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The Struggle for Purity

Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufism in Eastern London

Abstract

The Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi order has spread throughout the world extensively since it was founded in 1973 by its Sheikh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani. The present thesis analyses one local branch of that order in Eastern London within a theoretical framework of New Social Movements, as formulated by the Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci. A general picture of Muslim presence in Britain is given, against which specific topics and activities of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani participants are described. Focus lies on social relations and expressions within the group, and these relations' ability to create collective identity and collective action in the form of Sufi practices. Traditional practices within a new social environment are also discussed. Criticism is formulated both towards social theorists who ignore the study of religious movements, and those engaging in social studies of Islamic activism without regarding Sufism a potential subject matter. Moreover, it is suggested that there is a need for redefining concepts of efficiency and success from an instrumental to a more inclusive approach, involving the process of framing collective identity. Likewise, social studies of contemporary Sufism need to be conscious of the risks of categorising stable entities like Islam and Sufism, and instead focus patterns of action, identity-shaping and legitimisation.

Keywords: Sufism, Naqshbandi-Haqqani, London, New Social Movements, Melucci

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In late November of 2004, I was to my great surprise given the Muslim name Mahmoud Nazim in an East London mosque. I was surrounded by a group of participants of a just-finished Sufi ritual, and was expected to repeat the words of their sheikh, who welcomed me as a new brother in the community and gave me my new name. Odd as it may sound, the ceremony of conversion during which this name was given to me was, for my own part, unintended. I was there to carry out fieldwork for the present thesis, when my very first visit to the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi centre led to this. The evening started equally surprising when I in the very same building, instead of walking into an expected *dhikr* ceremony,¹ found myself watching a martial arts training for children. These events will be described in further detail below, and my understanding of them explained.

1.2 A short presentation of the pilot study

In my Bachelor's thesis *Transnational CyberSufism – a study of online Sufi communication* (completed in January 2005), I presented and analysed three websites and three mailing lists, which were run and participated in by members of, or people sympathetic towards, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani *tariqa*.² They were all based in England. Following the thoughts of, among others, the American anthropologist Dale F. Eickelman regarding how new media affects Muslim individuals and communities and the emergence of a Muslim public sphere on the Internet, these representations of online Sufism were discussed. The existence of an online Sufi discursive order was shown, building for example on specific usage of terminology, accepted and rejected ways of relating topics and presenting information, refutation of what was called 'the Salafi sect' and its' leading scholars.

¹ *Dhikr*: remembrance of god, in a Sufi context referring to various types of meditation rituals.

Barbara Metcalf (1996) discusses her position on transliteration of Arabic or Islamic words in English texts, with regard to the essays in the publication she has edited. She is in favour of the inclusion of Arabic and Islamic terms into common English written and spoken vocabulary, and refers to the late Isma'il Raji al Faruqi's book *Toward Islamic English* (1986). In line with this, she chooses to only italicise Arabic words the first time they appear in the text, hereby somewhat demystifying their presence. In the present work, the same position is taken and Arabic words are only italicised once. Furthermore, no correction of possibly 'wrongly spelt' words will be done. The way words are used by informants is accepted without further discussion.

² *Tariqa*: lit. 'way', 'path', referring to a Sufi order or tradition.

The possible existence of and meaning of ‘online rituals’ was dealt with, leading to the conclusion that rituals are shared through the Internet via downloading of audio and video files as well as instructions on how to perform a certain kind of dhikr or prayer. Questions were posed as to what extent this represents something ‘new’ regarding ritual experiences. In sum, it was concluded that online rituals must have some meaning and fill some function; otherwise they wouldn’t be available and used. Through the mailing lists analysed, it was clear that people actually use the online ritual material, learn from it and discuss it. The comparison between actual physical ritual experience and online ritual experience might be wrongly formulated; instead of asking to what extent online rituals can resemble and fill the same function as physical or ‘real’ rituals, perhaps the question should be what new possibilities and kinds of experiences it actually provides, i.e. what is there to *gain* from sharing and participating in online rituals.

The thesis ended with a number of questions for further study of Sufism in Western Europe, stressing the importance of extensive fieldwork in local contexts. This is not least due to the great diversity regarding practices, theology, and organisation of contemporary Sufis. Among the aims suggested for future research, was to examine how common members of a Sufi community, i.e. not the leading sheikhs or imams, perceive and think about the importance and meaning of being Sufi in Western Europe; both in relation to other Muslims and the surrounding society. A follow up question is whether and in what cases it is more appropriate to speak of organised Sufi communities, or of loose networks of Sufi-interested individuals.

1.3 Aims of this study

This work has sprung out of the conclusions of my Bachelor’s thesis, in which online Sufi communication connected to the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa was analysed. The aim of the present work was in a basic manner formulated there. The long-term aim was formulated as: ‘to reach an understanding of how Sufi networks in the UK are shaped and what function they fill’.³ This formulation is very wide and general, which is why it now needs to be further explained, limited and specified. First of all, the present work is solely dealing with a specific branch of Sufism which claims its adherence to the centuries-long tradition of the Naqshbandi

³ Stjernholm 2005:57.

order of Sufism.⁴ The specific branch studied is the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, founded by and centred around its' Grand Sheikh, Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani.

Second, the fieldwork which has been carried out and on which most of the material presented here is based, was only carried out in *one* of this branches' centres in London. In London, there are three centres connected to the tariqa, plus, in addition to these, several dhikr circles taking place in peoples' homes.⁵ During my fieldwork, I visited one of the other centres, situated in the Peckham area of London, but not during their dhikr since the time of the ritual collided with the dhikr of 'my' group.

These two factors indicate that the aim of the present work must be re-formulated to suit the practical circumstances surrounding it. Here the aim therefore is *to reach an understanding of how a specific transnational Sufi community in the local British context functions, for individuals and as a community*. This is the broad aim, which needs to be outlined in further detail by sub-questions:

- * Around what topics, activities and kinds of relations is the Sufi community organised?
- * How do the participant individuals perceive of their situation, and of Islam?
- * What is the relation between the tariqa's global presence and the local environment?
- * In what way do relations to other Muslim groups affect the tariqa's self-image?

In order to grasp some important aspects regarding the answers to these questions, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa will be analysed within a sociological theoretical framework of social movements. This has implications for the way the researcher perceives of his material. Implied as a presupposition for the thesis, lay the understanding of religion not as a static system of beliefs and practices, nor as a metaphysical objective 'Truth', but rather as a social and ever-changing interaction, always situated in time and place. Religion is nothing without religious people performing and formulating it.⁶

⁴ For information on the Naqshbandi order, see Gaborieau, Marc, Popovic, Alexandre & Zarcone, Thierry (eds.) 1990.

⁵ According to information gathered on *The Heart* mailing list 2003-2004. On the mailing list, invitations to and announcements of newly started dhikr circles were posted. In conversations with my informants, private dhikr meetings in peoples' homes were mentioned as well.

⁶ Compare Stenberg 2004:93f.

1.4 Previous research on the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa

The Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa has been the attention of scholars' interest prior to this study. The University of Birmingham, for example, launched a research project in 1998, spanning until 2001.⁷ In the US, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani has gained much attention of various kinds. It has been subject to academic research, of which a few examples will be reported below. I feel it is crucial here to shortly relate what kinds of studies that have been performed, and what the main results have indicated.

Annabelle Böttcher delivered a speech in 2000 at Harvard called 'The Naqshbandiyya in the United States'.⁸ In this speech, she gives a short description of the American branch of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, whose growing influence and access to the 'religious market' Böttcher explains with three features of the movement: the charisma of the sheikh, the order's structure which easily incorporates various ethnicities, and the sheikh's message. Böttcher relies heavily on the official website of the order, as well as some of their own published literature. Furthermore, she shortly describes the different 'branches' of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani's organisation on the US; among them are the Kamilat, which is said to be a women's organisation, specifically addressing women's topics such as for example marriage, domestic violence, children. This branch of the organisation is also said to be headed by Sheikh Nazim's wife, Hajjah Amina (who, as will be further mentioned below, passed away during my time of fieldwork in London).

At Howard University, Zulkarnain Ahmad Hatta presented a Ph. D. dissertation in 2003 named *Relationship between religious practices and adaptation of immigrant Sufi Muslims in the United States*, which by statistical means set out to analyse a selected group (from a database) of immigrant Naqshbandi Muslims and their amount of religious practice compared to their assimilation to the American society.⁹ Hatta suggests, among other things, in his conclusion three areas for future research on the Naqshbandi order:

1. the influence of the shaykh in the life of the Naqshbandi Muslims in providing the guidance for life in the United States, including the adaptations process,
2. the influence of the shaykh on the level of religious practice, and

⁷ <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/mdraper/transnatsufi> (2005-03-31).

⁸ This speech has been translated from French, since it was first delivered at Sorbonne University in Paris in March 2000. Kabbani 2004:519-529. In her speech, Böttcher also mentions an unpublished Ph. D. thesis which compares the workings of the order in Lebanon and the UK, written in 1985 at University of London by Daphne Habibis. Unfortunately, Habibis' unpublished thesis has not been accessible to me.

The speech has also been available at www.naqshbandi.net/haqqani/features/naqshbandiyya_in_us.htm, from where I've copied it. The site, however, is no longer accessible without login information. (2005-11-11)

⁹ Kabbani 2004:539-550.

3. explore the religiosity/spirituality aspects of the Naqshbandi Muslims.¹⁰

I am doubtful regarding to what extent statistical analysis of a rather small number of surveys can provide any substantial knowledge on a religious movement like the Naqshbandi-Haqqani. I do, however, appreciate Hatta's suggestions for future studies of the Naqshbandi order, since topics like these was what first caught my interest in performing a qualitative study of the order in the UK. The present work, as explained above, has however taken other questions as point of departure.

Another Ph. D. dissertation on the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa is Andrew Vidich's *A Living Sufi Saint: Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani and the Naqshbandiyya Method of Self-Transformation* (2000).¹¹ The material for Vidich's work was gathered through repeated meetings and interviews with Sheikh Hisham Kabbani, as well as a stay at Sheikh Nazim's personal derga in Lefke, Cyprus, which is visited by many murids from practically the entire world. Vidich emphasises, or so it seems in the quotes cited by Kabbani, the spiritual experience of meeting the sheikhs, and the effect this had on him on the related occasions. In great detail, he recounts his experiences from these meetings and draws conclusions regarding the central features of the tariqa from the direct words and actions of the sheikhs. Notable such features are for example the metaphor of the tariqa as a mental hospital, and the murids as interns in that hospital. Therefore, Sheikh Kabbani says, you cannot expect the murids to explain the Naqshbandi way in a correct manner; you have to approach the sheikhs to get the truth, since the common murid is 'sick'.¹² Vidich also brings forth the *adab*, proper conduct or etiquette, of the murid as an important point, both regarding the murid's relation to the sheikh and to other worldly matters. Moreover, the practices of visualising the sheikh and focusing on his physical appearance, and the connecting of one's heart to that of the sheikh, are explained by Vidich through his own attempts to perform these tasks of a murid.

One of the articles resulting from the Birmingham research project is the British researcher Ian (formerly Mustafa) Draper's contribution to David Westerlund's (ed.) anthology *Sufism in Europe and North America* (2004), in which Draper describes how advocates of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani adapt their message, terminology and practices to fit

¹⁰ Hatta 2003, quoted in Kabbani 2004:550.

¹¹ This dissertation, presented at the University of Berne, Switzerland, receives significant attention in the mentioned book by Sheikh Hisham Kabbani, since he quotes chosen sections at extensive length, Kabbani 2004:551-653.

¹² Kabbani 2004:589, 593.

the active spiritual environment at an old Celtic place of worship in Glastonbury, England.¹³ Draper quotes utterances from Sheikh Nazim on the occasion of his visit to Glastonbury in February 1999, stressing interfaith views through promoting general spirituality rather than specifically Islamic practices, prayers and rituals. Sheikh Nazim said on this occasion, quoted in Drapers article:

Don't say I am Christian, I am Protestant, I am Catholic, I am Muslim, I am Buddhist. No, it is not important. Are you asking eternity or not?¹⁴

In this passage, Sheikh Nazim evidently wishes to show an acceptance of all major religions, hereby reaching out to the great Christian presence in Glastonbury. The ability and willingness to adapt to a given situation is stressed by Draper. As Draper also notes, the 'issue of being Muslim was not part of the discourse.'¹⁵ As we shall see below, this official statement by Sheikh Nazim, clearly related to the environment in which it was said, was a deviance from utterances in other situations; both by the sheikh and his *murids*. In its attempt to attract spiritual followers in the local context, this inter-religious openness has persisted in the tariqa's activities in Glastonbury; among other things, dhikr rituals are not announced as 'Muslim dhikr' but as the somewhat more vague 'Sufi meditation', hereby showing the tariqa's will to adapt to its environment.¹⁶

In the same volume, the Danish islamologist Garbi Schmidt discusses the Naqshbandi-Haqqani's extensive presence on the Internet.¹⁷ By analysing the main website of the transnational tariqa, Schmidt comments the transmission of Sufi charisma through the Internet and concludes that this 'traditional' transmission actually works in the virtual world. She also lifts to the foreground that, as much as the website focuses on the proposed divinely given authority of sheikhs, it engages extensively in rejection of other Muslim leaders and communities, most notably the 'Wahhabi sect'.¹⁸

In an essay discussing the role of 'networks' for Muslim organisations and informal structures in Europe, Jørgen S. Nielsen, who initiated the above-mentioned project at Birmingham university, specifically focuses on the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis, although he calls

¹³ Draper 2004:144-156.

¹⁴ Draper 2004:148.

¹⁵ Draper 2004:148.

¹⁶ Draper 2004:150.

¹⁷ Schmidt 2004:109-126.

¹⁸ Schmidt 2004:126. The same phenomenon and development of Sufi presence on the Internet, specifically focusing the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa, but with the aim to look at the more interactive and participant side of Internet material, has been analysed by the author of the present thesis in Stjernholm 2005.

the group ‘Nazimis’, thus emphasising the great importance of the sheikh’s own person. Nielsen describes the informal way in which followers of Sheikh Nazim interact, not least via the Internet. He also points out the relatively large amount of self-rule that the various centres enjoy throughout the world, thus making way for differences as to how rituals are conducted, local environments handled and related to and differing interpretations of the sheikh’s messages. Sheikh Nazim’s repeated eschatological warnings in relation to the year 2000 (see the section on David Damrel’s article below) are also mentioned, one of which led to the ‘invasion’ of ‘young Europeans and Americans, dressed in the exotic garb and coloured turbans of the disciples’ into a small village in the Lebanese mountains.¹⁹ The habit of supporting political *status quo* in various national environments is also made reference to, illustrated through statements made by Sheikh Nazim regarding the personal affairs of Prince Charles and Princess Diana and response to her death, close relationship to members of the royal family of Brunei, as well as strategic alliances with government officials in Dagestan and Uzbekistan. The continuous warnings of Sheikh Hisham Kabbani, Sheikh Nazim’s deputy in the US, of the threat of fundamentalists and ‘extremists’, most famously in a speech delivered at the US State Department in 1999, is also featured in Nielsen’s presentation of the tariqa. Nielsen’s conclusion at the end of the essay, when asking if it is applicable to call the tariqa a network, leaves some precision to wish for:

While there is a degree of common discourse, and events in one place have an effect in most of the rest of the network, and while large parts of the *tariqa* share in common communications, at every point when one attempts to state that here is something shared which justifies the appellation of ‘network’ one has to accept that there are exceptions. (...) The *tariqa* is the sheikh and the sheikh is the *tariqa*. (...) When he is not physically present there is an awareness of him and of his potential physical presence.²⁰

The difficulty in making generalisations about the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, and the centrality of Sheikh Nazim, is thus noted by Nielsen. Nielsen further stresses the need to include consideration of charismatic leadership when viewing the tariqa. His essay and discussion of the alleged loose network form of the tariqa shows, most of all, the difficulties of providing an overall coherent picture of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani and still being attentive to all the features existing within the movement.

