Chapter 9

Pilgrimages in Western European Sufism

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**Introduction**

Sufism (*taṣawwuf* in Arabic), the esoteric or mystical path to soul purification within Islam[[1]](#endnote-1), is spreading extensively today throughout many different domains in Western societies.[[2]](#endnote-2) Culturally, there is a large production of traditional Sufi music as well as what might be called a ‘revisited’ style, in addition to contemporary literature and cinema productions (Hermansen 2004). Intellectually, the academic literature on historical, philosophical and sociological Sufism has been growing since the 1970s. Within the religious field, Sufi orders (Arabic *ṭuruq* plural, *ṭarīqa* singular) are expanding in different ways: a) in numbers and in size, with the consequence that they are looking for new places in which to carry out both religious and non-religious activities; b) in importance, many *shuyūkh* and *khulafā’* (plurals of *shaykh* and *khalīfa,* Sufi Masters and local leaders) have become political and cultural reference points for certain Muslim communities and national institutions (e.g. *Shaykh* Hisham Kabbani in the United Kingdom and in the United States, *Shaykh* Pallavicini in Italy, and Abd Al Malik in France).

Western European Sufism can today be described as a complex phenomenon drawing from different sources: 1) ‘traditional’ religious Sufi organizations are formed by first, second and third generation migrants, a process labelled by Hermansen as ‘transplanted’ Sufism (Hermansen 2004, 37); 2) European esotericism, more precisely René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon (Sedgwick 2004; Bisson 2007; Piraino 2016b); 3) the ‘cultic milieu’ (Wilson 1992) or New Age culture (Hermansen 2004; Hammer 2004; Sedgwick 2009; Piraino 2016a); and 4) scholarly Sufism, which has often moved beyond an academic context to influence contemporary Sufism (e.g. Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin, William Chittick, Patrick Laude, Éric Geoffroy). These different sources must not be understood separately since they all contribute, in various degrees, to the composition of Western European Sufi orders.

In this chapter I discuss Western European Sufism through the lens of pilgrimage, and I ask: what forms, what values and what meanings does pilgrimage have within the Western European Sufi frame? First of all, we will notice that while the cult of saints and worship at tombs is quite widespread in African and Asian forms of Sufism (Werbner 2003; Rhani 2013), these ritual practices seem secondary in Western European Sufism. The main reason for undertaking a pilgrimage in the West European context is, instead, to meet the living charismatic Sufi master. Secondly, we will see how pilgrimage can be an instrument of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue, and a manifestation of the social and political role played by the Sufi orders. Thirdly, we will see how the universalistic spirit of some Sufi orders encouraged Sufi disciples to perform Christian pilgrimages. And finally, I argue that *communitas* should not simply be associated with the liminal state of pilgrimage (cf. Turner 1974). In the case of Sufi pilgrimage, I argue, *communitas* might also be experienced in the pre- and post-liminal stages of the rituals*.*

The Sufism I describe is particularly related to France and Italy. The discussion is based on a meticulous study of some of the most significant Sufi orders in Western Europe, in terms of size and impact. The methodological approach is ethnographic, supported by seventy qualitative in-depth interviews. In 2013 and 2014, for a period of more than six months, I attended weekly prayer meetings, *dhikr* (remembering God through the repetition of God’s names), in Milan and Paris. I focused my attention on the following *ṭuruq*: ʿAlāwiyya (*Shaykh* Khaled Bentounes), Būdshīshiyya (*Shaykh* Hamza), Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya (*Shaykh* Mehmet) and Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya (*Shaykh* Tuğrul İnançer). During field research I also had the opportunity to participate in *ziyārāt* (Arabic, literally ‘visits’), the visit to holy places, together with Sufi disciples (Arabic *fuqarāʾ*, *faqīr* in the singular). The pilgrimages took place in Algeria, Morocco, Cyprus and Turkey, and my presence at these pilgrimage sites has been fundamental in order to comprehend the processes of continuity and discontinuity in transnational forms of Sufism in Western Europe.

**From the field: New Sufi groups in Europe since the early 20th century**

In the following section I offer a short review of the history of the Sufi movements discussed in this chapter, before turning to a description of the Sufi pilgrimages in which I participated.

