

# Contents

<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	vii
Introduction	1
1. Modernization Theory Questioned	9
2. A Brief History of Sufism	21
3. A History of Sudanese Sufi Orders through the Khatmiyya	31
Early Tariqa Phase	
Eighteen Century Taruq	
The Khatmiyya	
4. The Mahdiyya	51
5. Political Evolution	65
Authority	
The Body Politique	
The Mahdist Government	

Modern Political Involvement	
6. Sufi Millenarianism in China	91
Conclusion	111
<i>Notes</i>	119
<i>Glossary</i>	141
<i>Bibliography</i>	144
<i>Index</i>	152

## **Introduction**

Islam is an enigma to the Western world. It has no political ideologies, especially those that coincide with the twenty-first century. It is backward, violent and completely undemocratic. Islam reacts to events and its reactions are customarily anti-western and anti-modern. This is one of the most disturbing perceptions today of how the West views Islam —both as a religion and a culture, especially in the political arena. As there are only a handful of

Muslim countries that have embraced some sort of democracy or democratic traditions, the most obvious assumption is that Islamic countries cannot and will not be able to ever become democratic in any sense of the word that those from the West understand. This is because the Western world is educated to think of a political system in terms of a liberal democracy. It is usually very difficult to accept political systems outside of the scope of democracy that are considered normal and acceptable to other people. Because of this Western education, Islam is basically perceived of as a religion that impedes any type of development or modernity. This assumption is even more prevalent in the events since September 2001.

However, this premise is actually quite false. It is first necessary to accept that most of what impedes the democratization and modernization of Islam is based more the tradition of the people than what is contained in its religious doctrines. Moreover, unlike Western countries that developed their democratic ideals through contact with each other, Muslim society did not have any neighboring country from which to draw that experience. The contact Islam has had in its growth and development been one that incorporated others into their way of life. However, that is not to say that Islam has no contact with concepts of democracy. Actually, Islam holds certain modernizing elements that go back to its inception, especially within the political sphere.

Islam is much more than a simple religion. It is an all-encompassing way of life, which addresses all modalities:

social, economical and political. The political tone within Islam was one that arose in the formation of the religion. As long as Muhammed was alive, he was the undisputed head of both the faith and the community. He subjugated all areas within his reach and pronounced himself the sovereign ruler. Laws were made, justice dispensed, taxes levied, war waged and peace concluded. In essence, Muhammed created a quasi government. However, the political overtones he set manifested themselves immediately following his death.

The first issue to confront the Islamic community was how to organize government after the death of Muhammed. Because this was a very central issue among Muslims, different vehicles for expressing political activism arose in the Islamic community. One such response came from Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqa*, *sing. taruq*, *pl.*). Sufi brotherhoods originally were established to be a guide to achieve a closer union with God. As time passed, they evolved from their initial essence to one that incorporated political activism and sectarianism. It is because of their politically active nature, Sufi brotherhoods have been able to speak for their communities and in many cases have transformed into viable political parties. It is their religious alliances that give them the ability to form a cohesive unit that has political power.

Since its inception, Islam has had a history of sectarianism (*taifiya*). Sectarianism in this sense refers to the religious alliances formed in the Islamic world, especially during periods of conflict. It demonstrates a

continuing belief and loyalty of the religious orders. The Islamic community arose out of the prophetic revelations sent to Muhammed, but the spread of its message was accomplished basically through military conquests, *jihad*. Through the centuries, Islam has looked at itself, finding the need to revitalize and reform in order to keep the original message in tact. This expression is more commonly known as millennial Islam. It is one of "the means of expressing dissatisfaction with the state of society... when the Islamic community has felt imminent danger to its world of value and meaning."<sup>1</sup> This usually occurred with militant overtones, whether in strictly Muslim countries or in ones with a sizable Muslim population.

As Islam has been build upon tradition, it also has a history of *taqlid*, or the unquestioning imitation or following of tradition, past legal or doctrinal precedents. Although in its past, Islam has adapted and transformed, it was not until the nineteenth century that serious modern challenges emerged. Intense pressure was put on Islam to reexamine itself, its social structures and institutions. This was done as the majority of the Islamic world had come in contact with Western hegemony and its values. There was also the confrontation with those who considered themselves experts and critics of the authenticity of traditional Islamic Qur'anic literature. The perceived strength of the West forced questions of Islamic communities and required that action be taken to renew the glory and intrinsic power once found there.

There are many different regions where revival and reform occurred beginning at the middle of the nineteenth century. It was not particular to one or two regions. Many Islamic communities found that the casual expression of their identity was not sufficient to bind their communities together. In many of these instances, Sufi brotherhoods were the ones to initiate many movements of revitalization.

Sufi brotherhoods represent the mystical path within Islam. They are historically concerned with achieving an inner spirituality, and as such, are seemingly apolitical and outside of any secular activities. However, the nineteenth century was to change this perception, especially in region where there were sizable Sufi populations. Sufi brotherhoods illustrate that mystical religious orders have been able to transform into vehicles of political modernization and expression, even becoming modern political parties and interest groups. This has been noted many times by those who study Sufism, but the reasons why such a transformation has occurred has been rarely examined. Moreover, this phenomenon has occurred, especially during the nineteenth century in various places where there is both a majority and non-majority Islamic population. By examining this shift to political activism in Sufi brotherhoods, it is possible to identify the underlying causes in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics of certain Islamic groups and why they have been able to become a modern political force, expressing the goals of their followers.