¹⁹ Nielsen 2003:48.

²⁰ Nielsen 2003:50.

In the fourth edition of the *ISIM Newsletter* in 1999, David Damrel gives an account of one specific peculiarity of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani's teachings, namely its' repeated warnings that these are the 'last days' and apocalyptic predictions for the year 2000 (i.e. following the Gregorian, not the Hijri calendar).²¹ He also contributes with one of few short summaries of the tariqa's rise from traditional Naqshbandi presence in its' long-lasting environments, to the Haqqani version's rapid spread all over the world, especially North America and Western Europe. Damrel points out several reasons for the tariqa's success; the apocalyptic agenda; the sheikhs' ability to incorporate unexpected societal events in the contemporary world into a complex explanatory framework of traditional mysticism; references to historical Muslim characters and scholars; Sheikh Nazim's and Sheikh Hisham Kabbani's mystical interpretation of their environment, explained in a language that can be easily understood and related to by audiences in Western Europe and North America. All of this makes the Naqshbandi-Haqqani successful when it comes to tying followers to their movement. Damrel further suggests that while the urging message of 'last days' and 'Armageddon' might draw attention and new followers to the order, these new adherents to the sheikhs apparently also find satisfying reasons to remain within the order after their first contact.

1.5 The tariqa's attitude to and use of academic research

Traditionally, many Sufi orders have been known to be of a 'secret' and exclusive character, not willing to share their teachings and rituals publicly. Initiation and access to the specific knowledge of the sheikhs have been difficult to come by, and visitors or researchers have many times met challenges in gaining extensive information on the inner secrets of Sufism. As a contrast to this, however, and as is stated in the Research Briefing following the Birmingham project on the Naqshbandi-Haqqani transnational tariqa,

the very concept of membership is nebulous, and declaration of adherence (*bay'a*) at a meeting led by Shaykh Nazim is easy, as distinct from most other Sufi groups which require an often lengthy initiation process.²²

²¹ Damrel 1999:1, 6.

²² <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/mdraper/transnatsufi> (2005-03-31).

As much as my own observations support this notion, it is also obvious that the tariqa has no objections to being the centre of attention for academic evaluations. Instead, the various research projects which have focused the Naqshbandi-Haqqani are lifted to the foreground when the tariqa presents itself. To illustrate this, it could be mentioned that in Sheikh Hisham Kabbani's extensive work *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition* (2004), he dedicates no less than 136 pages to quoting and summarising various articles and dissertations that have studied the tariqa.²³

Moreover, academic scholars are often used by the tariqa's sheikhs in their speeches and scriptures for informative, authoritative and legitimising purposes. For example, in the above-mentioned book by Sheikh Kabbani, he quotes a number of passages from an article by my own tutor, Dr. Leif Stenberg, on Sheikh Nazim's relevance as well as the spreading of his tariqa in the Middle East and through communication technologies.²⁴ There is a twofold interpretation of this to be done: first, it gives legitimacy and authority to a statement if you can support it with an impartial and outsider academic scholar; second, outsider scholarly research can provide an organisation of transnational character such as the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa with information which is not previously known to the organisation itself. Thus, there is a kind of mutual benefit between the organisation/movement and the scholars investigating its' various aspects through research.

In one of Kabbani's other books, *The approach of Armageddon: An Islamic Perspective* (2003), the importance of relating academic scholarship, or 'science' as it often somewhat vaguely is called, is overtly present. Here it's the presumed predictions of the Qur'an and *hadith* literature concerning the last days that are to be proved by providing 'scientific' findings which support the author's interpretation of these sources.

For now, it will suffice to conclude from the above stated that the Naqshbandi-Haqqani in no way oppose academic studies of their organisation, but rather encourage them and, when convenient, make use of the results themselves.

²³ Kabbani 2004:517-653.

²⁴ Kabbani 2004:498f, 510. The title of the article is 'Naqshbandiyya in Damascus: Strategies to Establish and Strengthen the Order in a Changing Society', in Elisabeth Özdalga (ed.), *Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity*, (1997), and mainly concerns the organisation tied to the late Syrian Grand Mufti and Naqshbandi Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro (d. 2004).

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter will provide analytical tools for handling the empirical observations which will be presented below. Initially, a short introduction to theories on ‘social movements’ will be given, followed by a more specified set of analytical terms and definitions taken from one of this sociological field’s most influential scholars, the Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci. Recent efforts to characterise and describe the development of Sufism in Western Europe and North America will also be introduced. An approach depending on social movement theories has, to my knowledge, not previously been used for analysis of contemporary Sufi movements.

2.1 Social movement theories – a short introduction

When the sociological field of study was defined, social movements was one of its main themes. For a long time, however, in the works of scholars such as Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies and Robert Michels, the term was not used in plural. Rather, focus was aimed at *the* social movement, i.e. the workers movement.²⁵ When analysing the workers movement, which naturally was identified through the workers socio-economical position in society, attempts were made to single out, describe and understand the mechanisms behind the historically deterministic evolution of the workers movement. While Marx (although he did not use the term social movement) pointed towards the workers inevitable and by nature necessary revolution that would give them control of the means of production,²⁶ others, for example Michels, presented a more sceptical development regarding the success of the movement. Michels insisted on the deterministic development towards oligarchy and bureaucratisation, leading to new elites watching out for their interests instead of actual change. The workers movement would then be trapped in a wheel of historically determined repeated failures.²⁷

In later developments of social movement theories, however, the theoretically possible evolutionary scope has widened dramatically. Not only because of the acknowledgment of a vast amount of empirically observed movements, focusing on various themes and aspects challenging the dominating forces of society, but also because of the emergence of several theoretical perspectives aimed at understanding the efficiency and organisational functions of

²⁵ Melucci 1991:9.

²⁶ Thörn 1997:56-62.

²⁷ Michels 1975; Olofsson 1975.

social movements. Since the 1960s a huge number of new movements made themselves known through various collective actions, ranging over a wide scope of objectives, political stances and philosophical grounds; such as peace movements, student movements, women's movements and environmental movements. The events connected to these movements inspired whole new sets of theories on social movement, contesting one another in their attempts to explain what was happening.

The two most dominant theoretical lines of thought regarding social movements to emerge in response to this development are Resource Mobilisation Theories (RMT) and New Social Movement (NSM) theories. Central to RMT are organisations and formal institutions which successfully mobilize popular support for a common cause. These organisations' strategies for achieving their goals are also focused.²⁸ Rationality, in a liberal democratic sense, is seen as a key feature of movement organisations, and studies often include concepts like institutionalisation and professionalisation of movement members' tasks, presupposing that a movements' efficiency and success is measurable in a concrete, positivist sense, for example through survey data.²⁹ The focus on formal, tightly organised movements whose activities and results are measurable and distinctly observable is highly present. The instrumental and *rational choice*-inspired view of politics in general, and contentious protest politics advocated by SMOs in particular, which is apparent in most of the RMTs, make their usefulness questionable in our present purpose. Instead, we will turn our attention towards what sometimes is called the 'new social movement approach' or the 'identity paradigm'.³⁰

2.1.1 Some theoretical positions on New Social Movements

Steven M. Buechler, American professor of Sociology, identifies four theoretical perspectives on New Social Movements by their leading theorists, namely Manuel Castells, Alain Touraine, Jürgen Habermas and Alberto Melucci.³¹ It would not be meaningful to go into detail concerning all of these perspectives – a short glimpse will simply be given before developing one of these theorists whose thoughts are given a central place in the present work. A few of the central themes over which social movement theorists discuss will also be briefly touched upon.

²⁸ Thörn 1997:99.

²⁹ See for example Meyer & Tarrow 1998:6-9.

³⁰ Thörn 1997:101.

³¹ Buechler 1997:297. These four scholars should not be seen to represent the whole range of Social Movement Theories, but merely an introduction to what some main influential positions during the development of these theories during the 1970-1980s were.

Castells' work is derived from a neo-Marxist point of view, arguing that class relationships are fundamental in creating tensions in society, hereby providing fertile ground for social action. Class is not, however, viewed by Castells as the sole mobilizing reason for collective action, but is placed among other possible identities such as ethnicity, gender, nationality and citizenship. Opposition towards capitalist logic and the ruling political classes still remain important themes in Castells' analysis of social movements.³² Alain Touraine, a French sociologist, assumes that every societal type has one central conflict, as a continuum from the old view of the workers movement as *the* social movement.³³ This is put into a context in the post-industrial society, a term which Touraine was one of the first to introduce, with the distinction between the popular class of consumers/clients and the dominant class of managers/technocrats.³⁴ Touraine identifies himself as post-Marxist, focusing *conflicts* of interaction rather than *function*.³⁵ Out of this societal dichotomy, Touraine locates the social movements caught 'between two logics: that of a system seeking to maximize production, money, power, and that of subjects seeking to defend and expand their individuality.'³⁶ The German social theorist Jürgen Habermas sets social movements in a defensive position, defending the lifeworld of its' participative individuals against the system. A system which regulates more and more, not only of official areas like economy and politics but to a growing extent even individuals' identity and other forms of symbolic reproductions.³⁷ Habermas defines social movements as purely defensive and mostly engaged in conflicts regarding socialisation, projects of self-realisation, identity formation and other socio-cultural objects.³⁸

The Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci, who in his studies has specialised himself towards social movements more consistently than for example Habermas and Castells, is a disciple of Alain Touraine, yet he has developed his theories in a new direction with the passing of time. The one to introduce the term 'New Social Movements' (NSM)³⁹, he has become influential in developing key concepts and reformulating the questions of social movement studies. In his theoretical works, a few of which will be further referred to below, he focuses the relational and interactive aspects of NSMs, builds on 'post-modern' ideas (although Melucci is reluctant to use that term) and redefines the meaning of words like *efficiency*, stressing the 'hidden efficiency' of movements when claiming that the energies and

³² Buechler 1997:298. See for example Castells 1983.

³³ Buechler 1997:299, Thörn 1997:101ff.

³⁴ Buechler 1997:299, Thörn 1997:101,103. See for example Touraine 1988.

³⁵ Thörn 1997:102.

³⁶ Buechler 1997:299.

³⁷ Foweraker 1995:10.

³⁸ Buechler 1997:300. See for example Habermas 1984.

³⁹ Melucci 1980, 1991, Thörn 1997:95.

powers spent on building a collective identity is in fact an essential part of that collective's action; instead of merely seeing it as an outer or 'expressive' dimension.⁴⁰ Some have named the theoretical framework within which Melucci's work fits the 'identity paradigm', because of his focus on identity and interaction rather than instrumental contentious mobilisation.⁴¹

2.1.2 What's new about New Social Movements?

The concept of New Social Movements (NSMs) has been challenged since it was introduced by Melucci. Those scholars who argue *for* the existence of and use the concept NSM have been forced to continuously defend their theoretical stance. The critics have attacked various aspects of the proposed 'newness' of the NSMs. Among these are suggestions that the NSMs aren't all that new, but simply part of a cyclical history of collective action; critics argue that the movements have often sprung out of previous movements and haven't changed in their characteristics. Instead of seeing the movements as new, the critics often accuse them of being anti-modern and idealistic.⁴²

Criticism has, however, not put an end to the theory building of NSMs, but only made the theorists improve their arguments and refine their definitions of newness. Aspects that have been lifted out by various theorists as proving the newness of contemporary movements are their often post-materialistic agenda, global awareness and avoidance or rejection of institutionalised politics.⁴³ There is no consensus among scholars as to what the exact features of an NSM that need to be fulfilled are, not even among those arguing in favour for the term. One important point that's often made is that the class-base which previously constituted the foundation for social movement (i.e. the working class) no longer fills the same or even a similar function. Rather, 'part of what makes new social movements new is precisely the fact that class becomes much less important in determining the base.'⁴⁴

Alberto Melucci defends his usage of the term New Social Movements by introducing a theory on what he calls 'complex society'.⁴⁵ In complex societies, Melucci states, material production is to a growing extent replaced by production of signs, symbols and social relations.⁴⁶ Based on his view of contemporary societies, Melucci criticises the debate on NSMs 'newness' as missing the crucial point; instead of trying to determine if and how 'the

⁴⁰ Melucci 1991:85f.

⁴¹ Thörn 1997:101.

⁴² Buechler 1997:302f.

⁴³ Buechler 1997:303.

⁴⁴ Buechler 1997:308.

⁴⁵ Thörn 1997:106.

⁴⁶ Melucci 1991:59.

women's movement' or 'the environmental movement' are *de facto* new or not, one should realize that contemporary collective action is dependent on different relations and meanings than pre-complex-societal movements. These relations and meanings must be identified and differentiated; otherwise there is a risk that movements are seen as homogenous 'actors' instead of complex networks of relations, opinions, experiences and meanings.⁴⁷ Melucci mentions, among others, Erving Goffman's work as promoting and describing this relational and interactive dimension of social collective behaviour.⁴⁸

Also, Melucci warns of political reductionism regarding how movements are perceived. What he aims at is the tendency of many scholars to only observe movements as political actors, evaluating their degree of success concerning their subject matter. Scholars look at the resulting actions but fail to see the process which has led to that action.⁴⁹ The importance and meaning of collective action should not be reduced only to its' effects, since contemporary movements operate as signs, symbolically challenging the dominating cultural codes.⁵⁰

A note on the concept of New Religious Movements (NRMs) should also be made. One of the leading theorists regarding NRMs is the British sociologist James A. Beckford. He criticises sociologists arguing in favour of NSMs for disregarding or ignoring religious movements, claiming that they 'do not represent a serious challenge to the prevailing social order.'⁵¹ Comparing Habermas, Melucci and Touraine's view of religious movements in contemporary society, Beckford still finds Melucci's view 'more nuanced and better-informed', since he does not categorically place religiosity outside the sphere of collective action in an NSM perspective.⁵² There are, according to Beckford, significant reasons to include studies of religious movements into the sphere of social theory more consistently than has been done so far, instead of seeing them as backwards, regressively utopian, or as simply enhancing anti-democratic structures. Such reasons could be the claim for 'identity spaces' on behalf of religious movements, as well as connections between religious movements and theoretical ideas on 'self-reflexive identity'.⁵³

⁴⁷ Melucci 1991:56-58.

⁴⁸ See for example Goffman 1982 for a study of social interaction in everyday life.

⁴⁹ Melucci 1991:58f.

⁵⁰ Melucci 1991:87.

⁵¹ Beckford 2003:161.

⁵² Ibid:162.

⁵³ For expanded account of this, see Beckford 2003:173-192.