*Ṭarīqa ʿAlāwiyya*

The *ṭarīqa* ʿAlāwiyya, led by *Shaykh* Khaled Bentounes, is one of most important *ṭuruq* in North Africa and Europe. Founded by the *Shaykh* Aḥmad Ibn Muṣṭafā Al-ʿAlawī at the beginning of the twentieth century, ʿAlāwiyya was the first *ṭarīqa* to be established in Western Europe. Important individuals contributing to this development are Algerian migrants in France and Yemenis in the United Kingdom, in addition to the conversion of Guénonian[[3]](#endnote-3) intellectuals, such as Frithjof Schuon, Michel Valsan, Titus Buckhardt, and Martin Lings. Following Shaykh Al-ʿAlawī’s death in 1934, the *ṭarīqa* was dismantled, giving rise to different independent branches. The main branch, first led from Algeria by *Shaykh* ‘Adda and *Shaykh* Mahdī, has since 1975 been led from France by *Shaykh* Khaled Bentounes. ʿAlāwiyya is also well developed in Canada, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Germany.

In terms of appearance, *Shaykh* Khaled Bentounes can be described as ‘unconventional’ since he does not appear as a conventional Sufi, e.g. wearing a beard and characteristic clothing. Moreover, he has married a Catholic French woman. The many activities he is engaged in include writing books, participation in conferences and television broadcasts, and involvement in social issues. In particular, he founded the Muslim Scouts in France, inspired the establishment of a new system of management called META (Management Ethique Traditionel Alternatif), and works in Algeria promoting women’s rights as well as environmental awareness. Moreover, he is strongly active in interfaith dialogue. *Shaykh* Khaled Bentounes is also a promoter of ‘post confraternity-Sufism’, that is, a form of Sufism that seeks to overcome differences among *ṭuruq* so that they are no longer in competition with each other, but share a common vision of spiritual Islam (Geoffroy 2009a).

In the past years, ʿAlāwiyya has organized many pilgrimages to sacred Islamic places in Uzbekistan, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Syria and Jerusalem. The *ṭarīqa* has also organized, through the Muslim Scouts, spiritual journeys to Sicily and Spain in order to rediscover Muslim heritage in Western Europe. Furthermore, the *ṭarīqa* organizes the *‘umrah* (the little *ḥajj*) every year for disabled people, where the *fuqarāʾ* (Sufi disciples) are at the service of Muslims who are unable to travel alone.

Pilgrimage is also promoted as an instrument of interfaith dialogue. Every year since 2011, ʿAlāwiyya has participated in the parade ‘La marche du vivre ensemble’ (Living Together Parade) in Cannes, where different religious groups demonstrate their desire for peace. To give another example, in September 2013 ʿAlāwiyya promoted the Saint Assisi’s Parade in Italy, in collaboration with the international interreligious association ‘Compostelle-Cordoue’. This interfaith parade is seen as an opportunity for religious movements to become better acquainted with each other and create dialogue and peace. The Assisi Parade is part of a richer programme which, in the last three years, made its way to other countries, for example Switzerland, Spain and Morocco. Finally, the Muslim Scouts and the *ṭarīqa* ʿAlāwiyya in 2011 organized the ‘Flamme de l’espoir citoyen*’* (Flame of civic Hope), a bus tour all over France, in order to promote civic duties and political participation among young Muslims.

As mentioned above, ʿAlāwiyya works in Algeria to promote women’s rights. In October and November 2014 I attended the conference ‘Congrès Féminin pour une culture de Paix – Paroles aux Femmes’ held in Oran, Algeria. The conference focused on different themes around women’s rights, women’s interpretation of the Qur’an and *ḥadīth*, and Peace culture, and gathered thousands of people from all around the world. After three days of conference, there was a ‘spiritual day’ where people could visit the mother *zāwiya* (literally ‘corner, the house of prayer, *zawāyā* in plural) in Mostaganem, as well as the *shuyūkh*’s tombs.

These pilgrimages to Muslim and Christian sites in various countries are examples of the interreligious and intra-religious dialogue-activity promoted by ʿAlāwiyya, as well as their social commitment to create ‘a culture of peace’, to quote *Shaykh* Bentounes’ motto. The activities reflect the focus within ʿAlāwiyya Sufism on the ethical and spiritual dimension of the human condition. This does not mean, however, that typical characteristics of Sufi pilgrimages, such as worship at the tombs to participate in the miraculous healing powers, are absent. In fact,these practices are still being performed, but have become less central. Instead, the members are encouraged to take responsibility in society.

