the modernisation/adaptation processes.

Muslims are among the most ethnically diverse religious groups in Australia (Saeed 2003). Although Muslims occupy 1.9 % of the Australian population, there is no reliable data to indicate how Muslim affiliations break down into sub-groups (Akbarzadeh and Roose 2011). Because the Sufi heritage is an ‘inner’ or ‘hidden’ dimension of Islam, its members and their specific practices are often indistinguishable from the general Muslim community, at least to the non-Muslim observer. For this reason, Sufis have generally experienced a degree of anonymity in Australia, a tendency that makes a traditional narrative history of Sufism in Australia a somewhat challenging task. The history of the arrival of Islam to Australia begins with the arrival of Indonesian and Afghan visitors and migrants. Macassar fisherman arrived in the sixteenth century, followed by Malay and Filipino pearl drivers recruited by the Dutch. The first mosques were built between 1889 and 1907 in outback New South Wales, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane (Akbarzadeh 2001). While the cultures of these early arrivals possess a strong Sufi heritage, Sufism was formally introduced to Australia in 1927 through non-Muslim representation. Sufism had already been introduced to the USA (1910) and Europe (1912) in connection to Hazrat Inayat Khan’s Sufi Movement. It was initially promulgated in Australia by two associated figures, namely Baron von Frankenberg (1889–1950) and Francis Brabazon (1907–1984) (Genn 2007, 2013; Keating 2002a, b). This existing literature on the Sufi Movement has marked the beginning point of a history of Sufism in Australia, underlining the capacity of Sufism to adapt itself to a Western audience and non-Muslim culture. There is little literature about the history of other orders in Australia after this time, or about their contemporary forms and activities.

Hermansen (2000; 2007) has sketched the activity of Sufi orders in the USA as well as the study of Sufism in American academic institutions. Pnina Werbner (2006) has charted the variety of experiences and activities of Sufi groups in Britain. In Australia however, apart from Celia Genn’s work on the Inayat Khan Sufi order of Australia, there is an absence of in-depth analysis of divergent Sufi groups in the domestic context. Further, research that explores how Sufism operates at the grassroots level therefore has the potential to yield new knowledge about the role of Sufism within Australian Muslim communities.

The Khaniqahi Nimatullahi and Naqshbandi-Haqqani orders in the West

The account of these two orders was acquired through rigorous means of research, fieldwork and e-fieldwork, which is described in more detail in the methods section below. Before describing this research however, this section provides a brief overview of these orders, as they are manifested in the West. The main similarities and differences between the two orders are also summarised in Table 1.

These orders can be sociologically understood as twentieth-century adaptations of preceding traditions which have their roots in the late mediaeval period. While they

Table 1 The Khaniqahi and the Haqqani orders: summary of socio-cultural-historical characteristics

Khaniqahi	Haqqani
Both originate from Iran in the fourteenth century	
Global presence	
Reference to Persian history and culture	Reference to Turkish history and culture
Shia (Twelver)	Sunni
Sufi Master in London	Sufi Master in Cyprus
Revival of pre-Islamic values of spiritual (Iranian) Sufism located in Chivalric code as the way forward	Aim for a spiritual revival of the Islamic faith
Less emphasis on Islamic practices and Shari'a	More emphasis on Islamic practices and Shari'a

(Milani and Possamai 2013)

maintain the traditional chain of authority prescribed independently by the orders—establishing their connection with the Prophet—these groups, even if they appear traditional, are perhaps best described as having been somewhat reinvented for a new age. As it will be explored below, the Khaniqahi Nimatullahi (hereafter referred to as Khaniqahi) is one sub-branch of the Nimatullahi *tariqa*, which recognises the Sufi saint, Shah Nimatullah Wali (1330–1430) as its founder. The Khaniqahi today tends to be prominently an Iranian order with strong ideological ties to the earlier antinomian traditions associated with Abu Yazid al-Bistami (804–874) and Mansour al-Hallaj (858–922). The Naqshbandi Haqqani (hereafter referred to as Haqqani) is one sub-branch of the Naqshbandi *tariqa*, which traces its lineage back to Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband (1318–1389). The Haqqani is presently a polycentric order rooted in Islamic tradition (Sunna).

The Khaniqahi

The Khaniqahi in the West have tactfully sidestepped the issue of Shari'a, and claim to leave concerns for its observance to individual judgement (Lewisohn 2006: 53). The same attitude is applied to other traditional aspects of Islam, whereby the Khaniqahi stress inward and spiritual concern with Islamic practices such as prayers and fasting, almsgiving, *hajj* and so on, all of which are 'left to be pursued eclectically according to personal inclination and persuasion' (Lewisohn 2006: 53). Furthermore, all aspirants are required to have a professional occupation, which, of course, strengthens Khaniqahi influence within the contemporary social fabric. The order itself functions as an unofficial corporation, consisting of thirty-seven Khaniqahs or 'Sufi hostels' around the world (see Nimatullahi Sufi Order (2011-2014a). The network is, in fact, now run with a professional business attitude. One example of this is the sale of books through the order's publishing house in London, Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Press (KNP), which distributes the prolific writings of Javad Nurbakhsh in both English and Persian. In addition, in 2012, the order began publishing its biannual journal of Sufism in electronic format (see Nimatullahi Sufi Order 2011-2014b). Nurbakhsh, whose own professional career was as a medical doctor, is today described by the order as having initiated 'the greatest renaissance of the Khaniqahi Sufi order since the work of the

founder, Shah Nimatullah Wali, in the fifteenth century' (Nimatullahi Sufi Order (2011-2014b).