2.2 Alberto Melucci on New Social Movements – definitions and key concepts

2.2.1 Defining social movements

With inexhaustible zeal, Melucci points out that the term ‘social movement’ is an analytical concept, a tool for handling a certain type of collective action, and not, as often is presupposed, an empirical generalisation. A set of analytical dimensions have to be fulfilled in order to name something a social movement, thus struggling to leave behind simplifying or reductionist descriptions of ‘objective reality’. Following this notion, Melucci proposes a shift in the

attitude of the observer-analyst: that from simply mirroring empirical reality under the assumption of its ‘objective’ existence, towards a more explicit and conscious acknowledgment of the active role of our analytical tools in selecting among the mass of empirical ‘data’ and in constructing our ‘objects’ of knowledge.⁵⁴

As a researcher, one must therefore be aware of ones’ role in ‘seeing’ certain features of a collective phenomenon, based on a theoretical pre-existing understanding of what it is one is observing. Clearly stating that the concepts used are analytical instead of empirically objective thus has implications for the relation between the observer and the observed, since the conscious selection made by the observer is considered. Melucci defines three analytical dimensions which he stresses must be fulfilled for a collective to be called a social movement. The first of these three dimensions is *solidarity*, i.e. the ‘ability of actors to recognize others, and be recognized, as belonging to the same social unit.’⁵⁵ Secondly, there has to be an element of *conflict*, meaning opposition towards an opponent who makes claims to the same area or set of properties and utilities. For a conflict to arise, ‘the actors must be definable in terms of a common reference system, and there must be something at stake to which they both, implicitly or explicitly, refer.’⁵⁶ Finally, a social movement must break the limits of compatibility of the system within which the collective action takes place.⁵⁷ However, ‘any analysis that (...) introduces the notion of the “breaking of limits” must define a reference

⁵⁴ Melucci 1996:29.

⁵⁵ Melucci 1996:23.

⁵⁶ Melucci 1996:22.

⁵⁷ Melucci 1991:45, 1996:28-30.

system.’⁵⁸ In the present study, the reference system or the environment surrounding the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, providing it with its opportunities and constraints, will be presented in the contextualisation of Muslims in the British society in chapter 4.

2.2.2 Collective identity

Another central term regarding NSMs is *collective identity*, something which Melucci defines as a process in which the actors or participants produce common or shared frames of knowledge, enabling them to judge their environment according to these frames.⁵⁹ It is an interactive and shared definition, produced by many interacting individuals who are affected by the actions’ end as well as by the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action is taking place.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Melucci defines three dimensions of this interactive process; first, there must exist *cognitive definitions* concerning the ends, means and the field of action. These definitions include a given set of rituals, practices and cultural artefacts which allows mutual recognition between actors. Second, the processual view of identity demands *active relationships* between the concerned actors in a network of influences, negotiations, forms of leadership, decision-making and communicative channels. Third, *emotional investment* is central for enabling a feeling of common unity within the group.⁶¹ These characteristics, described by Melucci, will henceforth be viewed as the content of the term collective identity.

2.2.3 Charismatic leadership related to social movements

When discussing leadership, its function and objectives, Melucci directly states that ‘leadership is a form of interaction.’⁶² By this he means that leadership does not emerge and develop either from one person with specific qualities and powers (the leader), or from an anonymous mass of people who will follow anyone, anywhere. Rather, leadership must be analysed in a relational way, focusing on the mutual benefits and demands of both the leader and his/her followers. The leader and the followers – members of a movement – take part in an ongoing negotiation concerning the forms and functions of leadership, since it is not a constant, eternal relation. Leadership can be contested and therefore has to be continuously legitimated and maintained through the active support by a movement’s members.⁶³

⁵⁸ Melucci 1996:25.

⁵⁹ Melucci 1991:50.

⁶⁰ Melucci 1991:49, 1996:70. See also Melucci 1995:44f.

⁶¹ Melucci 1996:70f.

⁶² Melucci 1996:333.

⁶³ Melucci 1996:333-335.

Having said this, Melucci turns his attention towards the form of leadership which has been characterised as ‘charismatic’. The term derives from the German sociologist Max Weber, thus every use of it must in some way position itself towards the meaning Weber gave to it.⁶⁴ In Weber’s analysis *charisma* represents certain extraordinary qualities ascribed to an individual which effectively make that person extra suited to lead the masses: ‘the leader points out the ends and offers her-/himself as the one who knows the way to attain them.’⁶⁵ Melucci, however, is not contented by this simple view of the relation between leader – follower. Although he recognises the importance of the concept of charisma, he therefore offers a few points of criticism towards Weber. For example, and this point is crucial in the present context, he dismisses the fact that the ‘masses’ is annulled as an actor, which easily leads to reductionism and ‘crowd psychology’ instead of exploring the actual social relationships at hand. Instead, Melucci suggests that

charismatic leadership is a specific type of exchange in which predominates (...) affective identification with the extraordinary qualities of the leader and the enhancement of the followers’ individual and collective identity.⁶⁶

Central to Melucci’s understanding of leadership in general, including those involving a charismatic leader, are thus the relations which constitute the foundation for every collective movement and action. Without these relations, for example the affective identification with the leader and the leader’s ability to attain the formulated aims, as well as the continuous negotiation over its constitution and efficiency, there simply is no leadership for collective movement.

2.3 Islamic studies and social movement theories

The Swedish Professor of Religious Studies Catharina Raudvere, in her monograph *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility, and Zikir in Contemporary Istanbul* (2002), uses the thoughts of Alberto Melucci to grasp the specific situation of the women’s group she’s describing. Raudvere stresses Melucci’s acknowledgement of individual needs within a social movement. She also appreciates the notion that movements include ‘emotional and symbolic

⁶⁴ See for example Weber 1922/1993 for Weber’s explanation of the term *charisma* related to religious leadership.

⁶⁵ Melucci 1996:336.

⁶⁶ Melucci 1996:337.

relations, that cannot be interpreted as political in a conventional sense since they function according to a radically different logic.⁶⁷ Other facets of Melucci's theoretical stance which come to use in Raudvere's book, are the importance of the 'historical mirror (...) when confirming legitimacy in a local context', and the variability which is demanded by actors in movements to meet the various situations where 'the possible expressions of identity' might differ greatly.⁶⁸ In Raudvere's presentation, this point of departure for seeing religious groups as bound to their local environments and thus constantly in relation to what is happening around them, is fruitful for the analysis of contemporary Islamic activity, including Sufism.

A recent contribution to the combination of Islamic studies and SMT, is Quintan Wiktorowicz's (ed.) *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (2004). In his introduction, Wiktorowicz addresses the need for both the field of Islamic studies and the field of social movement theory and studies to make use of each other's knowledge and perspectives. Likewise, in Charles Kurzman's concluding chapter of this volume, he focuses on the similar development within the fields of Islamic studies, as opposing the outgrown Orientalist outlook, and social movement theory, as opposing the 'collective behaviour' paradigm. Still, he points out, the mutual benefit of each other's progresses has been scarce and too rarely utilised. One benefit for the study of 'Islamic movements' by using social movement theory, Kurzman suggests, would be to bridge the gap which many see between Islamist organisations – their ideology, political means and ends – and 'Western' social movements. The 'otherness' of such Islamist movements could be demystified in this manner, according to Kurzman, by seeing common rationalities in matters like identity formation and mobilisation strategies. When it comes to what Islamic studies can contribute to SMT, Kurzman sees the problematic 'tendency of social movement scholars to study movements with which they sympathize'.⁶⁹ Given the ends of many Islamist movements, as well as the means they might make use of, Kurzman argues that this will contest the social movement scholars to broaden the scope of their empirical universe, leading to a different and probably fruitful relation between the observer and the observed.⁷⁰

There must, however, be added some criticism towards Wiktorowicz's book. As fruitful as the proposed combination of Islamic studies and SMT might be, it is saddening to see the narrow scope of movements which are taken into account. Almost exclusively, the movements touched upon are of Islamist character, thus reflecting the instrumental politicised

⁶⁷ Raudvere 2002:48.

⁶⁸ Ibid:49.

⁶⁹ Kurzman 2004:294.

⁷⁰ Kurzman 2004:289-298.

view of social movements of RMT.⁷¹ Islamist movements certainly deserve attention, but not, in my opinion, at the cost of practically every other Muslim movement – for example various Sufi organisations, movements and networks.

2.5 Perspectives on contemporary Sufism

In recent years attempts to describe and summon the developments of contemporary Sufism, especially Sufism in Europe and North America, has been presented. Concepts such as ‘Euro-Sufism’, ‘Islamic Sufism’ and ‘Neo-Sufism’ are found, among others, as scholars strive to define various representations of Sufism, or ‘Sufi-inspired’ representations of religiosity.⁷² The degree of adherence to ‘Islamic orthodoxy’ is often considered an important aspect when distinguishing the different organisations, individuals or circles who are to be defined.

The concept of ‘Euro-Sufism’ is discussed by the Swedish Professor of Religious Studies David Westerlund, who identifies it as ‘the form of Euro-Islam that occasionally transcends the borders of Islam’.⁷³ Westerlund considers this to be the most rapidly growing form of Sufism in Europe and states that it might well become the mainstream features of future ‘Euro-Islam’. As far as I understand, however, ‘Euro-Sufism’ does not include the transplanted Sufi orders present in Europe, to which Westerlund counts the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, although Sheikh Nazim is said to have ‘contributed to the growth of Euro-Sufism’, and although these orders have been heavily influenced by their local environments.⁷⁴ This latter type of Sufism is said to have much (for example individualism, ‘pick and mix’-attitude, and low degree of institutionalisation) in common with what is commonly called ‘New Age’.

Another attempt to describe contemporary forms of Sufism is the French islamologist Olivier Roy’s characterisation of what he calls ‘neo-brotherhoods’.⁷⁵ Roy presents a rather radical view of such brotherhoods and points to a number of generalised features they include which make them distinctly ‘new’ or ‘neo’ compared to what consequently must be dubbed ‘old’ or traditional brotherhoods.⁷⁶ Roy describes the sheikh, who he compares to a ‘modern guru’ – a leader who recruits individuals rather than groups defined of family or geographical traditions. The sheikh employs modern media in spreading his message; he writes extensively,

⁷¹ See also Wiktorowicz 2004b and 2004c.

⁷² See for example Westerlund 2004 and Hammer 2004.

⁷³ Westerlund 2004:33.

⁷⁴ Westerlund 2004:33.

⁷⁵ Roy 2004:221-224. These pages include what is referred to and quoted in this section.

⁷⁶ In chapter 5 examples of features from the Naqshbandi tradition will be presented when describing activities of the particular community studied.

appears on television, and founds websites. The follower learns the message through these media representations, listens to the sheikh's sermons, watches his videos (and thus has 'direct and complete, rather than progressive, access to knowledge'), and attends public meetings arranged by an organisation that puts the disciple in contact with the sheikh; the disciple is himself not regularly in contact with the sheikh or his deputies. At these meetings the sheikh 'performs' his role. A neo-brotherhood is cultic, inward-looking and inclusive, and affects all aspects (even professional) of the disciple's life. Reasons for joining such a brotherhood are goals of self-realisation and positive relations within the community. Worship is considered 'more as a part of self-realisation than as a quest for salvation. In short, they join because they enjoy it.' These brotherhoods are also, because of their adaptation to a 'Western' religious market, likely to attract converts and draw towards syncretism, moving away from 'orthodox Islam'. Roy specifically names the Naqshbandi-Haqqani as one of these neo-brotherhoods of whom he is talking. In my concluding analysis, I will evaluate whether I support this categorisation or not, based on my empirical findings during fieldwork.

3 Material and fieldwork

3.1 About the fieldwork

The fieldwork which constitutes the foundation for this thesis was carried out in London and its' surroundings during two and a half weeks in November and December 2004. Prior to this, the information I had on the place and group I was to visit was gathered from the Internet; mainly from one of the websites analysed in the pilot study.⁷⁷ Furthermore, one week before my departure to London I spoke briefly to Sheikh Abdul Hamid, who is the local imam in the mosque. He confirmed the information on the website concerning time and place for the dhikr ceremony on Thursday night and welcomed me to join. On the website, the place was called St. Ann's Mosque, although on a large sign on the front of the building it says 'Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani Derghai'.⁷⁸ Henceforth I will call it the *derga*, in accordance with the terminology of my informants.

3.1.1 Documentation techniques

My goal was at first to arrange and record as many fixed interviews as possible, i.e. to arrange a time and date with an informant and have an exclusive conversation. This, however, proved to be difficult, for several reasons. The participants come to the derga not only to take part of dhikr and listen to the Friday *khutba* or sermon, but also to socialise with their brothers and sisters. Therefore it is hard to find a time and place to have a peaceful and lengthy conversation with a single person, since you are constantly interrupted by the other people surrounding you or playing children. Many of the participants are also parents and live quite far away from the derga, which means that they have to be heading home shortly after the ceremonies. Effectively, I had to adjust to the socialising atmosphere in the derga and mingle just like everyone else. In time, this mingling became a key method of my fieldwork.

After a few visits, I decided to try to record as much as possible anyway. Effectively, I simply put my Minidisk on 'record', placed the microphone on my clothes and mingled. This proved to be an efficient way to sample the atmosphere of the derga. What was recorded were not just conversations, but interruptions, noises, chanting and other present sounds which all added something to the whole experience of being there. This method also meant that I behaved just as I would have if not recording. As for the ethic problem of recording

⁷⁷ <http://sultan-nazim.members.easyspace.com> (no longer available in January 2005).

⁷⁸ *Derga*: a Sufi building or 'dervish convent', Schimmel 1975:499.

participants without them knowing it, I did tell most of the ones I spoke lengthily with that I was wearing a microphone and they didn't oppose. Rather, they seemed a bit embarrassed about perhaps not having said as good things as their Sheikh would have done. Furthermore, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani often documents themselves extensively, by video, sound recording and written documentation of events. These documents are later reproduced and spread to a wide audience. Since the tariqa in this way is not a secret community in any way, or wish to keep their teachings among themselves, I regarded it as acceptable to document my research in this manner.

In addition, I wrote down my impressions and as much I could remember of what had happened immediately after every visit to the derga and otherwise where and when I met informants. When it was more convenient, I also recorded myself as I told my MD my impressions. These impressions were, of course, coloured by my own interpretation of an event when it comes to how a person reacted or the way a group of people interacted with each other.

3.1.2 Problems related to participative observation

As briefly mentioned in the introduction (and further described below), the first visit to the derga led to an unexpected and unintended *shahada* or conversion ceremony. At first this terrified me – I felt as if the whole fieldwork had begun with a huge mistake. As it turned out, perhaps it wasn't all that bad. After all, it was not my own initiative to take the shahada. I didn't even repeat the words Sheikh Abdul Hamid recited, just stood there in a kind of shock. Instead, the event shows overtly the eagerness of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani members to win new supporters, supporting the above quoted notion regarding membership and initiation in the Research Briefing of the Birmingham project on the tariqa. Interpreted in this manner, the shahada incident simply provided me with a kind of information concerning those matters. I tried to keep an observer/observed relation as a researcher, which I made no secret of to the ones I spoke with; still, this distanced relation was nullified away almost instantly by the participants in the collective action of dhikr, when putting me in the described position. Although I did not take active part in prayer or dhikr, but merely was present and observed what happened, I regard my observations to be 'participative'; not least because many of the participants counted me as participant. But also, however, because the information I was interested in was provided not only during the ritual itself, but to a large extent before and after the ritual in the 'mingling' and social interaction in the derga – in which I definitely took active part.

During my fieldwork period, I attended all the Thursday dhikrs and Friday prayers given (i.e. three of each). This further strengthened some participants' impression that I was a new 'brother' of the faith, especially those who had witnessed the shahada. Although I did not partake actively in the dhikr, or the prayers, or the silat trainings I attended, or in any other way gave reason to think I was actually part of the community, that impression stayed with most of the people I spoke with in the derga.

Catharina Raudvere has discussed this problematic issue and poses the question she senses from her informants: 'why was this far-away university prepared to spend money on an unappeasably curious academic's journeys to Istanbul?'.⁷⁹ Although Raudvere's and my own work are very different in many ways (London is not as far away as Istanbul, her fieldwork was much longer, and her university spent more money), she puts her finger on an illustrative spot. The question's most obvious answer seems to be, both in Raudvere's case and mine, that the 'academic' is a subject for potential conversion. Incidentally, any doubts that might have been present during my first hours in the derga must have diminished immediately when witnessing the shahada.