*Ṭarīqa Qādiriyya Būdshīshiyya*

Since 1972, Būdshīshiyya has been led by *Shaykh* Hamza, whois considered by his *fuqarāʾ* to be a ‘living Saint’, or the *quṭb* (axis) of this historical period. He revolutionized the *ṭarīqa* when initiating a shift described as ‘from *Jalāl* (Majesty) way to the *Jamāl* (Beauty) way’. In other words, he promoted a change from an ascetic and rigid disciplinary form of devotion to a merciful and embracing compassionate attitude. Būdshīshiyya, originated in a little village in Morocco in the nineteenth century*,* and evolved into one of the most important *ṭuruq* in the country, with tens of thousands of *fuqarāʾ* and sympathizers. Today it is also spreading in the United States, United Kingdom and France. This process of expansion began in the early 1990s when Būdshīshiyya opened up to Europeans, especially to French people. The development is very much indebted to Faouzi Skali, who wrote several books on Sufism and organized the festival ‘Le festival de musique sacrée’ (Festival of sacred music) in Fez, which turned out to be an international success. Today the brotherhood has two *zawāyā* in Paris that bring together around 300 *fuqarāʾ*.

In Morocco, Būdshīshiyya has a significant position. Many journalists, professors and government officials are involved in the *ṭarīqa* (Dominguez 2014),and every year it organizes an international Sufi convention, ‘Le Rencontre Mondial du Soufisme’, which brings together academics and religious leaders from all over the world. Būdshīshiyya’s politics has been described as ‘engaged distance’ (Heck 2009)which implies that while it cultivates a close relationship with Moroccan authorities, it also presents itself as not interested in politics. In fact, *Shaykh* Hamza invites his *fuqarāʾ* to focus only on *dhikr* and not on local and international politics. Also in France, Būdshīshiyya plays an important role and the former socialist vice-president of the Senate, Bariza Khiari, the rapper, Abd Al Malik, and Professor El Kadiri Mounir (*Shaykh* Hamza’s nephew) are the *ṭarīqa*’s most important spokespersons.

Companionship between people is a core feature of the Būdshīshiyya and the relations among *fuqarāʾ* are very strong, even across national borders. For example, the contact between the Parisian and the mother *zāwiya* in Morocco is intense with visits organized at *Shaykh* Hamza’s house in Naima almost once a month. The most important event is the *Mawlid,* the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birth, organized in the village of Madagh. During the event the convention ‘Rencontre Mondial du Soufisme’ is organized. Moreover, in Madagh there are several tombs of Sufi masters that are believed to possess strong *baraka* (spiritual energy) and to be a source of *karāmāt* (miracles). I was told that those who are looking for spiritual and physical healing visit these tombs. Nevertheless, the Sufi tombs are not at the centre of Būdshīshiyya pilgrimage. Instead, the most important pilgrimage destination is the ‘living saint’ *Shaykh* Hamza.

*Ṭarīqa Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya*

In 1973, Shaykh Nazim succeeded his master *Shaykh* Abdullah al Daghestani, and having been asked by him to spread Sufi knowledge in the Western world, Shaykh Nazim founded a new branch of the Naqshbandiyya, called Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya. Starting from the late 1970s, *Shaykh* Nazim made yearly trips to London and in the 1980s he visited the United States, France, Switzerland, and Germany. During the same period, he moved from Syria to Cyprus, where he had been born in 1922. Today the majority of the Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya *fuqarāʾ* are in Europe and the United States, although Shaykh Nazim is also well known in Turkey and Indonesia. When *Shaykh* Nazim died in 2014, his son *Shaykh* Mehmet took over the leadership of the *ṭarīqa*.[[4]](#endnote-4)