The Khaniqahi exhibit a dominant nationalistic tendency in their literature, and their emphasis on Iranian nationalist ideology has been interpreted as an indication of their socio-political awareness (Lewisohn 2006: 63). Milani (2013) notes this nationalism to be a signature attribute and an indication of an explicit interest in contemporary issues. Furthermore, their nationalist concern demonstrates a clear link between Khaniqahi activities and secular modernist interests, as the Khaniqahi express the desire to modernise and be part of progressive society, even if their emphasis on Iranian nationalist ideology makes references to what is seen as a more spiritual and moral bygone era (*farhangi irani*). For the Khaniqahi, this emphasis is important because it represents a form of cultural resistance to a negatively perceived Islamic Arab culture. The fieldwork undertaken for this article suggests that the Khaniqahi remain (by choice) disconnected or isolated from an imagined worldwide Muslim community and its concerns. Their global exploits are instead focused on establishing a worldwide 'Sufi community'.

In this respect, the Khaniqahi differ from the Haqqani in that the former have externalised 'Sufi' identity as their main identifier, while the Haqqani have internalised it as the heart of Islam. This is reflected in the analysis of the Internet site (Milani and Possamai 2013). It appears, from interview data analysed for this research, that the Khaniqahi identity has become increasingly forged out of the tension that is felt at the grassroots level in Iran, between dissidents and supporters of the regime. By distancing themselves from an 'Islamic identity', the Khaniqahi increasingly ratify Sufism as a tradition in its own right (developing upon an independent trajectory quite separate from that of the Islamic tradition). The Islamic Regime of Iran distrusts Sufi orders, and forbids members of the armed services from becoming Sufi. Moreover, Iranian government intelligence suspects the popularity of Sufism, in both Iran and in the West, to be evidence of an American ploy of infiltration (Lewisohn 1998: 461). Presently, the Khaniqahi boast a strong Western (and African) presence, having established Khaniqahs in the affluent regions of numerous major cities (including London, New York, Paris, Leiden and Sydney). Our research data suggests that the Khaniqahi are successful in portraying a non-Islamic 'Sufi' spirituality that appeals to both modernist and secular sensibilities in the Australian context. They do this, however, without alienating cultural sensitivities, since they maintain a strong 'Persian' cultural focus at their heart. This strong Persian association is demonstrated by appeals to authenticity and legitimation made by the Khaniqahi interviewees, as discussed below.

Haqqani

This prominent Sufi order is one of the oldest of the traditional orders. Today, the Haqqani branch is also one of the more popular manifestations of Sufism, with a substantial world following and a strong presence in cyberspace. Damrel defines the order by a set of four key features. These are (1) its uncompromising Sunni orientation, (2) its continued emphasis on Shari'a and Sunna, (3) the way it fosters a tradition of full social and political engagement with the world and (4) a fervent disposition to guide and, when necessary, to confront the state 'in order to bring it closer to religion' (Damrel 2006: 116). The Haqqani were catapulted onto the world stage through the

activities of the late Shaykh Nazim Adil al-Qibrusi al-Haqqani al-Naqshbandi (1922 – 2014), who is the namesake of the present Naqshbandi-Haqqani lineage. Born in Cyprus, Shaykh Nazim was educated in Istanbul and received early tutelage from a number of shaykhs before moving to Damascus to join the Naqshbandi order in 1945. He received initiation from his spiritual guide Shaykh ‘Abd Allah Daghestani (d. 1973), who instructed him to return to Cyprus with the mission to disseminate spiritual guidance and the teachings of Islam (Damrel 2006: 116). Shaykh Nazim continued his mission despite the Turkish government opposition to his activities.

The height of Nazim’s career was the period from the early 1950s to 1974. In 1952, he relocated to Damascus. He then organised retreats in, and preaching tours through, Syria, Cyprus, Jordan and Turkey, where he urged people to forgo atheism, secularism and materialism and return to God (Damrel 2006: 116). When Cyprus gained independence from Great Britain in 1960, Nazim voiced his opposition to the secular coalition government headed by president Archbishop Makarios (d. 1977) and vice president Dr Fazil Kucuk. As a result, he was denounced by the Cypriot press as an anti-reformist and a reactionary agent with foreign interests, and was subsequently expelled by the Turkish Cypriot administration in 1965. Upon the death of his master *pir* Daghestani in 1973, Nazim received permission in a dream from the Prophet Muhammad to spread Islam in Europe. He travelled regularly to London, where he established a centre, and to Turkey and a number of Muslim and non-Muslim European countries. He also expanded his proselytizing mission to the South and Southeast Asia and by the 1980s boasted a following in the thousands.

Sufi inventors of tradition

The Khaniqahi and Haqqani orders represent Sufi strands that demonstrate aptitude for change, and the continuing evolution of Sufi thought and its direct involvement in a contemporary setting. Both of these orders, despite the fact that they retain a traditional outlook, are driven by contemporary concerns that have influenced important shifts in their worldviews and their approaches to Islamic praxis and identity. They both seem to indicate a clear reinvention of ‘tradition’ of the kind referred to by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), and both exhibit forms of ‘cultural hybridity’ (Cox 2014; Milani 2013).