The main problem of participative observation, thus, is the struggle to at once keep the scholarly distance and being part of what is going on in the actual situation. Several times I found myself (during the last observations) able to 'talk the talk' of my informants, as though I had accepted their religious idioms. I myself saw this as a sign of being observant and adjustable, whereas the informants appeared to see it as a sign of me growing spiritually.

3.2 Informants

I met all my informants at the various events taking place at the derga, mainly interacting with them there; in fact, contact was made to varying extents with all of my informants on my very first visit. As it turned out, I arranged to meet two of them outside of the derga as well. Since my interactions with the informants mainly took place at the derga, they were obviously affected by the physical setting surrounding them – including the participants' style of clothes, the framework of prayer and dhikr, the presence of a great number of other co-participants, interruptions and disturbances to the research situation. The two occasions on which I met informants elsewhere proved to be meetings of a different character than the ones within the walls of the derga.

⁷⁹ Raudvere 2002:60.

The informants are, as explained below, all male. The youngest of them is in his late teens, the eldest around 50 years old. All of the main informants, who will be briefly but impersonally introduced here, have ethnic roots from outside Britain, be it one parent who has migrated from an Arab country, or a person who himself has migrated from his country of origin – for example Singapore, Malaysia and Turkey. All the informants are active participants of the activities at the derga. All of them attended every event that took place there during my short fieldwork. I cannot claim the information attained from them during this period to be all-comprehensive for the East London derga; however, brought together, it does give a picture of several aspects central to all of them. Their professional lives vary; one is a musician (which seems to be a relatively common occupation among the attendants to the derga), another is a recruitment consultant, while another is still in school. The occupations of other participants vary as well, but quite a few seem to live off something related to their Sufi activity or – for example selling alternative medicines (‘Mercy Oil products’) through the Internet, giving Silat lessons in organised classes outside the derga.

One of the informants is originally from Singapore, in his mid thirties, unmarried and makes a living as a musician, playing at bars and restaurants in London. He has lived in London about ten years and has been coming to the derga since around 1997-98, after having been introduced to it by an acquaintance and taking interest in the Naqshbandi order from a distance. Before that, he used to attend mosques which were closer to his home, for example Regent’s Park mosque. He also trains silat regularly every week; he took me to the one training occasion I attended outside of the derga.

Another informant was raised in London, taking interest in Islam as an adult after being encouraged to do so by a lady customer in the grocery store in which he worked. In his early twenties, he left for Egypt to study at al-Azhar University of Cairo a few years. In Cairo, he made contact with several Sufi orders, only choosing to stay within the Naqshbandi-Haqqani upon returning to London, after being invited to a dhikr in the home of a friend and later been taken to the derga. Presently, he is in his mid thirties, married and has two children, both boys. He and his wife were married by Sheikh Nazim, who also named both of their children. Apart from when we met in the derga, I was invited for dinner one Sunday in the house of this informant and his family.

A third informant is much younger, in his late teens. The reason why he caught my attention was the whirling he performed every dhikr I attended. During my fieldwork period, an average of three or four persons whirled at the dhikr events. This informant is the son of a

Palestinian father and an ethnically English converted mother. When asked, he said he'd been doing whirling dhikr since about a year before our encounter.

Lastly, among my main informants, is a man who is the official representative salesman for publications by the Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA), of which Sheikh Hisham Kabbani is chairman. The ISCA, among other things, publishes books by the leading sheikhs of the tariqa, among them the above-mentioned books by Sheikh Hisham, as well as recordings of for example speeches, dhikr and Qur'an readings on CD. In the derga, he keeps a table in the corridor where he sells these books and recordings at every derga event. He is around 50 years old and the father of five children.

In addition to these informants, I spoke to other men and boys in the derga, from whom information and quotes will also be taken below. However, the more lengthy conversations and extensive narrations came from these four individuals.

3.3 Women's participation and the methodological problem of sex-defined social boundaries

On one of the nights I spent at the derga, just before the Thursday dhikr ceremony, two women asked to take the shahada from Sheikh Abdul Hamid. The sheikh had returned from his visit to Cyprus the same afternoon and was standing in the corridor, just arrived to the derga, speaking to a group of men who inquired for information on how the funeral of Hajja Amina, Sheikh Nazim's wife, had been and how the Grand Sheikh was coping with his great loss. I was myself standing further down the corridor, speaking to a young man who had also just returned from Cyprus, when a man approached Sheikh Abdul Hamid, on behalf of the two women, to ask for the shahada ceremony. Sheikh Abdul Hamid immediately terminated his conversation and started the shahada, right there in the corridor. It was performed with a few brothers and sisters as witnesses, and afterwards the two women hugged each other and cried of happiness before they returned to the women's department of the mosque hall.

This incident proves that participation and involvement of women is regarded important and is given significance, since the sheikh directly took time to perform the shahada. In the above mentioned pilot study, examples were cited of women being active on mailing lists and websites – for example sharing information on what a visit to Sheikh Nazim's residence in Cyprus is like and translating speeches from the sheikhs. It should also be noted that the death of Hajja Amina was seen as a common loss, followed by grief for the whole Haqqani community. Several of the most distinguished and respected persons of the East London derga

went to partake in the funeral and comfort Sheikh Nazim directly after they received the news. Sheikh Kabbani also wrote an obituary which was published on the official website of the Islamic Supreme Council of America (of which Kabbani is chairman) and put up on the notice board in the derga. The obituary also commanded every follower of Sheikh Nazim to conduct a number of specific prayers for the deceased ‘mother’ of their community.⁸⁰ Hajja Amina was herself a leader of women’s dhikr,⁸¹ as well as the author of books, including a biography of Muhammad.⁸²

Unfortunately, however, during my fieldwork I had no possibility to get into first hand contact with the women present at the derga. A few times I tried to initiate conversations with women, but my attempts fell flat to the ground. It seemed it was regarded inappropriate for me as a young man to have contact with the women. I didn’t observe much interaction between the other men and the women either. The women mostly stayed in their department of the mosque hall, alternatively in the shared corridor, speaking to one another and taking care of the children.

The opportunities I had to interact with women were two. First, I was at a dinner in the private house of one informant’s family, and second, at one of the silat training occasions situated in a sports centre in North London, not in the derga. At the dinner, the wife of my informant left me and her husband alone in the living room while she prepared the food, only coming into the room to serve us tea. Later, while eating together, I had a chance to speak directly to her, although she was mainly occupied with serving us food and keeping after the two sons and their neighbourhood friend. It was clear that I was there to meet the head of the family, the husband-father, not his wife. When asked if she too worked professionally, she denied it and said she had enough to do taking care of their home and children.

At the silat training there was a young woman (the only woman in the training group), who my informant said was the silat master’s wife. Me and my informant picked her up at her house and walked jointly to the sports centre. During our walk, the two of them mostly talked about the silat master who was abroad this week. Afterwards my informant told me the young woman was also a Muslim. However, to my experience she did not behave like the women I had met at the derga. She did not cover her hair, she talked freely to me (although not very lengthy) and had been training silat several years. All in all, she gave a more independent

⁸⁰ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/the-heart/message/2762> (2005-08-21). Unfortunately, over a time of a few months, until the present, the website of ISCA has been unavailable online. The obituary was, when the site was up, available at <http://www.naqshbandi.org/mother/>.

⁸¹ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/the-heart/message/2574> (2005-08-21).

⁸² <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1930409117/103-3498191-3947016?v=glance> (2005-08-21).

impression than the women at the derga; accordingly, I did not meet her there even once. In her house, however (which naturally also was the silat master's house), several books published by the Naqshbandi-Haqqani lay about on tables and bookshelves.

4 Contextualising the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa in London

The Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa derives from the long and rich tradition of the Naqshbandis, which was founded by Baha ud-Din an-Naqshband (d. 1389) in the Central Asian province of Bukhara, but draws its descent from Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, companion of Muhammad and the first caliph.⁸³ The Naqshbandi Sufi order should not be viewed as a stable entity of faith, practices and stances, due to the fact that it has been spread over a vast geographic area during the centuries since it was founded. Various differing traditions have developed from the Naqshbandi *silsila*, most notably due to the great impact of several *mujaddid* or renewers such as Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) and Mawlana Khalid (d. 1827), who in various ways strengthened or rejected certain aspects of the order's teachings and practices.⁸⁴ It is not my purpose here to summon the history of this centuries-long Sufi tradition, but only to situate one recent offspring of the Naqshbandiyya in a specific local environment.⁸⁵ First, a brief introduction to the general Muslim presence in Britain will be given, followed by an account of the specific development of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani order, in general and in London specifically.

4.1 Muslims in the British context

The presence of Muslims in Britain has lasted since workers from the empire's colonies in the Indian subcontinent arrived in British cities during the 18th and 19th centuries to work. Settlements started to grow as some stayed put, and in time started arranging life in their new home country more in accordance with their usual habits. Later on, especially after the Second World War, a growing work migration caused a faster increase of 'foreign' habitants in Britain, which was subsequently followed by 'chain migration', i.e. the transfer of families and relatives to the initial migrants. Today, much has changed since the 1960s when a large migration stream occurred. One Muslim migrant from India described the situation upon arriving to England in 1961: 'when I came to England there was no mosque in England; there was no way of telling when ... we have to fast ... We were quite isolated ... so we just used

⁸³ Algar 1990:4, 11.

⁸⁴ Algar 1990:20-24, 28-32. Both of these renewers are considered part of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani's *silsila*; compare Kabbani 2004:'Contents'. The Naqshbandi-Haqqani could therefore be said to stem from the Naqshbandi-Khalidi tradition.

⁸⁵ For more detailed information on the founding, development and influence of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, see for example Gaborieau, Popovic & Zarcone (eds.) 1990 and Özdalga (ed.) 1999.

to celebrate Eid whenever we could.’⁸⁶ The process during which England, for these groups, changed from being a temporary place of work to becoming a new home country has been described as their turning ‘from sojourners to citizens’.⁸⁷ Estimates of the number of Muslims within the UK vary between 1.4 and 2 millions.⁸⁸

The history of Muslim presence in and impact on Britain, along with its inherent power struggles and various representing movements, has been discussed and described in several publications. Philip Lewis’ *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims* (1994), takes the city of Bradford as point of departure for describing the arena of British Muslims, allegorically calling it ‘Britain’s Islamabad’. This allegory serves, in addition to highlighting the large Muslim population of Bradford, to acknowledge that most of Britain’s Muslim immigrants originate from South Asia, most notably from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Several movements and organisations which have been part of the national Muslim debate and shaped the public image of British Muslims are described; for example the Bradford Council for Mosques (among other things [in]famous for the burning of Salman Rushdie’s novel ‘The Satanic Verses’), UK Islamic Mission and The Islamic Foundation. The power struggle between the two large reformist schools of South Asia during the 20th century, Deobandi and Barelwi, is present throughout the whole presentation. Lewis describes how attempts to import local South Asian practices and officials have both succeeded and failed, as well as the emergence and difficulties of ‘Muslim religious schools’, *dar al-‘ulum*, in Britain. Difficulties of transmitting religion and culture to children of the immigrants, as well as the parents’ mother tongues, are manifested not least in the educational sphere, and more or less successful efforts to create a British Muslim religious leadership that can communicate in a fruitful manner to the young.⁸⁹

Lewis also takes into account the ambition of local political authorities to assist in creating organisations which can be dealt with for solving various issues involving Muslims. The Bradford Council for Mosques is one of the organisations which were created with help from the City Council, with the aim to incorporate all major Muslim groups in Bradford into this central organ and represent them in the local political agenda.⁹⁰ Still, relations to the local governmental bodies have not been all harmonious. There have, for example, been numeral incidents involving islamophobia, the providing of *halal* food in schools, permission to build

⁸⁶ Metcalf 1996:9.

⁸⁷ See the title of Haddad 2002.

⁸⁸ Lewis 2002:129; Rex 2002:53; Vertovec 2002:21.

⁸⁹ Lewis 1994, chapters 4 and 5.

⁹⁰ Lewis 1994:143-145.

and rework buildings for religious purposes, and issues of racism among local population and officials; when it comes to Muslim politicians' participation in British political life, issues like these have been predominant as to which have been lifted forward.⁹¹

The gradual and active transformation 'from sojourners to citizens', in addition to organising oneself in various official communities, organisations, councils and schools, also means demanding space for living your life in this new, or not quite that new any longer, environment. Pnina Werbner has described this process and its' meaning excellently in her essay 'Stamping the earth with the name of Allah', where she discusses the function of performing rituals publicly, thus inscribing the 'name of Allah on the very spaces they cover'. It is, in her words, in addition to claiming a space for Muslim activity, a way of saying to other Muslims that 'we are proud of being Muslims, we are willing to parade our Muslimness openly in the streets, we believe that Islam is the last and best religion, containing the true message of God, the whole message, including even the hidden truths; and we are not afraid to show our pride in our religion openly and publicly.'⁹² Over the last two decades, this public presence of Muslims has become more consolidated within the British society, with the emergence of many different Muslim organisations, the slow but gradual growing number of Muslim politicians, and the publication of books specifically aimed at the British context.⁹³

The main internal problems facing the future for Muslims in Britain, are on the one hand the great diversity between the many represented ideological and traditional lines of thought and practice, and on the other hand the transmission of Islamic and Muslim faith, concepts, consciousness and culture to the young generation. Attempts to overcome the diversities have proven efficient to varying degrees, but it should not be expected that a single entity of 'Muslim population' ever emerges. Rather, Muslim identity seems to become one of many identities for Muslim youth, not a sole marker of belonging. Lewis brings forth several important notions of failures by the Muslim leadership to connect to the youth, as well as features of those youths' self-perception. He concludes that the future of British Muslims lie much in the question of who will have last word in defining British Muslimness – Lord Ahmed (the first Muslim to enter the House of Lords) or Ali G (a famous comedian, drawing on hip hop culture, of Pakistani descent).⁹⁴

⁹¹ See for example Husband 1994:82-92, and Rex 2002:66, 71-73.

⁹² Werbner 1996:181.

⁹³ See for example Lewis 2002 and Vertovec 2002:28-33. For a case study into a specific organisation and their extensive publication of books and other material for the British context, see Torsten Janson's Ph. D. thesis *Your Cradle Is Green: The Islamic Foundation and the call to Islam in children's literature* (2003).

⁹⁴ Lewis 2002.

4.2 The founding and spreading of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa

Sheikh Nazim, who by the followers of Naqshbandi-Haqqani is considered to be the grand sheikh of the Naqshbandi tariqa and a true saint and mujaddid of that order, was born in Larnaka, Cyprus, in 1922. He began his spiritual education in Istanbul, but later joined and followed the Naqshbandi Sheikh Abdullah ad-Daghestani (d. 1973) in Damascus.⁹⁵ Abdullah ad-Daghestani belonged to a Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi-Khalidi branch of the order, and consequently Sheikh Nazim was taught in the same tradition. It is apparent that ad-Daghestani had great impact on Sheikh Nazim; one of Nazim's series of books is basically a collection of stories told to him by his sheikh, and one of these books is recommended for every new murid to read first if they want to become a follower of Sheikh Nazim.⁹⁶ In publications of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, pictures of ad-Daghestani can also frequently be found, thus underlining the importance of his legacy in Sheikh Nazim's teachings.⁹⁷ It is said that Sheikh Nazim was commanded, just before the death of his sheikh, to spread Islam and the Naqshbandi way to Europe; England was supposedly specifically mentioned.⁹⁸ Effectively, Sheikh Nazim travelled to London in 1973 and founded a group of followers there, after which the message was rapidly spread in other parts of the world as well. In areas where there has been a Naqshbandi presence throughout history, Sheikh Nazim has made efforts to manifest himself as the rightful leader of the order, taking up relations with state officials and supporting the building of Sufi centres.⁹⁹ The order now claims to have a global following in practically every part of the world; focus seems to be, however, on South Eastern and Central Asia, the US, and Western Europe.¹⁰⁰

In 1991, Sheikh Nazim sent his spiritual deputy and son-in-law, Sheikh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, to the US to establish the tariqa there as well. The enterprise has proved successful, to say the least. A number of Haqqani centres have been started, and the tariqa's activities in the US includes various sub-organisations; the most notable of them being the Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA), which publishes and distributes books and other media products, as well as arranging seminars, and as-Sunnah Foundation of America, which promotes knowledge of *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence, through books such as *The*

⁹⁵ Damrel 1999:1; Nielsen 2003:44.