*Shaykh* Nazim revolutionized the Naqshbandiyya by changing the silent *dhikr* into a vocal performance by permitting the ecstatic dance called *ḥaḍra*[[5]](#endnote-5) in order to attract new disciples. His purpose for changing the method of spiritual devotion was to spread Sufi knowledge to the Western world. Indeed, within a few years, Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya became one of the most well-known *ṭuruq* in Europe. The brotherhood’s sudden openness to the outside world was also a result of a strong conviction that the end of time was near. The successful proliferation of the *ṭarīqa* was, however, very much tied to the charisma of local leaders such as *Shaykh* Hisham in the United States and *Shaykh* Hassan Dyck and *Shaykh* Burhanuddin in Europe. It is difficult to assess the theological and political position of Naqshbandiyya. Although there is a large production of speeches (Shaykh Nazim spoke every day through ‘*Sultanat* TV’ online) and a high number of active charismatic *khulafā’*, studying the *ṭarīqa* means dealing with a complex and nebulous structure which merges a traditional *ṭarīqa* with elements from new religious movements. In fact, Naqshbandiyya, due to its openness to the outside world has become influenced by New Age culture or what we may call a ‘cultic milieu’ (Nielsen, Draper, and Yemelianova 2006; Damrel 2006).

We can briefly identify two opposing dimensions in Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya: a universal spirit and a sense of superiority. Following the universal spirit, all mankind and all religions should be recognized with great compassion and love. This motivates the *ṭarīqa* to accept people from different confessional backgrounds, various ethnic origins, and diverse sexual orientations, etc. On the other hand, this spirit of compassion and universal love is associated with an anti-modern attitude and a sense of superiority. For example, *Shaykh* Nazim was not only the unquestionable *quṭb*, but his Naqshbandiyya is considered by many *fuqarāʾ* to be ‘the only Sufi *ṭarīqa* still working’, an attitude which promotes the notion of exclusiveness.[[6]](#endnote-6)

These complex and ambiguous aspects are further reflected in the *ṭarīqa*’s pilgrimage practices, which are numerous and associated with contrasting meanings. Like *Shaykh* Hamza (Būdshīshiyya), *Shaykh* Nazim was considered a living saint by his followers and attracted people from all over the world. Among them were also Muslims who were not *fuqarāʾ*, but who nevertheless searched for miraculous cures for various illnesses. Visits to *Shaykh* Nazim’s *zāwiya* in Lefke, Cyprus, with departures from *zawāyā* around Europe, are organized two to three times per year, including from Milan and Paris. The pilgrims’ main aims are to meet, speak with, or simply to look into the eyes of *Shaykh* Nazim. When I went to Lefke in April 2013, *Shaykh* Nazim was already very old and ill and he did not have enough energy to meet with all his *fuqarāʾ*. Therefore, the main opportunity to meet him was when he left his apartment and got into the car for a ride in the afternoon. Some disciples waited outside his house, singing and trying to establish eye-contact with him when the car slowly passed near them. Others were so eager to see the *Shaykh* that they followed his car in a cab in an attempt to look at him through his rear-view mirror.

For local taxi drivers, pilgrimage has therefore become a welcome business. The so-called ‘*fuqarāʾ* taxi drivers’ also offer to take foreign disciples to the various pilgrimage sites in Lefke. Near Lefke there are seven pilgrimage sites that are recommended by old Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya *fuqarāʾ* to visit: 1) *Hala Sultan Tekke* or *Mosque of Umm Haram,* the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad’s wet nurse; 2) *Mustafa Ahi*’s tomb, which is considered to have a particular miraculous effect for fertility; 3) *Canbulat*’s tomb, the Ottoman Empire’s commander during the conquest of Famagusta in 1571 against the Venetian Republic; 4) *Kutup Osman*’s tomb, the founder of Khalveti Fazlullah Effendi’s order; 5) *Saint Barnabas*’ tomb, a Christian Saint; 6) *Omer Turbesi,* seven tombs of fighters/martyrs who died during the Cyprus-Arab conquest in 647 A.D.; 7) *Hajja Amina Nazim*’s tomb, Shaykh Nazim’s wife. There are possibly other pilgrimage destinations too. A ‘*faqīr* taxi driver’ told me that there is a little church where Shaykh Nazim loved to pray, but further research is necessary in order to map the possible pilgrimage practices connected with this site. Shaykh Nazim is well-known to have taken an interest in Christian sacred places. At the beginning of 2013, he asked his Italian *fuqarāʾ* to pay a visit to Saint Francis’ tomb in Assisi and in April that year about thirty Italian *fuqarāʾ* went to Assisi together with *Shaykh* Hassan (Naqshbandi’s *khalīfa* for Germany and Italy).