These orders are historically distinctive, both in terms of their cultural character, and especially with regard to their social evolution (Milani and Possamai 2013, 55–59). Our participant observation research, together with detailed qualitative interviews with group members, gives further support to the view that these orders have not only complex trajectories of development, but that these trajectories are also underpinned by series of socio-cultural shifts. These shifts have triggered a reinvention of certain aspects of their traditions. Furthermore, as major Sufi orders with a wide scope of influence in the West, their unique appropriation of Sufi tradition to a Western context has become established as the predominant image of ‘Sufism’ for a Western audience.

A basic characteristic analysis of the two orders, from the evidence presented below, reveals that the Khaniqahi literature places less stress on stipulating Shari’a and Islamic orthopraxy, and more on ‘internal religion’. The result is an eclectic attitude on the above. In contrast, Haqqani have an uncompromising Sunni orientation and an emphasis on Shari’a and Sunna and are committed to engagement in the world. At an organisational leadership level, the present form of both orders is largely shaped by

their respective leaders, Javad Nurbakhsh (1926–2008) and Nazim al-Haqqani (1922–2014), roughly contemporaneous, both now deceased. Both figures were prolific authors and active promoters of Sufism in the West. While they exhibited different styles, to a large degree, these two leaders have together shaped the face of contemporary Sufism on the global stage. They both have reinterpreted Sufism for both a late modern context and for a non-Muslim Western audience.

Methodology and theoretical framework

The study chronicled the regular members of two Sufi groups within the broader Muslim communities of Sydney and Melbourne. The two Sufi groups examined are a representative sample of the variety of Sufi expression encountered. The Khaniqahi, a major Iranian order with an estimated 4500 members in the West, has been in Australia for 30 years and has an estimated membership base of 300. The Haqqani is a prominent Turkish order with an estimated 6000 members in the West. It has been in Australia for approximately 20 years, where it currently has an estimated 200 members. We encountered some individuals who were initiated, but who were only intermittent attendees at group meetings, and others who claimed to practise Sufi rituals, but did not formally belong to either of the Sufi groups. As we were seeking a view that was aligned with that of their group, we did not interview these people.

The fieldwork conducted in this study focused on the Khaniqahis in Sydney and the Haqqanis in Sydney and Melbourne. This study consists of 14 in-depth qualitative interviews that are coupled with a total of 6 months of participation observation of the groups from 2011 to 2012. Seven members from each group were interviewed using a semi-directive approach. The sample of interviewees was diverse, comprising both women and men of various ages between 18 and 65, who were drawn from all levels of the Sufi orders' hierarchical structure. The process of interviewing and participant observation was overt, and the groups were made aware of the authors' role as academic observers. Permission to act as participant observers of the ritual gatherings was requested and granted by the groups' leading authorities. This helped to establish a bond of trust and friendship, which was also made easier given one of the authors' familiarity with Iranian and Turkish language and culture. The authors were permitted to attend the formal weekly meditation gathering that consisted of vocal chanting (*dhikr*), in both the Khaniqahi and Haqqani practices, as well as musical audition (*sama'*) in the Khaniqahi practice. During the course of the interviews, group members were generally forthcoming in volunteering information about their groups' practices and worldview.

The interviews were analysed thematically with regard to key topics that emerged in our previous study (Milani and Possamai 2013). These are the relationship between Sufism and Islam, and the participants' approaches to consumerism, spirituality and the westernisation process. This analysis was coupled with an in-depth content analysis of literature and hagiographical materials produced by the orders.

This research also adapts Curry and Ohlander's (2012) analysis of contemporary Sufi activity by applying their critical methodological and interpretive approach with regard to the impact of the dissemination and popularisation of novel or hybrid forms of Sufi action and thought in late modernity. In taking this approach, the article aims to

explore the growing strength of popular forms of Sufism and the evolution of doctrine and practice amongst Sufis and affiliated groups.

The Khaniqahi and Haqqani Sufi orders' sample

Khaniqahi sample

Of the seven people interviewed in the Khaniqahi group, three were female and four were male. Age groups included from the range of 25 through to 65 and over. Six people left their religion of birth (e.g. Christianity). Some of them experienced different religions before settling down in this group and display a stronger seekership (Possamai 2005) attitude than members of the other group. Six were Australian-born citizens, and one was an Iranian-born Australian citizen. None of the Khaniqahi interviewees explicitly identified with 'Islam' or as being 'Muslim'.

The six Australian born discussed their relationship to a group that is Persian based, expressing a variety of perceptions of this. For example, one member who is a long-time devotee and heavily involved in the organisation said:

As an Australian, not as an Iranian, [it's] difficult in some sense. Belonging to an order here ... it's Persian-based, and I don't speak much Farsi – very little. I'm learning a lot more as I go, but not fast enough. There seems to be a feeling that ... if you're not Iranian, then you're not necessarily knowing how things should be in the Sufi order and you're always – you're not really asked to serve as such...

However, another member of the group and a long-time devotee seemed to feel differently:

The order has a cultural feel and there are many Iranians, but there are enough non-Iranians for me not to feel uncomfortable.