⁹⁶ Conversation with an informant during fieldwork. The book series is called *Mercy Oceans* and the specific book mentioned is Book 2 in this series. It was sold at the derga, and pieces of it have been published on the Internet.

⁹⁷ See for example Kabbani 2004, where all the sheikhs of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani silsila are presented. Pictures of Sheikh Nazim and ad-Daghestani were also present at the derga – a few were even given to me.

⁹⁸ Kabbani 2004:511; conversation with an informant during fieldwork.

⁹⁹ Nielsen 2003:46f.

¹⁰⁰ Kabbani 2004:iii-vi.

Encyclopaedia of Islamic Doctrine, and upholds relations with various teaching institutions worldwide.¹⁰¹ As chairman of ISCA, Kabbani oversees twenty-three mosques and centres in North America.¹⁰²

4.3 Establishment and development in London

According to my informants, the derga in Tottenham was founded in 1974. The building itself was bought and given to the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa by the sultan of Brunei, who supposedly is a follower of Sheikh Nazim. The establishment of the tariqa in London followed Sheikh Nazim's first visit there in 1973.¹⁰³ On this occasion there was already a fertile soil for his preaching, much due to the group of people following the teachings of a certain John G. Bennett, who in turn was a disciple of Georgii Gurdjieff.¹⁰⁴ Gurdjieff (d. 1949) was a greek-armenian who travelled extensively in Central Asia and the Middle East; during these travels he became influenced by different Sufi sheikhs' teachings, and became a pioneer in introducing esoteric teachings in the US and Western Europe.¹⁰⁵ Gurdjieff also met with Sheikh Abdullah ad-Daghestani once, visiting him while ad-Daghestani was still serving and following his sheikh, and Gurdjieff is supposed to have had an experience of increased spiritual knowledge through their meeting.¹⁰⁶

Sheikh Nazim began travelling to Britain every Ramadan, and soon he started 'three centers in London, each devoted to training seekers in the ways of Islamic spirituality, removing their depression and spiritual afflictions, and lifting them to a state of inner peace'.¹⁰⁷ Apparently, the number of Sheikh Nazim's followers in Britain has continued to grow ever since, which is both enhanced in the tariqa's own literature and confirmed by my personal conversations in the derga. Nazim's missionary interest and success in Britain is, however, just one example of the tariqa's activity and success worldwide. Centres have been started in many countries around the globe, and the number of followers continues to rise.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Böttcher 2000.

¹⁰² Damrel 1999:1.

¹⁰³ Kabbani 2003:495.

¹⁰⁴ Kabbani 2004:495; conversation with informant during fieldwork.

¹⁰⁵ Westerlund 2001:171.

¹⁰⁶ Kabbani 2004:435f.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid:496.

¹⁰⁸ Damrel 1999.

4.4 Current situation

There are three major Naqshbandi-Haqqani centres in London, all of which host dhikr on Thursday nights, in addition to the regular other prayer events. Apart from the centre in South Tottenham, there is one in Peckham and one in Tooting. Of these other two centres, I only visited the one in Peckham once, around the time for mid-day prayer (or a bit early, since the mosque was practically empty). According to several of my informants, many of the people who used to come to the Peckham mosque regularly, now comes to the East London derga instead. I could not get any clear answer as to why this is, but when collecting material for the pilot study, I came across a message chain in The Heart mailing list which started with a poem appraising the spiritual paradise Peckham mosque allegedly was during the 1980s and 90s. The poem was followed by other messages, lamenting over how Peckham mosque, which according to the poet previously had been a spiritual highlight of England, now had declined.¹⁰⁹ There are Naqshbandi-Haqqani centres or activity sites of varying size in many other cities in the UK; Sheffield, Birmingham, Slough, Rochdale, Leicester and Glastonbury, to mention a few. On his latest visits to the country, Sheikh Hisham Kabbani has spent some time in several of these cities. On occasion, the Silat master who will be further mentioned below goes to the city of Luton to lead dhikr with the group there. It seems, both according to what my informants said about the tariqa's extensive presence in the UK, as well as by what can be read on the Internet about the English activity of the tariqa, that there are well developed contacts between the various groups in the country. The publication of Haqqani books within Britain, mainly distributing recent speeches by Sheikh Nazim which has been translated to English (some of them with a specific British focus),¹¹⁰ also bear witness of an active functioning network of Naqshbandi-Haqqani activity in the UK. As late as Ramadan 2005 (October), Sheikh Hisham spent some time in London. A video of one dhikr ceremony where Sheikh Hisham was the central person, which took place in the East London derga, was rapidly made available on the Internet.¹¹¹ Preparations for the visit and the expected increased number of attendants arriving from various parts of England were made partly through the Internet as well; for example, a message where practical instructions like bringing sleeping

¹⁰⁹ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/the-heart/message/2221> (2005-09-20).

¹¹⁰ For example, I purchased a small book in the derga entitled *Princess Diana's Death*, where Sheikh Nazim gives moral lessons based on the allegedly sinful life of the late princess, which supposedly also led to her death.

¹¹¹ http://www.naqshlive.com/multimedia/albums/uploads/video/sufi_cinema/ (2005-11-14).

bags, and announcing for people with ‘handy talents’ to make the derga ready for a larger number of people was posted in preparation for the visit.¹¹²

4.5 Description of the derga

The derga consists of a large building complex, owing its history to being an old Christian monastery. It fronts of block facing St Ann’s Road, with a wooden doorway in the outer wall as main entrance to its domains. Behind the doorway there are stairs leading up to the main door. Just to the left of those stairs, on the outside, there are stairs leading underground to the room where the attendants wash before entering the mosque. Here you also find toilets. The room can be reached from inside the building as well. As you enter the main door, on your right there is a small area with coat hangers and benches around the walls, and hanging on the far end wall is a large portrait of Sheikh Nazim. If you walk straight forward from the entrance, however, along the sales tables and crossing a long sideways corridor, you will enter the prayer hall, which I propose at most takes a few hundred people. The prayer hall also runs sideways, at the far right end is the women’s department and at the far left end is the *minbar*.

If you don’t walk into the prayer hall but instead turn left down the sideways corridor, you arrive at a staircase, around which I was told there are administrative rooms. I was also told there is at least one apartment on the upper floor of the building, kept available for housing visiting notables. A right turn before entering the prayer hall will take you to another staircase, above which I do not know what hides. After the staircase, however, lie the large room in which the children’s Silat class was held every Thursday during my fieldwork. Both the mentioned staircases also take you to the basement, where you, in addition to the washing room, will find a restaurant space and a well equipped leisure room. The restaurant, I was told, used to serve free food in connection to the derga’s main events, such as dhikr and Friday prayer, but now ‘it’s a money-making game’, my young informant half jokingly told me. After one Friday prayer me and one of my informants had a cup of tea there – we were served the tea by a man who seemed to be cooking for a number of people, yet we were alone in the room. The leisure room, finally, among other things contained a large TV set, a pool table, a ‘foosball’ (football game) table and a long couch. One informant told me this was especially equipped for the youths in the derga. It is obvious that some effort has been made to provide opportunities for spending quality time in this leisure room, which lies next door from the restaurant.

¹¹² <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/the-heart/message/2853> (2005-11-14).

5 Activities and preferred topics of the participants

In this chapter a number of characteristics of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani in the East London derga will be described. To a large extent the chapter is based on conversations with informants, which means that their language and terminology is predominant during the description. In addition, my observations also provided me with themes and topics, regardless to what extent they were specifically commented or emphasised by the informants. Unless otherwise stated, all information in this chapter is taken from observations and conversations with informants.

5.1 Introduction: the first encounter

After arriving in London on a Wednesday, I took the tube to the Seven Sisters station on the following Thursday night. I followed the descriptions of how to get to the derga provided on the web. It proved to be rather easily found, but on my arrival almost completely dark and closed. I managed to find an opening in the outer wall and knocked on one of the doors. After a while two men opened it and looked very surprised to see me. When I explained that I was there for dhikr, they said I was very early, but let me in and showed me down a long corridor where, at the end of it, there would be some people with whom I could talk. At the end of the corridor there was a large room in which a group of people of varying ages were training martial arts. An instructor walked around the room, giving instructions to the participants. Three of the participants were children; two of them were girls. One of the adults was the children's father. In addition, two other adult men were training kicks, strikes and other movement patterns by imitating the instructor.

This surprised me a lot. I hadn't expected to find myself in the midst of a martial arts training within the walls of the derga. The questions gathered in my head: what type of martial art is this, why is it being taught in the derga and what, if anything, does it have to do with Sufism? The instructor invited me to sit down in a corner of the room and watch the remaining training session. He had a great black beard and his head was shaved completely bald. Furthermore, he was wearing very wide clothes; especially the trousers. He told me he would attend dhikr himself, so we could go there together after his class was over.¹¹³ After the regular class was finished, one of the adult men, a British convert, asked the instructor for a

¹¹³ More on the martial arts training, which is called *Silat*, and the meaning of it being trained in the derga will be given below.

private sparring lesson. I stayed to watch that too, during which the instructor gave more personal instructions regarding the pupil's improvements. During this private lesson they both also spoke to me, explaining a bit about what they were doing and how this form of martial art, called silat, was connected to their way of Sufism.

The dhikr ritual then started in the prayer hall of the derga. I was sitting in the midst of the men, but quite far away from Sheikh Abdul Hamid, the local imam who led dhikr this evening. A number of women and children were placed in the back of the mosque, behind a wooden borderline marked in the floor. The ritual lasted about an hour. Directly afterwards, most of the men walked around in a circle, shaking everyone's hands and greeting them. I was encouraged to take part in this ritual greeting as well. Meanwhile, others socialised in the mosque and in the corridor just outside it, where there also were various books, clothes and other artefacts for sale.

I started talking to the silat instructor again, asking general questions about the whole occasion. He hesitated to answer me, though, insisting on that I should meet the Sheikh and ask him questions instead. Consequently, he said he would introduce me to Sheikh Abdul Hamid if I wanted to. Since I had planned to make an interview with Abdul Hamid, this was a perfect opportunity to be introduced. As we approached the sheikh, however, there was a large group of men standing around him in our way. The silat instructor pushed me forward until we were standing right in front of the sheikh. Meanwhile, he had told me that this sheikh was a very special man with outstanding spiritual qualities, since he had been taught personally by Sheikh Nazim himself. To underline the spiritual power of Abdul Hamid, he insisted that I should recognise the similarity in physical appearance between Sheikh Nazim and Sheikh Abdul Hamid. This, he argued, further proved the 'trueness' of their imam, and by touching him I myself would have access to the spiritual powers of Sheikh Nazim as, in the end, a link to god.

As I stood in front of the sheikh, the instructor who had took me there said something in Arabic which I did not follow, whereupon Sheikh Abdul Hamid took my hands and the other 'brothers' gathered around me in a circle. The sheikh started reciting the words of the *shahada*, the confession or witnessing that you are a Muslim, for me to repeat. This was not what I had expected. Suddenly there was no realistic way out of it, being surrounded by the whole group of men who witnessed 'my shahada', and the sheikh involved in preparing my initiation to being Muslim and belonging to the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa. With this event, my first visit to the derga took a distinct turn against the plan for the evening. I was also given a Muslim name, Mahmoud Nazim. Perplexed as I was, I just stood there throughout the

ceremony. Afterwards, the men started greeting me welcome as one of their community. I told some of them that it hadn't been my intention to take the shahada, but only to speak to the sheikh and the others about their way of Sufism. I stayed in the derga a while longer, talking to some of the men, looking at the books and artefacts for sale and bought one book which was strongly recommended by several persons.

5.2 General remarks

It is a challenging task trying to describe the central aspects of a collective movement which, naturally, consist of a multiple of individuals with their specific lives, experiences and feelings. But those topics and activities presented here are shared by this collective, even though only a few individuals represent them with their own words. Even more challenging is trying to do justice to a social phenomenon and situation in plain words. An action is not only an instrumental action; it is embedded in a framework of words, symbols, expressions and movements, incarnated in each person present at the scene of action. The activities like dhikr and Silat training presented below should therefore be viewed as part of a social and material setting which gives it its' meaning. There are details which help producing this meaning and give it nuances, details which unfortunately are lost in this kind of presentation. This includes the way participants greet each other, touch each other (or don't touch), how talismans and pictures are handled and worn, looks given as response to for example a certain phrase, and the sighs and signs of emotional movement accompanying personal narratives. A few of these hard-to-capture details and features will be touched upon firstly.

I was given talismans by two informants, in the form of small triangular packages, one wrapped in cloth and the other wrapped in a leather cover. The talismans were said to contain the words 'Allahu Haqq', which could be translated as 'Allah is real'. These talismans are carried around the neck, which places them close to the heart of the carrier. They can be bought at the sales tables in the derga, among other small artefacts such as pictures of Sheikh Nazim. They are said to 'bring blessings' from god to the one who carries them.

The word 'purity' is repeated over and over again in the informants' vocabulary. It seems to constitute the very foundation for every Sufi-related thing they do. When engaged in dhikr, martial arts training, prayer or promoting their sheikh's message in speech or through the Internet, the issue of purity and purification is recurrent and ever-present. To purify and polish one's heart is said to be the goal of attending dhikr, allowing the love of the sheikh to erase everything that is not love; everything sinful and morally degenerate. In line with this,

informants often emphasise the need to ‘think with your heart’, and ‘purify the heart from the ego’s desires’. The moral aspect of this is obvious; living surrounded by sin in various forms (alcohol, immoral sexual standards, selfishness, atheistic people and culture) make sincere and constant purification of the heart necessary to survive the approaching judgment day and receive the blessings bestowed on the righteous.

The way attendants to the derga interact, sometimes without words, is also regulated by various standards of adab or manners. But there is not always consensus as to what this adab implies as correct behaviour. One such incident occurred during my stay in the derga, involving the controversial practice of ‘kissing hands and feet’ as a sign of showing respect.¹¹⁴ A man standing in corridor close to me greeted another man who just arrived to the derga by kissing his hand; the just-arrived man, however, quickly drew back his hand and objected to the kiss, saying it was forbidden and should be considered shirk. The man who had tried to kiss his hand opposed, quoting Sheikh Nazim in defence of his action. The incident was over in just a few seconds, but it shows the urge of attendants to the derga to act in a correct manner, showing their adab, and the strife to express their devotedness to the sheikh in every aspect of their behaviour in the derga.