As described earlier, the pilgrimages of this *ṭarīqa* combine inclusive and exclusive aspects, but these are sometimes at odds. Following the universal spirit, differences between religions are minimised in the name of one God − expressed, for example, at the Saint Barnabas’ and Saint Francis’ pilgrimages, as well as the prayers in the little Church in Cyprus. On the other hand, there is the cultural Ottoman-Islamic pride − expressed, for example, in visits paid to the martyrs’ tombs. To make Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya pilgrimage even more complex, this double aspect is also reflected even in the Saint Barnabas’ pilgrimage. For many *fuqarāʾ,* worship at Saint Barnabas’ tomb expresses their acknowledgment of a Christian saint. However, it should be remembered that according to the Saint Barnabas’ gospel, written in the sixteenth century, Jesus Christ is described as a prophet and not as the son of God (see Cirillio and Fremaux 1977). According to some pilgrims,the gospel provided the Catholic Church with the opportunity to also accept the Muslim view on Jesus’ prophecy. The fact that this opportunity was not seized by the Church, some *fuqarāʾ* see as the proof of Christian treason, and they resent paying homage at Saint Barnabas’ tomb. I personally experienced this double perspective when visiting Saint Barnabas’ tomb in 2013. A Belgian *faqīr* discouraged me from visiting Saint Barnabas’ Church because, in his words: ‘Christians are infidels!’ and ‘It is better not to speak with them!’ Such views are not, however, held by all members of the *ṭarīqa*. The day after, other *fuqarāʾ* joined the Parisian local leader in paying a visit to Saint Barnabas’ tomb. And not only did they visit the Church, but were also invited by the bishop to have lunch together with the local Christian community.

*Ṭarīqa Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya*

Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya is based in Istanbul and developed in Western societies thanks to Muzaffer Ozak (1916–1985). Nowadays, there are several *zawāyā* in the United States, South America and Europe. Gabriele Mandel (1924–2010), a multi-faceted intellectual and artist, founded the Italian branch of the *ṭarīqa*. His charisma charmed many people, some of whom became Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya *fuqarāʾ*, while others can be described as ‘fellow travellers’, i.e. non-Muslims who participated in cultural events and sometimes religious practices together with the *fuqarāʾ*. By adopting the notion of ‘fellow travellers’ Mandel was able to distinguish between those, who wanted to follow the traditional Sufi *ṭarīqa,* and those who were interested in Sufism but were not looking for a complete engagement in a Sufi-Islamic life-style.

Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya is one of the first international Italian-based *ṭuruq*. Its members have different national backgrounds, such as Egyptian, Turkish, Tunisian, Azerbaijani, in addition to Italian. Mandel has been a key figure within the Italian and international field of Islamic studies, and has translated the Qur’an and many of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s poems into Italian. Despite his liberal position (he left his disciples considerable freedom in interpreting Islamic norms), and his heterodoxies (he believed in reincarnation), he had good relations with the Muslim community of Milan.

After Mandel’s death, the Italian Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya lost its charismatic leader and underwent a profound crisis. Currently, the *khalīfa* is Mohsen Mouelhi, who is trying to re-establish the Italian *zāwiya* and build new relations between disciples in Italy and the mother *zāwiya* in Istanbul. Followers make approximately three visits to Istanbul per year. The distinction between *fuqarāʾ* and ‘fellow travellers’, established by Mandel, allows the participation of non-*fuqarāʾ* and non-Muslims in these visits in Istanbul. Accordingly, although not being a Muslim, I could participate in a visit to the Istanbul *zāwiya* in April 2014 together with a *faqīra* (the feminine of *faqīr*) from another *ṭarīqa* and a Christian woman. Istanbul’s *zāwiya* is open only on Mondays and Thursdays when the *meshk* (traditional sacred Ottoman music and the *dhikr* are performed. This leaves a lot of free time for the foreign visitors and our week was quite busy. Together with other pilgrims we visited the most important mosques and monuments in Istanbul, and there was time for shopping in the Grand Bazar and in the neighbourhood of Galata Tower. My participation in both the emotionally charged two spiritual nights, involving long discussions with the old *fuqarāʾ,* and the leisure time spent in Istanbul, allowed me to see how the boundaries between tourism and pilgrimage can be blurred during visits to *zāwiya* (Turner and Turner 1978; Cohen 1979;Coleman and Eade 2004; Reader 2013).