Another member, who is involved in the leadership, pointed to the challenge of both spreading the order and maintaining its heritage:

There is a strong Irani culture behind it. In terms of adapting, the master once said that this is an Irani order. At the same time, it is spreading across the world and sheikhs like myself are not Iranian. Still, I hope that it doesn't lose its Iranian heritage. This culture contains many treasures of music and poetry like Hafiz and Rumi, and why would you want to discard that?

According to Lewisohn (2006) observations, Western converts to the Khaniqahi are encouraged to learn Persian but not Arabic, because the group stresses the 'Iranianness of the Sufi tradition' (Lewisohn 2006: 56). Lewisohn finds the global reach of this group to be limited by this ethnocentric approach, which affirms the Iranian nature and native Persian origin of the Khaniqahi brand of Sufism. He points out that the group fosters a strong perception that a Westerner cannot (really) become a *darvish* (Lewisohn

2006: 56), a perception echoed by the first interviewee cited above. These limitations may be mitigated, in Lewisohn's opinion, because many Westerners do not have a strong affinity with nationalistic values and tend to embrace this religion for non-nationalistic reasons. Our own sense of the situation, from interaction with the Khaniqahi order studied here, is that many members are simply attracted to the 'Sufi culture' without necessarily knowing it is Iranian. Lewisohn observes that in Iran—a predominantly Shi'a nation—the Khaniqahi group tends to attract mainly Shi'ite Muslims, whereas in the West, where the group must inhabit a 'cultic milieu' (Campbell 1972) in competition with numerous Eastern and New Age groups, it attracts particular types of Westerners seeking a different kind of cultural and spiritual experience.

Haqqani sample

Our study suggests that the Haqqani group also occupies the kind of cultic milieu described by Campbell (1972). Seven members of this group were interviewed for this study. Only one was born overseas, and three grew up as Muslims. Four had converted to Islam. Interestingly, none of the participants made reference to an Iranian, Turkish or any other nationalist culture. Whereas the Khaniqahi order valued a cultural capital based on Persian culture and values, Haqqani members focused more on the symbolic capital of being a Muslim. There were two female and five male interviewees in this group ranging in age from 25 to 65 years old.

Speaking about the group in Melbourne, one participant noted that 'much of the people in the order in Melbourne are Western Australians, not born Muslims'. While we are unaware of any statistics that would verify this, there did appear to be more Australian-born members in this latter group, compared to the Khaniqahi. The focus of the Haqqani seems to be exclusively on the practice of the group in Australia rather than on maintaining Persian (or any other) cultural links. As one informant suggested, the group is intentionally inclusive of Westerners:

15 % [are] born Muslims, the remainder are non-Muslims and have since become Muslims over time... There's tremendous appeal and we are making it accessible to the Westerner. We don't separate men and women. We share a meal at the end of zikr [Sufi meditation ceremony] together. We are not prescriptive and we allow people to adopt the principles that are meaningful in Islam through their own desire to do so.

One respondent described Australia as a country that is not religious or spiritual, especially when contrasted to Turkey and India. He also spoke about Australia as tolerant of religion and underlined what he found to be a paradox that in some Muslim countries that have a spiritual heritage, Sufis are being suppressed. As he claimed:

One time when we were in Turkey the government were oppressing Sufism. In Indonesia you've got fundamentalists who don't like Sufis. So in Australia, we're on a clean plate. You can get on with your own form of Sufism and nobody disturbs you. It's that funny dichotomy again.

This relation between Sufism and Islam is now being investigated in the everyday life practices of the respondents.

Sufism and Islam

Interviewees from the Khaniqahi group saw the relationship between Sufism and Islam as tense. As one person stated: ‘...Sufi are victimised and are killed by Muslims’. Another who left an orthodox Muslim group to join this Khaniqahi group stated that when he met a Sheikh of this order, he was encouraged by the inward, rather than outward, aspect of the Sufi religion:

...I was sincerely devout and practising Muslim (five times prayer, namaz, and Ramadan and the whole lot)... and he said that here we are not interested in prayer, we like music and poetry.

He continued to describe the link between Islam and his Sufi group:

Sufism I believe existed before Islam. ... You could be an absolutely full-on practicing Muslim or Jew or Christian and still be a Sufi. ... Sufism emerges from the environment of Islam. But the truths of Sufism do not differ from the truths of any other religion.

Similarly, another Westerner stated:

...it is all culturally embedded in Islam, but this particular order talks about Sufism being pre-Islam. The order’s attitude is that the old Master, Javad Nurbakhsh wanted to de-emphasise that part of it. And I think that’s fine in the West, and people who want to divorce themselves from Islam, but the people in Iran are in a different world. So some people carry the Islamic culture within them.

More specific to this Khaniqahi order, another group member claimed that:

...this order disengages from some of the structures and practices of Islam, which may not be the case with others.

This view is shared by the Iranian interviewee, who stated:

I think that Sufism did exist before Islam. Because it is the Aryan culture. It is the culture of happiness, chivalry, loving kindness, service to humanity, which the Aryan people have always practiced, but when the Arabs invaded Iran and Islam became the main religion of the people, so those chevaliers and those who were practising chivalry they took the invisible god of the Arabs and called it absolute being. ... Then the Sufism in Islam begins so this is after Islam. So the basis of Sufism is before Islam, but then was mixed with Islamic culture.