5.3 Dhikr that looks like a Benetton commercial

Thursday night is dhikr night in the derga. At around eight P.M., it all starts in the prayer hall, with the men sitting in a circle in front of the sheikh, and those who don’t fit in the circle gathered on the floor behind it. The women, of course, sit in the women’s department at the rear end wall. But a while before the dhikr starts, a few people have already been active in various ways in the building. As mentioned above, a children’s Silat class is taking place every week at six. Between six and seven, the three men who sell books, CD’s, clothes, pictures and other products arrange their tables and prepare for the arrival of the dhikr participants. Most people arrive around half past seven, but some don’t come until after dhikr has started.

According to one informant, Sheikh Hisham once said, when leading dhikr in London: “You look like a Benetton commercial!”, drawing upon the mix of ethnicities present. This very formulation echoed through several accounts given to me when asking about the dhikr

¹¹⁴ This is a custom which is criticised by ‘Salafis’ but defended by representatives of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, based on ‘sohbets’ and sayings of the sheikhs. The practice can be seen performed in videos from various events, where the hands and feet of Sheikh Nazim and Sheikh Hisham are kissed. For examples of the debate on this topic taking place on the Internet, see Stjernholm 2005.

performed at the derga. The variety of ethnicities present at dhikr obviously serves to strengthen the participants' feeling of being part of a true brotherhood where race and background is of no importance. During my visits to the derga, I witnessed the social intercourse of many ethnicities, that which brings them together thus being something else than shared ethnic background.¹¹⁵ Dhikr appears to be the most central common activity of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, emphasised both by the participants themselves, in books authorised by the officials, and at websites promoting the tariqa. The importance of both the loud weekly communal dhikr and the silent, individual dhikr is enhanced through all these means.¹¹⁶

Another striking characteristic of the dhikr events is the large amount of young people present, something which was also underlined by my informants. It is apparent that Sheikh Nazim attracts followers of all generations; both old and young men and women are present in the derga. Some of the youths have been taken to the derga since their early childhood by their parents, others have started coming their selves upon being invited by an acquaintance or reading about it.

Communal dhikr, as it is performed in the derga, follows the prescriptions which can be found both in the tariqa's literature and on its official website. It lasts about an hour and includes a number of textual and rhythmic variations, with intensity rising and falling, which follow a specific internal structure. On a certain signal from the sheikh, always following the same internal order of dhikr segments, a few men rise to whirl around in the midst of the circle formed by the participants. During my three dhikr evenings in the derga, the number of whirling murids varied between three and five, the core being the same murids. Whirling is not something traditionally associated with the Naqshbandi order; rather it brings to mind the Mevlevi order in Turkey.¹¹⁷ Whirling in the East London derga, however, is even announced on the Internet, and the whole community appears to take pride in having a number of whirling participants. One of the whirling murids especially caught my interest, because of the intensity of his whirling and his remarkable youth: only seventeen years old, I was told by another informant. Most of the time before and after the dhikr itself, he was looking after his much younger brother, but on my last evening in the derga I got a chance to speak more lengthy with him, about whirling among other things. He then told me,

¹¹⁵ As opposed to the Deobandi and Barelwi centres often portrayed when it comes to Sufism in the UK. See for example Lewis 2004.

¹¹⁶ See Stjernholm 2005 for examples regarding promotion of the importance of dhikr on websites.

¹¹⁷ Schimmel 1975:325f.

(...) I whirl for the love of Allah, I whirl to come closer to Allah, I whirl to be in touch with Allah, I whirl for the forgiveness of Allah, I spin for the strength to keep me strong (...)

This is a short passage of a long lecturing speech he gave me, having been told I was leaving the next day and also, which should not be forgotten, believing I was a newly converted Muslim since the above mentioned shahada ceremony. He gave me a lot of precautions, warnings and advice on how to continue living as a Muslim; for example staying away from sin, alcohol and ‘ladies, because now it’s so easy to sin with ladies’. The more he spoke, the more serious and intimate his advice became, touching on many different topics regarding my future life and the rewards/punishments awaiting me after this life has come to an end. Several times he mentioned the importance of dhikr for him to keep focus of what’s important in life and being ‘in touch with Allah’. He also stressed how lucky I was to have come to this specific mosque; the Naqshbandis, in his words, are more spiritual than other tariqas, not to mention the ‘stubborn-minded Wahhabis’ who despise dhikr and say that the prophet is gone. ‘But the prophet is here, his light is among us!’¹¹⁸

How do the other, non-whirling, participants perceive of the meaning of dhikr? A number of accounts were given to me on this matter, formulated in different ways but with common features. One informant said that dhikr is ‘polishing the heart and reflecting the light of Allah, *nur Allah*’. He went on, saying that through dhikr you ‘fill your heart with love. If you fill it with love, there isn’t room for anything else.’ It also helps you to ‘think with your heart and listening to your feelings’. Another account concerns the good influence the other brothers who are present have on you; ‘the more you sit among brothers who are like this [filled with love and humbleness], the more you become like them’. Many persons gathered share this feeling, which makes the participants ‘feel the presence of the sheikh, so strong’,

Dhikr has been a first contact with the tariqa for many of the participants, after reading or hearing something about it. One informant told me about his first contact with the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, after first having experienced Sufism and dhikr in several other tariqas in Cairo. When back in London, he was invited by a friend of his (who now is one of the persons who sell clothes, books and other artefacts in the derga) to dinner along with a few other brothers he didn’t previously know. After eating together they performed dhikr, which surprised my informant, but he took part in the ritual to show good manners. The event affected him and in time he started to come regularly to similar dinner/dhikr meetings in

¹¹⁸ It is my hope that the style and eagerness with which the informants spoke to me, is somewhat transmitted through my account of it here. This should also be taken as explanation for the sometimes perhaps unstructured text in this section of the thesis.

people's homes. Eventually, he also began coming to the derga for dhikr, where he met the sheikh and felt strongly attracted to him when experiencing his physical presence, which will be further described below. Effectively, 'I became a part of them [the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis] without realising it!'

5.4 Dressing up for the derga; being stylish and humble at the same time

Looks and appearances are important. When entering the derga, one of the first things that strike you is the style of dress that many men share. Colourful turbans and foot-long *jubbas*, beard and very wide trousers are significant characteristics of the dress code in the derga. From looking at photographs of Sheikh Nazim (among others the large portrait hanging on the wall directly on your right as you enter the derga), it's clear that he is the perfect incarnation of this style, which is described by one informant as classical Ottoman style. The turban is a *taj*, 'crown', which is said to have been worn in the same manner by Muhammad. It was 'part of the prophet's outfit.' Muhammad's way of dressing is best shown and imitated by Sheikh Nazim, which is why his murids deliberately tries to resemble him as much as possible.

The own way of dressing is often mentioned. One informant said he likes the wide trousers because he feels comfortable in them. Another said he wants to look beautiful to praise Allah, plus it's a way to stay close to the Sheikh and share the blessings bestowed on him. Yet another informant said the clothes were the initial reason he wanted to be a Naqshbandi: 'it's the pants, man!', he told me, remembering watching people wearing the loose wide trousers, both in Singapore where he's originally from and after moving to London.

Three main explanatory reasons for dressing up for the derga are given by the informants:

1. *Resemblance* to Sheikh Nazim, which is said to bring blessings by being close both spiritually and physically to the ideal man and one of *awliya allah*, 'God's friends'.
2. Taking *pride* in walking the path of true Islam. Dressing beautifully is a way of praising Allah. 'The best riders have the best horses', one informant said, and meaning that since the Naqshbandis have the best Islam, they wear the best outfits.
3. *Distinguishing oneself* from other Muslim groups, most notably the so called Wahhabis and Salafis. Several informants warned me of the Wahhabis, who have 'hijacked' mosques all over the world; Finsbury Park and Regent's Park in London were specifically mentioned. They are apparently easily recognised by the way they dress, which according

to my informants is very rigid and dull; combined with angry faces. One informant even went so far as to make jokes about the way the ‘Wahhabis’ wear their trousers.

Clothing and appearance, for these reasons, hold a central place in performing the weekly rituals of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani. As mentioned previously, I met with two of my informants outside of the derga, in their everyday whereabouts. At these occasions they were both dressed like any other ‘man in the street’. But both of them were among the most self-consciously dressed men in the derga, standing out even in that environment. This proves that every visit to the derga is a special occasion, deserving its particular efforts and preparations.

One informant commented on the general manner of dress in the derga, and his own in particular, by saying that you must do it with the right intention. ‘If you dress to make people look at you, that’s the wrong intention. I dress in that way to follow the way our sheikh is dressing, and if you do that, you do get blessings.’ To further emphasise this point, he showed me some pictures of Sheikh Nazim with *his* sheikh, the late Abdullah ad-Daghestani, proving his point by saying that ‘the sheikh dresses like his sheikh, and we should follow his example in everything’.

5.5 Physical training – martial art, archery, horse riding

5.5.1 Observed Silat training occasions

As above related, on my first visit to the derga I met with a group of people training a form of martial art called Silat. The facts that the training was undertaken within the walls of the derga, that it for some of them was a warming up for dhikr, and that the training was initiated and ended by the reading of certain phrases or ‘blessings’, inevitably made it a significant part of the whole experience at the derga. This was a children’s class, with three children (two daughters and one son) and their father as the main participants. Later on I was told many parents have their children train Silat. The father himself was also a beginner, eager to learn himself. During the training he expressed concern that the children should learn as fast and much as possible; this was further enhanced by his harsh remarks to the children when he felt they were not taking the training sequences serious enough or paying attention to instructions. The instructor was paid afterwards and a new training time, the same time and place next week, was decided. I attended the following week’s training as well, which was conducted in very much the same manner.

The other two participants were men in their early thirties, who seemed to have been training some time before. One of them told me he often took part in the children's class to get some extra exercise and remind him of the basic principles of Silat. He also found it to be a good way to gather his thoughts, focus and concentrate before dhikr. The other one of them, a convert, asked for and received a private sparring lesson when the family had left. During this training session the instructor began speaking more to me as well, explaining the various movements and what Silat meant to him. As he was instructing moves, kicks and strikes, he was speaking of the 'first level' and 'second level' of Silat. The pupil, who had not been training Silat that long, was apparently on the first level. When sparred, he was instructed to move smooth and slowly, to follow the 'flow' of the first level movements. Suddenly the instructor switched over to the 'second level' type of movement, much faster, harder and more aggressive.

The instructor spoke of why wrestling is more beneficial to a Sufi than for example boxing. First, while boxing demands that you aim your powers *against* your opponent, in wrestling you are dependent on the movements and energy of your opponent. You have to move together with your opponent, not against him. This creates a flow of energy, a continuous movement that you have no choice but to follow. Through this you learn humbleness, decreasing and in time erasing the self's need to stand out in a crowd and receive attention. Second, the movement patterns in themselves are not that impressive to watch when repeated over and over again while training. This, too, helps developing humbleness. When doing the repeated exercises, especially on the first level, you actually cannot avoid feeling silly and foolish. 'The ego gets a good kick out of that.'

I also visited an adult Silat training occasion, located in a sports centre in north-western London. My informant took me there on a Tuesday night. Prior to the training, we spent some time in the house of the Silat master, who normally teaches the class. This week he had gone to Cyprus to pay his condolences to Sheikh Nazim since the sheikh's wife, Hajjah Aminah, had died a couple of days ago. The master's wife, a young British convert, was the only woman to take part in the training. She had been training for several years and was one of the most experienced participants in the group. Her husband, the Silat master, was originally from Malaysia. He had also been authorised by Sheikh Nazim to conduct dhikr in his home and on other occasions; some Thursdays he therefore drives up north to Luton to lead dhikr with a Haqqani-group there.

Not everyone taking part in the training were Muslims or Sufis, but most of them. Two of the men in the group had been training various other martial arts, like Kung Fu and

Taekwondo, before taking up Silat. The main reason they had stuck with Silat was that they found the master to be an excellent teacher. On this occasion, however, since the Silat master wasn't there, the group members instructed each other, performing some basic movement combinations before starting the sparring exercises. All were dressed in black training outfits, trousers and a wide robe which was knit together by a belt. The training was much like any sports training, there was nothing explicitly 'Islamic' about it, apart from the fact that almost all participants were Sufis and that the training began and ended with some ritual movements and greetings of one another – the participants sat in a ring and performed common movements with their hands, similar to the 'washing' movements done as part of the *salat* prayer.

When leaving the sports centre, I got a lift with one of the participants. My informant and the young woman were also with us, and they were all talking of a series of lectures that Sheikh Hisham was to hold in Malaysia sometime in the near future. The lectures were going to be filmed and recorded for a future DVD release, and the driver was part of the film crew. The conversation was about a friend of my informant who had some technical equipment the crew wanted to borrow. Apparently, they would be travelling a whole group of people to this lecture, including the mentioned Silat master, who was going to be assisting Sheikh Hisham in some way.

5.5.2 Comments on Silat

All informants who were asked about the meaning of Silat emphasised its both physical and spiritual benefits. The physical aspect should be obvious, given the benefits of exercise in general. Here focus will therefore be on the supposed spiritual benefits. To begin with, 'wrestling is part of the sunna', one informant said. He didn't, however, refer to a specific hadith when saying this. He went on, saying that Silat is 'originally from Malaysia, it's ancient. It's linked to Islamic practices (...) and ceremonies that have to do with spirits (...) in Malaysia throughout history. It's not from the Middle East so it's not practised there.' He didn't know what the word Silat originated from, but guessed that it could be from the Arabic word *silah*, meaning weapon. He also said that there are various 'folklore stories about Silat in Malaysia', and that there are different forms of Silat in Indonesia and Malaysia.

In August 2005 a festival called the London Malay Festival was arranged, which was a full day where events, performances, music, food and other cultural expressions were displayed. It was the first festival of its kind but will be repeated next year. One of the organisers is an informant of mine and he had sent me information concerning the festival in

an email. Among other things, there were several different demonstrations of Silat taking place, involving some of the participants present at the above described training events which I attended. This is a different environment for Silat compared to the *derga*; instead of an Islamic environment it is shown as a cultural historical expression – but with the same active participants.¹¹⁹

5.5.3 Archery and horse riding

My informants mentioned two other sports except wrestling as being part of the *sunna* – archery and horse riding. Measures are therefore, when possible, taken to perform these sports as well. Horse riding is, though, due to the circumstance that the community is situated in one of Europe's largest cities, not at stake very often for practical reasons. Archery can, on the other hand, be arranged pretty easily. As I spoke to one of my informants in the *derga*, another *murid* approached him, interrupted us and asked if my informant was interested in doing some archery the following Wednesday. Apparently, a group of *murids* would make an effort to arrange a weekly archery session, so people would know that something was going on every week and attend if possible. I do not know where this archery was going to take place, but they both believed it would be a popular reoccurring event.

On the mailing list which was studied in the pilot study to this thesis, efforts have also been made to arrange special Muslim archery events. A message was posted as recently as 22nd August 2005, promoting a 'Sacred Archery Event' on 4th September. The event was to take place on a football/rugby ground in South London, and in the message there were instructions on how to get there by train, car and bus. Furthermore, it said,

there will be a demonstration of the various techniques of shooting according to the *sunnah* of the Prophet (s) and his Noble Companions (r) with comparisons to other styles. A ladies range and men's range (four in total) will be available, (...) children with sufficient strength to pull a bow, may also shoot if they wish.¹²⁰

Clearly, the arrangers are aiming to build on a tradition of archery as it supposedly was practised by the prophets. A book newly translated into English was also going to be sold at the event, called 'Sacred Archery: The Forty Prophetic Traditions', further spelling out the

¹¹⁹ Information about and pictures from the London Malay Festival can be found at <http://www.london-malay-festival.co.uk/> (2005-10-02).