The religious commitment expressed by the ‘fellow travellers’ (Muslims as well as non-Muslims), who frequent the *ṭuruq* without being completely committed to it, can be compared with Hervieu-Léger’s ideal type of the pilgrim as someone who seeks emotional experiences but is less interested in dogmatic teachings and regular religious practices (Hervieu-Léger 1999). We can observe the ‘postmodern pilgrim’, who lives Sufism as a spiritual search and the ecstatic practice of *dhikr*, disconnected from a specific vision of the world*.* In other words, for these disciples practising *dhikr* or going on a pilgrimage are spiritual experiences in themselves, which do not require either a complete commitment or a communitarian view of life. Hence, pilgrimage can be a spiritual experience that focuses on a disciple’s inner meanings and is decoupled from all the legalistic and mandatory dimensions of religion; this approach may even sometimes be opposed to mainstream ways of religious living. Therefore, Muslim pilgrimage can include various kinds of religious experiences, as well as be combined with elements from pilgrimage sites and practices that are not necessarily Islamic. The result is a spiritual *bricolage* which is highly personal although, at least to some extent, organized.

*Spontaneous pilgrimages*

In contrast to the organized pilgrimages described above, Muslim pilgrimage in contemporary Western Europe may also arise from a *faqīr*’s individual initiative. In all the three cases I present below, these acts of pilgrimage by Muslims in Europe have been performed at Christian sites. Particularly interesting is the first case, where a Belgian-Moroccan ʿAlāwi *faqīr* undertook the pilgrimage of Santiago de Compostela in order to improve his knowledge of the Christian religion and Christian believers. The *faqīr*’s visit to a well-established Christian pilgrimage site may come as a surprise, particularly since Saint James (Santiago) is also called the ‘Moor-slayer’, an epithet which could be assumed to be provocative, considering the pilgrim’s partly Moroccan origin. However, the *faqīr* explained to me that he considered the persecution of Muslims on behalf of the Spanish Kingdom and the Christian inquisition to be something of the past. In response to my astonishment, he smiled and said ‘Don’t you know? There is only one God.’ The comment suggests that his visit to the Christian pilgrimage site built on appropriating the Islamic understanding of there being only one God into a notion of an encompassing God.

The second case concerns an Italian-Moroccan Būdshīshi who, after a spiritual dream, paid a visit to the tomb of Saint Emiliano, a local saint in northern Italy. In this case, the visit was motivated by a personal dream, but it was supported by and rationalised through reference to Islamic sources. The *faqīr* told me that there is a *ḥadīth* which encourages respect and prayer for local saints. Similarly, in the third case, a Būdshīshi *faqīra* in Milan dreamt about a saint called Anthony. She inquired among her Italian friends whether there was a saint called Anthony, and this was confirmed. The following week she paid a visit to Saint Anthony’s basilica in Padua, which is one of the most important sacred places for Catholics in Italy.

These cases suggest that Christian pilgrimage sites can be perceived as powerful spiritual sites also for Muslims living in Europe. In conversations with the three pilgrims introduced here, they told me that in undertaking pilgrimage to Christian sites, they were by two sources in particular: the universal love and openness taught by their Sufi Masters, and a direct, mystical experience, which calls for interfaith pilgrimage. It is important to note that these *fuqarāʾ* are deeply engaged in Sufi-Islamic spiritual life. Their interfaith attitude cannot be explained as a form of syncretism or a New Age vision of Islam. Those who undertook the spontaneous pilgrimages, as described above, framed themselves within well-established Islamic dogma and were convinced they were on the right path towards God. Situated within this world-view, they believe that the oneness of God could be expressed in different ways.