On the other hand, the interviewees from the Haqqani order had a different perspective, viewing Sufism and Islam as ‘inseparable’ and stating, for example, that ‘for me

Sufism can't really exist without Islam'. They did however acknowledge that orthodox Muslims 'believe that we're falling outside of Islam'. As one put it:

I look Arabic and people immediately ask about Islam, and then, the non-Muslim people, they're easier to talk to. When you talk to the Muslim people you get the mixed reaction. You get half saying you're following some kind of evil innovated path or something. And then others think well you're just doing extra above the prescribed teachings of Islam.

The Haqqani members even viewed Sufism as offering a type of bridge between Islam and Australian culture. One of them, an Australian and Muslim born, states:

...growing up in Australia I wasn't content with Islam and the Australian culture. They were conflicting all the time. And personally, I was in conflict with myself. So when I discovered Sufism, it really made me content. They really worked together. They really complemented each other and it made me sort of [feel that]... I could be a Muslim and an Australian.

A similar point is made by the other Muslim-born participant:

Sufism is a bridge between Muslims and non-Muslims. Even for people who don't believe in organised religion it can bring a lot because all it teaches is for people to be happy within oneself. That attracts people and they can use it in their day-to-day life.

A Muslim convert also described the group as offering 'a middle path, like a Sufi path' stating that new members are 'guided through the Islamic faith that way.... People who come to us are gently taught very, very slowly so that they can integrate Islam into their life and learn slowly'.

A convert explains the importance of Islam:

I did wait some time before formally being initiated because it is a monumental decision especially being a Westerner and the impact that the decision has on every aspect of my life. But once I decided to go deeply into Sufism, I realised that you really need to embrace Islam because Islam is the container for Sufism. The sheikh says there's no tariqah without Shari'a.

Another one admits that certain Sufi groups do not engage in Islam as much, but he does not share this perspective:

There is a place for Sufi tradition without Islam, but I suppose Islam is the body and it has to go together. There's an aspect, I don't support those who call themselves Sufis but who are disconnected from Islam.

To help understand these findings in Australia, it is worth exploring the other parts of the Western world. Yukleyen (2010: 217) studied a sub-branch of the Haqqani order in Europe, the Sūlaymançı, and noticed that their main form of activism is to reach out

to Muslims rather than non-Muslims. In general, they are not interested in converting people to Islam (Yukleyen 2010: 281). He observed that novices are first required to attend communal rituals, and if they are subsequently found to be serious about their involvement, they can be initiated into the community. Manço (2010: 486), who studied the Iskenderpasha branch of the same order (especially the discourses of Sheik Coşan) claims that the objective of the dervish is to represent Islam in such a way that non-Muslims would want to convert themselves. Manço (2010: 487) cites a text that claims that if the Iskenderpasha faith were to procure pleasures, European spiritual tourists would join with them.

Malik and Hinnells' edited volume (2006) established that Sufism plays a potentially pivotal role in the process of integration. Sufism is defined as a third social force that is an 'innovative and ingenious interacting medium' with its various representatives seen 'as oscillating actors between different social languages or consciousnesses' (2006: 25). This study reminds readers about the potential of Sufism 'when its members adopted the patterns of their host environment and hence became actors of both Islamization as well as indigenization' (2006: 25). What this study clearly demonstrates is that 'Sufism – intellectually and well as sociologically – may therefore eventually become more mainstream due to its versatile potential, especially in the wake of what has been called the failure of political Islam world-wide' (2006: 25). Malik and Hinnells' volume—the most pertinent for a current assessment of Sufism in the West—concludes that 'Sufism in the West seems to have the capacity to diversify Islam, as well as to operate in different public spheres and visibilities through its rich semiotics and symbol-systems, as well as its rituals, which appeal to a variety of social strata' (2006: 25).

Religion and spirituality

Respondents from the Khaniqahi group tended to distance themselves from religion and express their involvement in the group as part of their spirituality. As one person stated:

Spirituality is what attracted me to Sufism. I don't think Sufism is dogmatic and discriminative. It accepts everybody. What I feel to be difference between religion and spirituality is for me religion is seeped in dogma, and literal and jealously guarding of their version of truth. Religion is ok as a stepping stone, a conduit that brings you to a place where there is no division, then that's fine. There are good things about religion, but spirituality is the underpinning component.

Another Khaniqahi respondent described the relationship between religion and spirituality as follows:

One's exoteric, the other is esoteric; the outer, the inner. You could see religion is the form and spirituality is the content. But I find this trite, because it's like saying people who follow a religious path have no inner dimension to it. It's a bit of generalisation. Spirituality is the activity that goes on in your heart. Religion I guess is the scaffolding.

However, one Western Khaniqahi respondent disagreed with this distinction between religion and spirituality:

I think that it is problematic, intellectually, philosophically, ethically, in all kinds of ways, it's a bit of a false distinction. I think that people have a right, subjectively, to differentiate between what they think the sort of attitudes and practices that they identify as spiritual as opposed to the attitudes and practices that they identify as religious – the more rigid, dogmatic etc., in other words subjectively I think it's legitimate, but objectively I don't think you really can. I think you can only talk about how people regard their own path. This distinction is extremely important for some, and they're not stupid.