¹²⁰ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/the-heart/message/2847> (2005-09-12).

connection between archery and sunna. The efforts to situate these sporting events into an Islamic context are clearly central to the murids who arrange and take part in them.

5.6 *Rabita and suhba* – bonding with the sheikh

All informants thoroughly emphasise their experiences of physically meeting Sheikh Nazim at every chance. Being close to the sheikh, both spiritually and physically, echoes as a goal through practically all the activities and topics of the murids. The sheikh is said to be constantly present in their minds and words, through pictures, quotations and style of dress as well as through speeches, books, recordings and the performed rituals. In the two homes I visited during my fieldwork, there was extensive coverage of the sheikh as well. Books and pictures of the sheikh were lying about overtly. This brings to mind the practices of *suhba* and *rabita*, as concepts sprung from the Naqshbandi tradition (and other Sufi orders). A short introduction to these concepts will be given, to assist comprehension of the meaning they're given among the Naqshbandi-Haqqani.

The Arabic word *rabita* is translated, in Kabbani's extensive work on *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Tradition* (2004), as 'heart's connection'.¹²¹ The widely acclaimed Hans Wehr's Arabic-English dictionary also gives the alternative translations 'link', 'union' and 'bond'.¹²² Within a Naqshbandi Sufi framework, *rabita* refers to the relationship between the sheikh and his murid. The term is often associated with the mujaddid Mawlana Khalid, who pronounced the practice of *rabita* equitable to that of *dhikr*.¹²³ This relationship is of a special kind and is one of the most common objects of criticism from anti-Sufis, who accuse the practitioners of *rabita* of *shirk*, 'polytheism'. But even within the Naqshbandi history it has been criticised, and Mawlana Khalid had to defend his teaching of and emphasis on *rabita* in opposition to other Naqshbandis.¹²⁴ The idea is, simply put, that the murid should visualise the sheikh between his eyes, and that there should be a direct connection between the heart of the murid and the heart of the sheikh.¹²⁵ Hence, the sheikh becomes a link between murid and Allah – an intermediary level, as it is often formulated by the critics. Effectively, the sheikh is sometimes even called a *qutb*, axis or pole, binding together heaven and earth.¹²⁶ Each murid

¹²¹ Kabbani 2004:673.

¹²² Wehr 1994:373.

¹²³ Abu-Manneh 1990:295, 298.

¹²⁴ Abu-Manneh 1990:297-301.

¹²⁵ Abu-Manneh 1990:295, 299; Stenberg 2001:88.

¹²⁶ Abu-Manneh 1990:290.

has his/her own, unique connection or *rabita* to the sheikh; an allegedly very close relationship where the sheikh actually knows more about the murid's spiritual state than the murid self.

Suhba, on the other hand, is often translated 'association'.¹²⁷ It refers to the close company the murid is supposed to have with the sheikh, during which he receives spiritual training to tread the path that lies before him. Traditionally, this has been a long process, often stretching over several years.¹²⁸ However, *suhba* also holds the meaning of 'conversation between master and disciple conducted on a very high spiritual level',¹²⁹ which includes a kind of speech given by the sheikh where he addresses topics he feels urgent, or explains the meaning of a certain passage of the Qur'an. The practice of *suhba* in its' first meaning, that of a long period of spiritual training which the murid must undergo in the close company of his sheikh, was contested by Mawlana Khalid, who introduced another practice that didn't take so much time in the close company of the sheikh. Still, however, the concept of *suhba* has generally been considered superior in developing a murids' knowledge of Allah.¹³⁰

To the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis in London, however, *suhba* and *rabita* is somewhat complicated by the fact that the sheikh now, at his high age, no longer travels as extensively as he used to. Earlier, as mentioned above, Sheikh Nazim usually spent Ramadan in England, thus giving old and new murids the chance to meet with him regularly and build this connection, learning from him directly. Even during this period, the situation differed greatly from the traditional Sufi practice of a murid following his sheikh closely for a long period. Still, ways of solving this problem are found. The publication and spreading of books and recordings, and not least pictures and videos, in which the sheikh promotes his message, fill some of the physical vacuum.¹³¹ These artefacts are widely distributed and seem to be extensively used and appreciated. Moreover, the *khalifas* or deputies of Sheikh Nazim contribute to give a kind of closeness by their presence in the local environment. Sheikh Hisham is the first and foremost of these deputies, travelling as it seems almost constantly around the world, thus maintaining the idea of the *tariqa* being a global brotherhood. Apparently, he adjusts his speeches to the local environment. According to my informants, Sheikh Hisham frequently addresses the specific situation in London and the surrounding British society when he speaks at gatherings there. During 2004/2005 he has visited England on at least four occasions. On one of these, he gave a speech on 'Hypocrisy', directed at false

¹²⁷ Abu-Manneh 1990:290; Kabbani 2004:674.

¹²⁸ Abu-Manneh 1990:291.

¹²⁹ Schimmel 1975:366.

¹³⁰ Abu-Manneh 1990:290f.

¹³¹ The spreading of recordings and translations of such 'sohbets' by Sheikh Nazim, as well as other information, through the Internet is dealt with in Stjernholm 2005.

believers who claim to be part of the community but who undermine spirituality through various ways. This critical and rather harsh speech, specifically delivered to the British murids in Peckham mosque, was also quickly spread through the Internet to those murids unable to attend the speech.¹³² The importance of being close to the imam in the derga, Sheikh Abdul Hamid, who has been taught personally by Sheikh Nazim, is also stressed by the informants. By learning from a person who has spent so much time with Sheikh Nazim brings oneself closer to him as well. One informant even urged me to note the physical resemblance Sheikh Abdul Hamid shows to Sheikh Nazim, apart from the turban and the rest of his outfit.

Another important aspect of each murid's rabita with the sheikh is the personal visits to his home in Lefke in Turkish Cyprus. I encountered several participants, in addition to the main informants, who enthusiastically told me of their experiences of visiting the sheikh in Cyprus. As has been related above, during my time in London Sheikh Nazim's wife, Hajja Amina, passed away. This meant that a significant number of London murids hastily left for Cyprus; among them Sheikh Abdul Hamid and the above mentioned Silat master. According to informants, many others accompanied them. Travels to Cyprus are, even when something extraordinary like this hasn't happened, evidently part of life as a Naqshbandi-Haqqani murid in London. All of my informants have visited the sheikh in Cyprus at least once.

5.6.1 Personal narratives about Sheikh Nazim and visits to Cyprus

One night in the derga, a murid entered the door with a shining smile on his face, approached the group of people with whom I was standing and starting a bubbling enthusiastic account of his visit to Cyprus, from where he had returned the same afternoon. His eyes glowing with joy, his tongue unstoppably recounting what he'd experienced and his feet barely able to stay still, it was obvious this trip had had a great impact on him. That night he whirled during dhikr, which he usually didn't. It's the first time I have seen someone actually fall to the floor when whirling. The murid told us of 'signs' that Sheikh Nazim had shown him to guide him during his stay. Firstly, as he came off the airplane in Cyprus, he asked for a sign that it had been right for him to undertake this journey. As he walked from the plane towards the arrival zone of the airport, he saw a strange light phenomenon appear in the sky, like a rainbow but in the shape of a vertical pole instead of a bow. He urged the other people present to look, and no-one had ever seen anything like it before. The murid interpreted this as a sign from the sheikh, telling him he was right to come to Cyprus. This specific murid is a musician, and makes his living playing with a band in London. He told me he had hesitated to go home to

¹³² <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/the-heart/message/2825> (2005-09-29).

London for a gig that had been planned for a long time, and finally he decided to stay a few days more in Cyprus, although this meant cancelling an important gig. As it turned out, he found out upon returning that there had been no gig; his memory had deceived him. He took this as a sign from the sheikh that he had taken the right decision to stay longer in Cyprus. Narratives of ‘miracles’ like these are common when the murids talk about the sheikh.

The personal narratives of the informants concerns such things as the first encounter, experiencing the love and power flowing from the sheikh’s person, his eyes and smile, the way he looks straight through you, and words of wisdom given in unexpected ways. One informant told me of his first (and so far only) visit to Cyprus; he had travelled around the Middle East for some time and was running out of money. ‘At this time I looked like Neil Young.’ He decided to go to Cyprus with his last money, having been advised to do so by an acquaintance in London. He asked his way around, finally arriving at the residence of Sheikh Nazim. The sheikh met him as he entered, saying ‘I have been expecting you.’ This first meeting with the sheikh was crucial for the future of this murid’s life.

Another story involves the marriage of one of my informants and his wife. They wanted to get the sheikh’s blessings over their future marriage once when the sheikh was in London. Instead of blessing their relationship, however, Sheikh Nazim married them right there on the spot. Later on he also gave names to their two children, and last time the family visited Cyprus he wouldn’t let the wife and children go home when my informant did – he had to go back because of his work, but the rest of the family was persuaded to stay with the sheikh another week. This informant told me, concerning meeting Sheikh Nazim, that

when you see him in person, you get a taste. It’s difficult to describe, you will know and you will feel this love. So much love. So much power. You look at him and you don’t want him to leave you. There’s a feeling that comes when you physically see him, you feel overwhelmed, honoured, special. Insh’allah, you will experience it. (...) The sheikh’s eyes. Pure love is pouring from them. I never met a person with that much attraction, and so much humbleness at the same time; I had to (...).

Being in the presence of a ‘holy person’ thus bears significant marks. Even when looking at pictures of the sheikh, this feeling is evoked. When pictures were shown to me, both in the derga and in the house of one informant, I was asked whether I felt something special. My reply to this was ‘no’, whereupon I was instructed to open up my heart to the love that flows from the sheikh. I was also given pictures of the sheikh to bear with me.

A typical day in Cyprus, according to one informant, follows these routines: you wake up and pray early in the morning, and then you rest. Later on you have coffee and come to listen to the sheikh's talks. Between *'asr* and *maghrib* prayers you speak with the brothers. Then you might go somewhere else to have dinner, and after the evening prayer it's time for dhikr. Sheikh Nazim doesn't lead the prayers, but he does lead the evening dhikr. When seeing the sheikh's way of life and the simplicity of everything surrounding him and his home, 'you see how spoiled you are, even though you think you live a simple life'. To stay in Cyprus gives a lesson in humbleness, and it is 'the best place – to be with Mawlana'. The need of following the sheikh and being close to him, was compared to my own studies at the university; 'why do you go to the university? Because you need to go to the persons who know things: the teachers. That's why we need to stay with Mawlana, he shows us the way, always.'

6 Analysis

Given the fact that Muslim communities in Britain have been largely defined by shared ethnic background and cultural similarities, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani tariqa can be said to represent a new development regarding Muslim activity in this part of the world. The ethnic boundaries are broken, opening up for new features of religiosity and collective action within a Muslim framework. Instead of a mosque that mainly is a cultural centre for people originating from the same area, or a base for certain imported schools of thought and ritual practices, such as the Deobandi and Barelwi traditions, the Tottenham derga offers something different. What brings the participants of the various activities in the derga together is not a shared background, a certain geographically defined area or imported rural cultural expressions of religiosity. Many ethnicities are present with no one 'original' nationality that has copyright of the tariqa's authenticity. Participants from Palestine, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Cornwall join together in dhikr, prayer and small talk. But most striking is the ease with which various cultural expressions, habits and products are mixed together – the combination of 'classic Ottoman' style of dress and Malaysian martial arts within the walls of the derga is, by all standards, groundbreaking. Moreover, it seems each Naqshbandi-Haqqani centre fosters its own mix of the message from the sheikhs, experiences and qualities of the individual participants, and not least the impact of the local surrounding with its set of possibilities and constraints. The individual participants come from different ethnic, class- and professional backgrounds, further pushing the movement away from the more clearly defined communities that have represented Islam in Britain earlier.

6.1 Naqshbandi-Haqqani as a social movement

6.1.1 Fulfilling the analytical dimensions

The above mentioned features of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani in London provide a number of reasons for viewing it from the perspective of social movement theories. To do this in the present context we must relate it to the definitions and key features of Alberto Melucci's thoughts on what constitutes a social movement. His definition, presented in chapter 2, involves three dimensions: 1) solidarity, 2) an element of conflict, and 3) a breaking of the limits of compatibility with the surrounding reference system. The solidarity dimension (or the ability to recognise each other and be recognised as being a social unit) we see fulfilled

through the murids' common strife to act in certain ways. The style of dress in the derga is one such uniting action. In addition to 'knowing' each other by the way they dress, their eyes being trained to spot the symbolic details (such as colourful jubba and turban, talismans and special trousers), clothes also distinguish the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis from other groups. My informants pointed out this several times, describing the clothes of contesting Muslim groups. One informant even said 'the pants' were the initial reason he got interested in the Naqshbandi way to start with. All the three reasons for dressing in this particular way, which I listed in chapter 5, underline the unifying solidarity dimension; apart from distinguishing oneself, both struggling to resemble the person they commonly refer to as their sheikh and the pride being taken in wearing well, thus strengthening the reliance on the assumption that their religion is the one true path. Other unifying and solidarity-promoting actions are the ones taken part in on their free time – the physical training here plays a significant role. Not only are the martial arts training and the archery shooting performed in a group, they are also mutually and actively proclaimed to be part of the sunna (which here serves as a common reference system symbolising truth). Evidence in favour of these presumptions are found in the books and well-spread speeches of Sheikh Nazim and his deputies, which are all read by the murids and therefore related to and discussed in a common way. The ease with which the murids talk about and recount the authorised explanations for performing these actions shows the importance this has for relations in-between them, and makes it clear that they share a framework of cognitive definitions, points of reference and 'knowledge'.

The element of conflict has already been touched upon in the section above. The Naqshbandi-Haqqani clearly identifies themselves against other Muslim groups. The so-called 'Salafi' and 'Wahhabi' groups are most commonly mentioned, but there is more to be found in this. As my young informant explained, the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis are 'more spiritual' than other tariqas. The informant which had been studying in Cairo joined the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis after having experienced dhikr with several other tariqas – he even travels a long way back and forth (from Ascot west of London to the derga in Eastern London) between his home and the derga every time he pays it a visit, which usually is twice a week. Note also that Sheikh Hisham in his speech in Peckham mosque in 2005 warned for hypocrites; both within the own tariqa and among Muslims in general. It is clear that the murids of Naqshbandi-Haqqani view themselves and their tariqa to hold the true religion – why would they otherwise show such eagerness to convert new members and encourage them to take part in their rituals, read their books and view their sheikhs the same way they do (which is evident in the way I was treated as a newcomer)? Melucci describes conflict as opposition towards an

opponent who makes claims to the same area or set of properties and utilities. In my interpretation, it is possible to view 'Islam' as such an area, which contesting actors make claims to based on various arguments, actions, lineages or interpretations. The Naqshbandi-Haqqani as a tariqa has, through the words of its' leading sheikhs, made a global claim to the area of Islam with its' properties and utilities; note Sheikh Hisham's speech at the US State Department where he warned for extremists in the name of Islam. Sheikh Hisham has in several publications also made claims that the different features of the tradition that the tariqa maintains, including ritual behaviour and the role of the sheikhs, represent true Islam. This battle for legitimacy and claims to the 'Islamicness' of certain actions, practices and interpretations, is undertaken by the local members as well, in a very practical way. Every dhikr is a collective action, every kissing of a hand is a symbolic statement, every picture of the sheikh looked at, printed and spread is not only a 'spreading of the word', but it is also a provocation to the groups pointed out as false. The topics and activities presented in chapter 5 serve as symbolic means in the conflict in which the tariqa (both at a global and local level) is engaged. The contestants fight in a battle for the area of Islam (which, if won, leads to sympathy, legitimacy, attention, media spotlights, increased membership numbers, i.e. in the end, power) and they do it through their everyday practices authorised by the sheikh and carried out in their local environment.