**The different ways of European Sufi pilgrimages**

The *ṭuruq* here presented stand in contrast to the ethnic and social homogeneity displayed in the Sufi orders studied by Geaves (2009) and Werbner (2003). Instead, the *ṭuruq* I have presented are rather heterogeneous, both from ethnic, social and cultural perspectives, and have been influenced by different sources, especially migrant Islam, European esotericism, New Age culture and intellectual research. Such heterogeneity is reflected in their pilgrimage practices, which take on multiple meanings for the individual participant, rather than being a public celebration of collective identity (Werbner 2002) or a sacralization of territory (Werbner 2003).

*Pilgrimage as a communicative tool: Interfaith and intra-faith dialogues*

From a conventional Sufi perspective, pilgrimage is a form of *dhikr,* a method for remembering God. Moreover, Sufi pilgrimage, in its present European understanding, can also be considered a tool which enhances the communication between different religions and among Muslims. As such, pilgrimages function as interfaith and intra-faith dialogue practices. For example, the ʿAlāwiyya’s peace parades in Cannes and Assisi are co-organized with Christian, Buddhist, and Jewish movements. Similarly, Naqshbandi’s pilgrimages to Christian sacred places suggest adherence to the belief in the Islamic-Sufi universal spirit, which overrides cultural and religious boundaries. The Būdshīshi conference ‘Rencontre Mondiale du Soufisme’, which takes place during the *Mawlid*, is not only a religious celebration but also an activity of intra-faith dialogue, connecting Sufi followers and sympathizers from all over Maghreb as well as from Europe.

*On the road to the living Saint*

Visits or pilgrimages to the *shaykh* are particularly important for Sufi followers. An important characteristic of both Būdshīshiyya and Naqshbandiyya is the charisma embodied in the figure of the *shaykh*. The Sufi Master is considered a living saint, with remarkable powers and knowledge. In fact, for some *fuqarāʾ* the *shaykh* is the bearer of existence itself. To be near the *shaykh*, to exchange even just a glance with him, is for many *fuqarāʾ* extremely important. The experience often produces strong emotional expressions in the *fuqarāʾ*, such as crying out in the expression of joy. Thus, the spiritual transmission from Master to follower is not limited to the use of language, but is seen as conveyed from ‘heart to heart’ or ‘through the eyes’. The ʿAlāwiyya’s case is, however, different from the two mentioned above. *Shaykh* Bentounes discourages devotional attitudes towards him. He neither wants to be called *quṭb* or have his hand kissed by disciples, and in general he does not appreciate ceremonious attitudes. He refuses to embody the traditional Sufi charisma and instead encourages his disciples to find the ‘inner *shaykh*’ who lives in their hearts. Nevertheless, he still embodies a strong charisma which charms many people, whether followers or not.

*Communitas, pilgrimage and mysticism*

My discussion of the Sufi groups established in Europe in the twentieth century shows that pilgrimage often engenders a turning point in a Sufi’s life. In fact, it is the moment in which the relationship between the *shaykh* and his follower is established, when the spiritual bond is either verified or vivified. Pilgrimage is also a way to put into practice the teachings received in European *zawāyā*. During pious visits to sites outside Europe, European *fuqarāʾ* mix with the local followers of the *ṭarīqa* and the intellectual dimension of European Sufism, which is usually very important, is set aside on these occasions in order to participate in and fully enjoy the *zāwiya*’s life. Many live and work together to support the *ṭarīqa* and, above all, practise *dhikr* together. The Sufis join in a spiritual and social community, forgetting the social structures by which they are usually constrained.Thus, during pilgrimages, the *fuqarāʾ* experience the communal life of the *zāwiya* and the feeling of brotherhood, which is a fundamental pillar of Sufism all around the world. For many European Sufis, pilgrimage is thus characterised by *communitas*, understood as anti-structural dynamics, challenging established social meanings and relations among *fuqarāʾ*. At the same time, the experience suggests that *communitas* functions as a structuring force, creating a sense of common identity among the pilgrims, at least temporarily.