Whereas the Khaniqahi group tended to treat spirituality as outside of Islam, respondents from the Haqqani order viewed Islam as being more inclusive of the spiritual. They made similar comments to the interviewees quoted above, such as 'I think religion's more human; it has human influence, where spirituality has no human influence' or 'you have to break the boundaries of any religion to reach the divine', but they conceived of the spiritual as located and accessed from within the 'boundaries' of religion. As one person from the Haqqani group stated:

And religion can be a set of practices that may not be necessarily linked to any spiritual growth. So those who wish to go deeper to any religion there is a spiritual tradition available

As another put it:

The way religion is set up by mankind is extremely destructive I think and creates reason for conflict. There's a lot of manipulation and corruption. People really don't understand how to differentiate between tradition and fundamentalism anymore; they really don't know where they stand and question their own faith. I just try and tell them to keep it simple, keep your heart with God, that's what I say. ... Islam is the body, Sufism is the heart. They can't live without each other.

To understand this difference with regard to spirituality between these two groups, the work of Campbell (1978: 231), as inspired by Troeltsch (1950), provides an answer. Campbell writes about two ideal types of mysticism (or what we would call today spirituality (Possamai 2014), namely mysticism and technical mysticism. Mysticism occurs in established religious traditions, but its experience occurs outside the regular forms of worship and devotion to these religions. The experience of the mystics, from this ideal type, is the means by which they realise and appropriate the tradition of the religious organisation to which they belong. They even legitimise and support established ecclesiastical structures. Technical mysticism makes a break with traditional religion. Technical mystics contest the religion within which they have been socialised. They understand themselves to be independent from religious principle and from every religious institution. Technical mysticism sets up its own theory, which takes the place of doctrine and dogma by undercutting the form and structure of the established religions. It discovers everywhere, 'beneath all the concrete forms of religion, the same religious germ' (Troeltsch 1950: 231).

The same distinction can be applied to spirituality, and, like Troeltsch, we could distinguish spirituality from technical spirituality or what Hamberg (2009) calls

unchurched spirituality. In this sense, participants from the Khaniqahi order would better fit with the notion of technical or unchurched mysticism or spirituality (that is not exclusively grounded in the Islamic tradition), while those from the Haqqani order would strongly align with mysticism/spirituality (that is a more grounded approach with the Islamic tradition). These different approaches to spirituality are deeply connected to their different views on Islam.

Westernisation of the groups

Overall, all participants from the Khaniqahi group commented on how the group is being Westernised. For example:

Generally the influence of the West is everywhere; and this is change. If you don't change, you die.

[Our order is] relatively open to the Western influence. For example – of not having to swear allegiance to Islam. So in practice the order is very accommodating to Westerners, but maintaining its central identity.

However, there may be a simultaneous desire to limit Westernisation, as another Khaniqahi interviewee comments:

I think it was a strong Iranian experience in that Iranians are trying to preserve a bit of their way here, but that's what I like about it. But there are many examples of easy going attitudes that seem to be the results of Western culture.

The Iranian migrant follows this line of thinking by speaking first about Westerners and then about a Western environment:

... we have a lot of Westerners coming here. We never ask what is your belief, what is your background, whether you're Jewish, Christian. There's no prerequisite to be a Sufi. So you don't have to be Muslim to be a Sufi... Obviously we can practice Sufism in the West much better that we can practice it in Iran. ... There is no limitation in Nimtullahi Sufi order from becoming Sufi. As long as they have that fire of love, and the Western setting actually helps you in that way, because the democracy and freedom of speech really helps it.

The idea of Westernisation is fully embraced by some in the Haqqani group, as the following comment suggests:

Personally I think it [his Sufi order] was bred for the West. ... I mean, the Western culture and Sufism is complimentary. Putting Islam aside, the spirituality here is a breeding ground for it.

However, because the Haqqani group has a heavier focus on Islam than the Khaniqahi, there appears to be a diversity of opinions on this topic:

The order is interested in Western seekers...I definitely believe you ... have to compromise a lot in a good way. Particularly some Muslims or Sufi orders might get hung [up] about Shari'a things where this is halal or haram sort of things.

Although the development of multi-cultural and multi-faith societies in the Western world implies that the Western world is no longer exclusively synonymous with Judeo-Christianity and secularism, and has included non-Christian faiths for a long time, the post 9/11 events have created a wider gap between Muslim communities and what is perceived as Western. Although Muslim and Islam are now part of this Western world, there has been a growth of Islamophobia (e.g. Morgan and Poynting 2012) and a tension with regard to applying Shari'a in a Western setting (e.g. Possamai et al. 2015), which creates a more difficult dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. In this environment and context, it is tempting to argue that the more removed a Sufi group is from the Islamic tradition, the more Westernised it will be interpreted to be. We return to the analysis of the Westernisation of these groups in the section below on consumerism.

Consumerism

As seen above, respondents from the Khaniqahi group demonstrated a particularly positive attitude towards Western values. Our expectation was that the group would similarly be influenced by consumerism. However, this was not reflected in the words of the participants:

I think that spirituality and consumerism are at odds. But I also feel that with consumerism there's coercion, which is at odds with spirituality.
I don't think that it [this order] markets [itself] in a way that promotes consumption of it.

Another respondent suggested that Sufism is perceived as the kind of path that is not easy and is therefore not compatible with a consumerist approach:

...the order does not engage in consumer culture to promote itself. There's not much propaganda in Sufism and in this order. It's really the way of the elect, really. Not everybody can become a Sufi, it is not for everybody.