Mentioning the local environment leads us to the Melucci's third dimension of social movement: breaking the limits of compatibility of that environment. The reference system which provides those limits in this case consists of the largely secular British environment with its demand of certain types of rationality, as well as the social exclusion imposed on Muslims in general because of racism and islamophobia. By advocating the hidden truths of spirituality and placing their manifestations (such as: 'religious' meanings ascribed to supposedly secular activities like physical training; belief in the performance of miracles by a charismatic spiritual leader; submission to the wills and powers to a person claiming to represent divine light; showing ones' Muslimness in manner of dress and, to certain extent, professional occupations) in the open, the participants in the Naqshbandi-Haqqani community challenges the dominant cultural codes and more or less verbalised foundations of the environment within which they take action. The fact that the tariqa's leaders specifically focus on the spiritual 'poverty' in the largely secularised societies of Western Europe and North America, shows a determination on their behalf to provide their 'truth' as a better alternative and thus challenge secular presumptions taken for granted by many of the inhabitants of these areas.

6.1.2 'Activism' revisited: the need for redefinitions

Taking the above into account, I would argue in favour of calling the participants in the activities and topics raised by the Naqshbandi-Haqqani not only 'actors', but 'activists'. The term 'activist' often brings to mind militant or at least more openly political Muslim groups and individuals; this association, however, rests on a narrow definition of activism.¹³³ The struggle to change and improve society by changing and improving individuals, through ambitiously staged collective actions and behaviour, deserves to be included in the term activism. An activism more aimed at the individuals' morality and inner state, but in the long run this is aimed also to affect society at large. We should remember Melucci's caution of too narrow views of what 'political' or 'efficiency' means, allowing ourselves to see the 'hidden efficiency' that lies in the production of symbols and relations which create and consolidate collective identity, thus laying a foundation for collective action.

Proselytising is one aspect of this. Condemnation and refutation of other groups battling or engaged in conflict over the same 'area' (analytically speaking), calling them 'Salafis' or 'Wahhabis' or rejecting them as extremists, or simply denouncing their spiritual qualities (for example other Sufi communities), is another. The Naqshbandi-Haqqanis are engaged in a daily battle over the right to define 'Islam' and spirituality, and make no secret of that they believe themselves to walk the true spiritual path – except when humbleness in this issue serves their particular interests (compare the quote from Draper's article above). Every participant struggles both on his own, performing his/her duties prescribed in the material offered from the leading sheikhs, and as part of a community which gives strength to keep on. The collective that gathers twice a week (and more often for extra events such as training) provides a repeated affirmation of the correctness of the murid's choice, the importance of keeping one's identity, and of sharing one's knowledge of spiritual truths with the brothers and sisters.

Here the relations between participants come into focus. Collective identity, we have stated above in chapter 2, is based on three features: shared cognitive definitions, active relationships and emotional investments. Collective identity is a process that needs reaffirmation, strengthening of relationships, and continued negotiation over what is 'true'. All these parts of the process are clearly to be recognised among the Naqshbandi-Haqqani. Consequently, in our analysis we do not focus on any 'spiritual quality' or 'degree of Islamic orthodoxy' to judge or define the movement; what is regarded central are the relations that

¹³³ Compare my discussion above of Wiktorowicz 2004a, 2004b, and 2004c, and Melucci's redefinition of 'efficiency' in chapter 2.

constitute the movement and the various ways in which shared and performed actions take the form of organised collective action: social movement – activism. The tariqa's adherents undoubtedly defines themselves as 'Islamic', and are conscious (in my material from one local context) to promote that view at all times. We may therefore speak of an Islamic activism in the form of a Sufi movement in Western Europe. It should not be any obstacle that the community doesn't engage in militant or overtly political projects; this activism is engaged with another level than the instrumental, rational physical action which often is exclusively dubbed 'activism'. In doing this, we aim to avoid the trap of political reductionism, only judging a movement by the instrumental, measurable effects of its action, instead of seeing the process leading to that action and how that process affect the participating individuals.

6.1.3 Charisma and affective identification

Leadership is here seen as a form of interaction, as stated above. Charismatic leadership rests on that certain qualities and powers are ascribed to a specific person who is regarded extra suitable to lead his/her followers towards the ends of the movement at hand. But this leader-follower relationship is not only dependent on the leader's alleged qualities and powers; we must see the importance of those ascribing those qualities to him. The Naqshbandi-Haqqanis are clearly to be positioned within the field of movements relying on charismatic leadership. Sheikh Nazim is, as Nielsen said above, the tariqa and the tariqa is the sheikh. It is impossible to try to understand the movement without recognising the central function he fills. In every conversation I had with informants, on every website hosted by adherents to the tariqa, and even in the daily events such as prayer and clothing, the sheikh is mentioned, remembered and imitated. The participants are fully dependent on his ability to lead them in the right direction. They spend time and money on travelling to be in his presence; and when they are not, they recall his image, imitate it, and read, watch or listen to his words and appearance.

The concepts of *suhba* and *rabita* which were discussed in chapter 5 should be brought to mind; given the transnational character of the tariqa and the distance between the murids and their sheikh, new ways of 'associating' and 'connecting' with the sheikh have had to be found. The organisation tied to the sheikh strives to do this through for example books, websites, deputies' travels and preaching. But the individual murid also has a role in this; through his/her affective identification with the sheikh, and the sharing of that identification with the community of murids surrounding him/her, an active role should be ascribed to every murid as well. The active 'living out' of this affective identification is a statement to others; it

signifies a determination to act according to the choice of the bay'a, or profession of adherence. It affects other murids as well, and relations between murids seem to rely heavily upon the shared affective identification with the sheikh and the subsequent determination to imitate and follow him. The charismatic dimension of the sheikh's leadership, then, does not solely rest with him, but also with the actions of individual murids as part of the process of identity.

6.2 The struggle for purity

In chapter 5, various aspects of the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis' activism were described. They include different practices, seemingly aimed at different ends. But when murids are questioned, and each activity is put into a larger perspective, one word singles out as the main end to which every murid is striving: purity. This word defines what the murids aim their activities at; purifying their hearts and 'killing the ego', i.e. removing lower desires and moral imperfections. They want to 'fill their heart with love' until there isn't room for anything but this love. Even the Silat training is part of this quest for purity; one could say the participants practice self-defence against their own egos. The humiliating movements required at the first level of Silat was said to be effective in this way, because 'the ego gets a good kick out of that'. Likewise, dhikr helps cleansing the heart and make you 'feel the presence of the sheikh' among the participants and in your own heart. The sheikh is regarded as the perfect example, since he has no ego and therefore is pure. Thus, every action undertaken to imitate and be close to him, such as clothing, vocabulary, and rabita, is aimed at achieving purity as well.

The very word purity bears in it a distinct reference to the environment in which the murids are active, too. The derga is situated in a not very fancy area of London, and London being a metropolitan centre, it has its portion of 'sin' and 'immorality' and manifestations of people's 'egos' overtly present for anyone to see. Struggling to obtain purity is thus a rejection of the very space where this struggle takes place. My young informant who warned me of sin in the form of for example alcohol and women exemplifies this well. At the age of seventeen, he chooses not to live the kind of life many of those his age indulge in; instead, he spends time in the derga and whirls during dhikr for 'the strength to keep me strong' and on the right path – that of the sheikh, towards purity.

6.3 Neo-brotherhood, Euro-Sufism or what?

Religion exists in a social environment – a social context is both ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ when it comes to religious collectives. This must be taken into account if we are to characterise, categorise, and generalise a religious community. This study has focused on the social meanings that allegedly religious or spiritual practices bear, and their ability to create a collective identity as a basis for collective action. The choice of analysing the Naqshbandi-Haqqani within a theoretical framework of social movement theories is a conscious choice aiming at several consequences. One is focusing on the social dimensions of contemporary Sufism, analysing its social and collective practice instead of focusing on individual spirituality or evaluating the degree of adherence or deviance from certain ideas of orthodoxy. Therefore it was necessary during the fieldwork to focus on the common participant of the Sufi community, since they are the very base of the community – although they would probably claim quite the opposite, namely, that the sheikh is everything and they are themselves insignificant. I hope to have shown, however, that this type of reasoning is one of the ingredients within the framework of identity-producing practices that the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis engage in.

Another aim with focusing the social aspects of Sufism, is taking distinctive steps towards bridging the gap between social theory and studies of religion (see the criticism of NSM theorists offered by Beckford in chapter 2) and, more precisely, providing evidence that Sufism deserves attention at the same level as other forms of ‘Islamic activism’ in contemporary societies. It is my firm belief that similar conclusions regarding the process of collective identity, taking into account the specific types of relations, behavioural patterns, and aim for the resulting collective action of each particular community, can be drawn regarding other Sufi communities than the one studied here. It is a matter of shifting focus to include social as well as spiritual aspects of a community, and a widening of the theoretical scope to include thoughts on social movements. An illustrative example: what is sometimes called ‘Neo-Sufism’ is often mentioned alongside ‘New Age’ religiosity; ‘New Age’, on the other hand, is regularly mentioned as one type of NSM. But why haven’t this presumed connection and likeness been taken further than that? Perhaps we should try to speak of ‘New Islamic Movements’, when appropriate, rather than merely distinguishing whether communities spring from Sufi or Islamist backgrounds, and how they reflect that background, which of course also is valuable knowledge. This could be a way of acknowledging similar

types of identity-shaping, internal relations, and bases for collective action – even though the actions themselves may be very dissimilar.

When it comes to the study and categorisation of contemporary Sufism, especially Sufi communities and activities in Western Europe and North America, too much effort is often put into defining it, and to what extent, something is ‘Islamic’ – easily ending up in an unintended essentialism regarding ‘Islam’. Instead, in my opinion, scholars could spend effort studying what is actually said and done, which sources of inspiration and legitimacy are referred to and relied upon, and how the social environment influences and is influenced by religious frameworks. True, there exists a need for terminological means of describing differences between groups representing different religious trends and developments – but that terminology should be constructed to suit actual empirical findings, not vice versa. Concepts such as ‘Neo-Sufism’, ‘Islamic Sufism’ and ‘Euro-Sufism’, in my opinion easily get stuck in comparisons regarding ‘Islamicness’ which can prevent a more thorough analysis of what a development signifies. There is a risk of producing images of ‘Islam’ and ‘Sufism’ into distinctive categories with a defined content and actors in their own right.¹³⁴

In evaluating Olivier Roy’s above referred description of neo-brotherhoods in relation to the Naqshbandi-Haqqani, I must conclude that the description both fits and doesn’t fit. Many features of the generalised neo-brotherhood (such as: the usage of modern technologies and print to spread the sheikh’s message; the joining of an alleged neo-brotherhood as an individual instead of as part of a family structure; the direct and complete access to knowledge through books, videos, websites and the like; a degree of syncretism, for example the whirling dhikr, which has not been part of the Naqshbandi tradition), but several of them are more dubious. The extent to which being member of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani affects your professional life is one issue; some have occupations clearly connected to their following of Sheikh Nazim, some don’t. It doesn’t, to my knowledge, seem to be a fitting generalisation overall. Moreover, Roy claims that the members don’t have regular direct contact with the sheikh themselves, but only through meetings arranged by an organisation tied to the sheikh. This is partly true, given that when Sheikh Nazim or his deputies travel, they hold large public meetings for the followers to attend, and these meetings are often documented and spread for others to share. But in addition to this, many conduct personal visits to the sheikh’s home, when possible, to stay there in his presence among other followers. All my informants claim to have a personal relationship to the sheikh, based on different narratives regarding their own

¹³⁴ Compare Stenberg 2001:116f.

life. Some of these are very concrete (for example the murid whose marriage was conducted by the sheikh, as well as the naming of his children), while others are more abstract (like the ‘miracles’ performed to another murid during his stay in Cyprus). It’s a question of definition: how often is ‘regular’ in Roy’s vocabulary? Clearly, the personal contact with the sheikh is not as extensive as that of a murid following his sheikh during his long period of suhba in traditional Naqshbandi practice; but as we have seen (chapter 5, section on suhba) this practice was challenged, for practical reasons, even by Mawlana Khalid in the 19th century. Another of Roy’s features of neo-brotherhoods is the search for self-realisation, which, according to him, is more prominent for a member than the quest for salvation. I would say that it’s difficult to draw the line between these two. There is a strong sense of self-realisation in the activities practiced and the reflexivity over certain topics (like clothing, and distinguishing oneself from other Muslim groups), but I can’t draw any all-comprehensive conclusion as to which is predominant: the wish to ‘enjoy’ the community’s activities, or an urging quest for salvation.

In sum, Roy’s categorisation of neo-brotherhoods is interesting in its attempt to capture what contemporary Sufism in Western Europe and North America is going towards; but perhaps Roy is too eager to generalise and thus misses out on the double meaning or inseparability of certain issues, like self-realisation and salvation. Moreover, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani as a transnational movement can, for certain, not be generalised in a short summary, considering the great diversity of its’ various local branches worldwide. As Nielsen (chapter 1) comments, whenever one tries to generalise the movement in broad terms, one has to realise that there are exceptions.

For this reason, I have not attempted here to categorise and generalise the Naqshbandi-Haqqani in ‘Islamic’ or ‘Sufi’ terms, but instead to re-contextualise it within a framework of social relations, symbolic actions and collective identity. Analysed this way, even though the present work only deals with one specific Sufi centre, I believe one can create another type of understanding of how a Muslim community in contemporary Western Europe functions internally, and perceives of itself in relation to its environment.

6.4 Thoughts on further research on the Naqshbandi-Haqqani

As has been emphasised earlier, the study of Sufism in its relatively new environments in Western Europe and the US is still in its early stages. Many of the works that has been carried out so far mostly focus on ethnically defined or imported Sufi cults with their spiritual focuses

in their countries of origin. I believe that, to a growing extent, Muslim communities in the mentioned parts of the world cross these borders, like the Naqshbandi-Haqqani. In the present work social relations and identity-shaping have been focused, but there is still a lack of comprehensive studies on the more theological side of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani – much due, I believe, to the vast material of websites, books and booklets, videos and recordings that should be included in such a study. It could, however, provide an overall view of the official stances of the tariqa's leaders. Still, as has been mentioned above, those leaders adapt their message to local environments, which perhaps would make a study of the official material shallow for understanding how that material is used by the followers.

Another topic of great interest would be a study of how the various branches of the tariqa in the US work – especially Kamilat, which according to Böttcher (chapter 1) is run by and dedicated to issues concerning women. Böttcher states that Hajja Amina, the late wife of Sheikh Nazim, ran the movement: what, then, has happened with its activities since her death? Is the Kamilat still active, and if so, in what ways? Is the Kamilat an arena for women to have a more prominent position than has been the case in most Muslim communities throughout history?

An extended study of the present one, with the same basic assumptions and theoretical outlook, would certainly also be most rewarding: the study could take a larger material into account, comparing different dergas, and aim to map both internal and external (to other Muslim communities as well as to surrounding societal institutions) relations more extensively. The UK is one country where this would be recommendable because of the solid presence the tariqa has there, and has had since the early 1970s. A more integrated perspective on physical practice and various lines of communications could then be developed as well.

Given that the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis are transnationally active, and that diverse representations of the tariqa are present in various parts of the world, it is actually difficult to think of reasons *not* to engage in further studies of its different aspects and activities. The tariqa's leaders seem determined to make their way of Islam even more well-spread and influential – it is likewise difficult, given the success it already has enjoyed, to see why their mission would fail.

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