It should be observed, however, that pilgrimage is not only associated with the structural and anti-structural forces of *communitas*. Pilgrimage can also constitute a turning point in the life of Sufis that initiates a process of detachment from Sufism. Through pilgrimage to various sites, some European Sufis find the kind of Sufism practised in Europe through seminars and concerts to be very different from more conventional ways of Sufism. When confronted with such diversity, especially when the issue of values are at stake, some European Sufis chose to abandon Sufism. For example, a Milanese Naqshbandi *faqīra* confided in me that it was difficult for her to accept the gender separation and the hierarchies of the group encountered during her pilgrimage in Cyprus. After her visit, she felt betrayed by the Italian *khalīfa* who, according to her, had ‘artificially sweetened’ Sufism in order to attract more disciples. In this case, the pilgrimage did not offer the experience of *communitas*, butexactly its opposite. As such, the idea of *communitas* can be challenged through the pilgrimage experience*.*

*Communitas* has been understood as the result of collective rituals, for example pilgrimage. But it has also been perceived of as a creative and anti-structural force generally inscribed in religion more broadly. According to Turner, ‘*communitas* is not structure with its signs reversed, minuses instead of pluses, but rather the *fons et origo* of all structures and, at the same time, their critique’ (Turner 1974, 202). As such, the effect of anti-structure, as stressed by Turner, can be compared with De Certeau’s description of mysticism as a revolutionary force (De Certeau 1982) and Halbwachs’ understanding of mysticism as a revivifying energy (Halbwachs 1997). While it has been suggested that we can retrace a creative force in the history of Sufism, which revitalises religion through charismatic Masters (Popovic and Veinstein 1996; Geoffroy 2009b), the ethnographic material I have discussed in this chapter suggests instead that the connection between mysticism and *communitas* is expressed through the spontaneous pilgrimages performed by individual *fuqarāʾ*. Deeply religious and observant, they have performed a pilgrimage in a country in which they were foreigners and worshiped saints, who were not of their own religion, while framing the pilgrimage within the world view of their own religion.

As we have seen, the *fuqarāʾ* were motivated by an ecumenical will to seek knowledge and by the sacred dreams they experienced. In these cases, their experience of *communitas* was not the result of participation in pilgrimage ritual, but was motivated by a pre-ritual inner religious experience – a mystical experience – that called for the performance of pilgrimage. Yet, I do not think it is useful to deal with mysticism, *communitas* and ritual in terms of cause and effect. Instead I concur with Bouyer (1980) and Bonaccorso (2005), who argue that mysticism and ritual are closely connected. Indeed *mysterion* – the etymology of mysticism – has been translated in Latin as *sacramentum*, that is, the ritual itself. In the present case, I suggest, mysticism runs through the religious and ritual experience, while *communitas* is not simply experienced in the liminal phase of ritual, as Turner has suggested, but also in the pre-and post-liminal phases.

**Conclusion**

Sufis are often called, in a pejorative sense, ‘tomb worshippers’. However, among the new Sufi groups located in Western Europe, the role of Sufi tombs does not appear to be very relevant in their daily religious life. Among the majority of *fuqarāʾ* I have interviewed, they seem to discover the importance of these tombs as sources of *baraka* and *karāmāt* only when they are on pilgrimage visiting the *Shaykh*. However, it is fair to say that the *Shaykh* occupies the most central focus in such pious visits, and visits to tombs are of a secondary significance. Through an ethnographic analysis of ʿAlāwiyya, Būdshīshiyya, Naqshbandiyya Hāqqaniyya and Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya, in the Western European context, I have argued that Sufi pilgrimages have multiple meanings and values. They are instruments of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue; they can be performed and experienced as fundamental turning-points in a pilgrim’s religious life, as well as a religious-touristic experience. Finally, through the example of spontaneous pilgrimages, I have argued that *communitas* may not simply be a result of pilgrimage, but can be understood as an anti-structural and creative force inscribed within religion more generally, and in particular within mystic movements like Sufism.

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2. It should be noted that Sufism is experiencing a new phase of expansion even in many majority Muslim countries such as Morocco (see Dominguez 2014), Indonesia (see Howell 2007), and Algeria (see Werenfels 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. René Guénon was a French intellectual and esotericist (1881-1951). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *Shaykh* Mehmet’s leadership is accepted in all of Europe and Turkey; on the other hand, in the United Kingdom and the United States the position is not clear and many disciples have recognized *Shaykh* Hisham as the new *Shaykh*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The *ḥaḍra* is a Sufi ritual, an ecstatic dance. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ethnographic fieldwork notes. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)