In this last comment, we can see a link between the weak approach to promotion or marketing, and a feeling of authenticity of the group:

I don't think that this order puts itself out there [in consumer culture] very much. I don't think they're trying to market themselves to anyone. ... I went to the Nimatullahi (Khaniqahi) I liked it, coz it was more traditional.

For the Haqqani, this situation is slightly different, as one respondent states:

[consumerism] has come up a lot of times, and I'm not really for that. But American counterparts are all for it. For me personally, it's a spiritual group

and it's as simple as that and it comes out of my pocket. But they merchandise everything, books by the masters, but I'm not against it.

Another mentioned how useful it is to have access to these commodities:

There's one of the main websites based in America that does sell things like prayer beads and the like... Traditionally the order wore the Ottoman dress, turbans and baggy trousers and you can buy that online. Also books, prayer mats and all that sort of thing.

While one respondent completely dissociates Sufism from consumerism, others give a different rationale for this link:

But I don't think this is about money, but transferring knowledge. I got into Sufism via Idries Shah, and if it weren't for that book I wouldn't have known Sufism. I have a lot of Sufi books and I buy them because I love them and I want to support the authors, but it's about the knowledge. I'm happy for the money to go towards charitable ends. There might be CDs too. There is merchandise too like talismans for protection, also things like rings and women's scarves and so on.

Consumerism has been with mankind from the beginning. Rumi talks about trade, and the Prophet was a trader. You need to be ethical, but nothing wrong with being good about business. We don't shy away from making money. It's about attachment really.

Another study, by Muttaqin (2012) in Indonesia, explores the link between Sufism and consumerism at length. Muttaqin studied Bioenergi, a centre for training, healing and business consultation in Indonesia. The centre was developed by Syaiful M Maghsri who belonged to the Naqshbandi Sufi Order in Cirebon. In his research, Muttaqin discovered how this hybrid Sufi group has engaged with commercialisation and capitalism. Although Syaiful originally wanted to bring Muslims back to their spiritual heritage via Sufism, later, the focus changed as Bioenergi became universal and began attracting a range of followers, including, for example, Buddhist monks. As Muttaqin states:

In short, Bioenergi has changed Sufi spiritual practices for 'authentic' spiritual purification of the self into a calculative spirituality for creating a 'heavenly life' on this earth. ... Corporatisation of this Indonesian hybrid Sufism allows Bioenergi to make transactions based on the principles of buying and selling, not on the principles of moral obligation between spiritual teacher and students. Commercialisation has thus facilitated a shift from Islamic Sufism for piety to universalised Sufism for worldly efficacy (2012: 43).

This group is part of a larger trend in Indonesia that has seen new urban Sufi groups inspired by the global New Age Movements (Howell 2007). From our own analysis of this Australian interview data, and the two groups' Internet sites (Milani and Possamai

2013), it appears that, in the way these groups present their constructed ‘authenticity’, the Haqqani in Australia are less Western but more involved in consumerism than the Khaniqahi which is, paradoxically, more Western in its approach.

Coming back to our previous discussion about Sufism being understood as a third, social force, these two groups indicate the propensity of Sufism and its members to readily adopt the patterns of their host environment and thus become social agents of both Islamisation as well as indigenisation (Malik and Hinnells 2006: 25). This study may further indicate that the Muslim diaspora in late-modern Western societies may be experiencing a return to the Sufi current within the broader spectrum of Muslim thought. Sufism as an applied philosophy, even as a non-definitive practice alongside normative Islamic practices, is increasingly appealing to Muslims (e.g. the Haqqani) and non-Muslim converts (e.g. the Khaniqahi) both intellectually and sociologically. What is suggested by this article is, again, that Sufism in the West has the capacity not only to diversify Islam but also to operate in different social and public spheres.

Conclusions

This article aimed to examine the process of self-representation and localisation of Sufism in Australia. It presented the results of a preliminary study of the adaptation of the Khaniqahi (Nimatullahi) and Haqqani (Naqshbandi) Sufi orders in Australia. Its findings and analysis are based largely on material obtained from 14 semi-structured interviews with members of the groups, along with historical literature and some web research into the groups’ histories and positions. It is admittedly a small-scale study with a small sample of members of two Sufi groups in Australia, the Khaniqahi and Haqqani. Nevertheless the article makes a useful contribution to the limited literature on Sufi groups in Australia.

The findings of this study may indicate that Sufi strands, in the Australian context, demonstrate aptitude for change, and the continuing evolution of Sufi thought and its direct involvement in a contemporary setting. From the evidence gathered, both these orders, despite retaining a traditional outlook, are driven by contemporary concerns that have influenced important shifts in their worldview and their approach to Islamic praxis and identity. There seems to be a clear indication of a reinvention of ‘tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), through which both groups exhibit forms of ‘hybridity’ (Cox 2014). With respect to this hybrid character, the literature and interview material suggest that both groups have accepted the Islamic faith, but in their own way (and through their own cultural and social experience), producing a version of the faith that is uniquely expressed through a worldview specific to their Sufi group.

References

- Akbarzadeh, S. (2001). *Muslim communities in Australia*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Akbarzadeh, S., & Roose, J. M. (2011). Muslims, multiculturalism and the question of the silent majority. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 3, 309–325.

- Bendle, M. F. (2003). Global Jihad and the battle for the soul of Islam. *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 16(2), 125–140.
- Campbell, C. (1972). The cult, the cultic milieu and secularization. *A sociological yearbook of religion in Britain*, 5, 119–136.
- Campbell, C. (1978). The secret religion of the educated classes. *Sociology of Religion*, 39(2), 146–156.
- Cox, J. (2014). *The invention of God in indigenous societies*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Curry, J. J., & Ohlander, E. S. (2012). *Sufism and society: arrangements of the mystical in the Muslim world, 1200–1800 (Routledge Sufi series, Vol. 12)*. Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Damrel, D. W. (2006). Aspects of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order in North America. In J. Malik & J. Hinnells (Eds.), *Sufism in the West* (pp. 115–126). New York: Routledge.
- Genn, C. A. (2007). The development of a modern Western Sufism. In M. Bruinessen & J. D. Howell (Eds.), *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam* (pp. 281–298). New York: IB Tauris.
- Genn, C. A. (2013). What's in a name? Changes and challenges in one hundred years of Inayat Khan's (Inayati) Universal Sufism. *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 26(1), 7–28.
- Hamberg, E. (2009). Unchurched spirituality. In P. B. Clarke (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the sociology of religion* (pp. 742–757). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hammer, J. (2006). The soul of Islam: writing and publishing as engaged Sufism. *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 26(1), 36–70.
- Hermansen, M. K. (2000). Hybrid identity formations in Muslim America: the case of American Sufi movements. *Muslim World*, 90(1&2), 158–197.
- Hermansen, M. K. (2007). The academic study of Sufism at American universities. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 24(3), 23–45.
- Hobsbawm, E. J., & Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Howell, J. (2014). Revitalised sufism and the new piety movements in Islamic Southeast Asia. In B. Turner (ed.), *Routledge handbook of religions in Asia* (pp. 276–292). London: Routledge.
- Howell, J. D. (2007). Modernity and Islamic spirituality in Indonesia's new Sufi networks. In M. Bruinessen & J. D. Howell (Eds.), *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam* (pp. 217–240). New York: IB Tauris.
- Keating, R. (2002a). *Francis Brabazon—Poet of the Silent Word—a modern Hafiz*. Sydney: World Axis Press.
- Keating, R. (2002b). The perfect master or axis of the universe in the writing of Francis Brabazon. In C. Rayment & M. Levon Byrne (Eds.), *Seeking the centre: 2001 Australian international religion, literature and the arts conference proceedings* (pp. 318–329). Sydney: RLA Press.
- Lewisohn, L. (1998). An introduction to the history of modern Persian Sufism, part I: the Nimatullahi order: persecution, revival and schism. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 61, 437–464.
- Lewisohn, L. (2006). Persian Sufism in the contemporary West: reflections on the Nimatullahi diaspora. In J. Malik & J. R. Hinnells (Eds.), *Sufism in the West* (pp. 49–70). London: Routledge.
- Malik, J., & Hinnells, J. R. (Eds.). (2006). *Sufism in the West*. London: Routledge.
- Manço, U. (2010). Corporéités, ascétismes et sécularisation dans le discours de la confrérie Naqshbandi turque contemporaine. *Social Compass*, 57(4), 479–492.
- Milani, M. (2013). *Sufism in the secret history of Persia (Gnostica: texts and interpretations)*. Durham: Acumen.
- Milani, M., & Possamai, A. (2013). The Nimatullahiya and Naqshbandiya Sufi orders on the internet: the cyber-construction of tradition and the McDonaldisation of spirituality. *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 26(1), 29–50.
- Morgan, G., & Poynting, S. (Eds.). (2012). *Global Islamophobia. Muslims and moral panic in the West*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Muttaqin, A. (2012). From piety to efficacy: hybrid Sufism in a secular landscape. *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, 46(2), 25.
- Nimatullahi Sufi Order (2011–2014a). Our order: find a centre. <http://www.nimatullahi.org/our-order/find-a-center/> Accessed 25 July 2013.
- Nimatullahi Sufi Order (2011–2014b). Our order: history. <http://www.nimatullahi.org/our-order/history/dr-javad-nurbakhsh.php> Accessed 18 September 2014.
- Possamai, A. (2005). *In search of new spiritualities*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Possamai, A. (2014). *Popular and lived religions Sociopedia*. Sage.
- Possamai, A., Richardson, J., & Turner, B. (Eds.). (2015). *The sociology of Shari'a: case studies from around the world*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Saeed, A. (2003). *Islam in Australia*. New South Wales: Allen and Unwin.
- Stenhouse, P. (2007). Islam's trojan horse? Turkish nationalism and the Nakshibendi Sufi order. *Quadrant*, 51(12), 11.

- Troeltsch, E. (1950). *The social teaching of the Christian churches* (Halley Stewart publications (Vol. 1)). London: Allen & Unwin.
- Werbner, P. (2006). Seekers on the path: different ways of being a Sufi in Britain. In J. Malik & J. R. Hinnells (Eds.), *Sufism in the West* (pp. 127–141). London: Routledge.
- Yukleyen, A. (2010). Production of mystical Islam in Europe: religious authorization in the Süleymanlı Sufi community. *Contemporary Islam*, 4(3), 269–288.