An examination of this type is important inasmuch as Western stereotypes of Islam, especially with the resurgence of Islamic activism, are basically inaccurate. There is a fundamental misunderstanding between the West and Islamic world in regards to political thought and action. The West is unable to comprehend that Islam is able to transform from within to meet the constant changes occurring in the modern world, particularly in the political and economic arena. It is inconceivable that Islam, especially Sufism, has the innate ability to adapt itself. Sufi brotherhoods, however, are excellent examples of how Islam is able to change from traditional religious affiliations into modern secular ones, exercising power in the political arena.

In order to gain a basic understanding of the evolution of the Sufi brotherhoods, two Sufist movements will be studied. By examining and contrasting movements in two diverse regions, it is easier to put the entire phenomenon into a global explanation. In each instance, one can see that if taken as a separate incidence, the comprehensive significance of the activism occurring is not readily seen or understood. But when incidences occur concurrently, and are examined within that context, the significance of the actions taking place contains more noteworthy implications. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explain why brotherhoods transformed into modern political parties and as well as becoming a vehicle to express dissatisfaction with a governing power, seen which will be in the case studies of the Sudan<sup>2</sup> and China respectively.

The following chapter looks at the methods and ideologies that have arisen through political modernization theory to see if the political power achieved could possibly fit into these paradigms. Although the modernization theories of the 1960s have been previously considered passé, there has been a trend to revisit them. Not all components of these theories are useful; however, they do provide a framework in which one is able to analyze particularities occurring within a political setting, especially from a western perspective. By applying the components in modernization theories, one is able to gain a better understanding of the transformations occurring.

In order to understand its legitimacy as a political force, Sufism must be briefly examined to show how it originally acquired legitimacy within the Islamic world. A careful investigation of the historical rise of the brotherhoods to political activism will be made by analyzing two movements in two different regions in the world: the Sudan and China. In the Sudan, the Khatmiyya and Mahdiyya in particular offer a look into the evolution of classical Sufism to political activism. An analysis of their internal structure and the authority held by their leaders indicates that modern paradigms are expressionless since Islam has been its own modernizing force since its conception. Furthermore, evidence suggests that Sufism and its internal setup are similar to those advocated by Western paradigms of modernization.

This investigation contributes further not only as to why the Khatmiyya and Mahdiyya became legitimate

political forces within an Islamic context, but a modern one as well. The study underlines the fact that the millennial experience in the Sudan was not an isolated case at the time when it began. Because lines of communication went past the borders of countries, millennial Sufism appeared in many places at the same time. To show how the lines of communication and brotherhood cohesiveness influenced similar expressions of dissatisfaction, the nineteenth century revival and reform movement started by the Sufi brotherhood, the Naqsbandiyya, in China is explored. The correlation of events in these two regions will demonstrate that Sufi brotherhoods by nature of their intrinsic internal and external organization are not only political forces, but modernizing ones as well.

Islam first made inroads into the Sudan before the eleventh century by the Arab Muslims involved with the caravan trade from Cairo, and then was spread by tribal leaders. Most of the penetration into sub-Saharan Africa is attributed, today, to the Almorvids (*al-Murābitūn*) who were the chief promulgators of the religion in the eleventh century.<sup>3</sup> However, the Arabization of the Sudan came from the penetration of Arab tribes (*qabila*, *sing. qaba'ilun pl.*),<sup>4</sup> which were already established in the upper Nile valley region.<sup>5</sup> By the middle of the fifteenth century, these Arab nomadic tribes were responsible for the Islamization and Arabization of the three Christian kingdoms in the present-day country of Sudan.<sup>6</sup> With the beginning of the Funj sultanate in 1504,<sup>7</sup> Sudanese Islam entered into a three hundred year period of expansion. One of the principal

elements for the growth of Islam in the Sudanese area was Sufism, which was being carried throughout the Islamic empire during this period by nomadic merchants, teachers, and Muslim soldiers. As it will be shown, the Sufi groups that developed would be quite successful in spreading Islam. In addition, through an examination of the two major brotherhoods, the Khatmiyya and the Mahdiyya, it will be demonstrated how the loosely organized Sudanese Sufi brotherhoods were able to manifest themselves into a major political force. This evolution has permitted Sufi orders to become two of the main political parties in the Sudan.

The Sudan, however, is not the only place where Sufism acted as a political force, or one that bound the Islamic community together. As will be further shown, Sufism acted as an impetus in China at approximately the same time as it did in the Sudan, pulling together a disjointed Islamic population. It gave Chinese Muslims the opportunity to express both their identity and cohesiveness in light of having an appreciable population in a non-Muslim country. The Chinese Islamic experience demonstrates that although rebellion has traditionally been a part of Chinese history, the movement that occurred in the Muslim community was not case specific to China, nor had its roots only in the discord that was occurring then. As in the Sudan, the Chinese movement proved that Sufi brotherhoods were a political force, expressing the desires of its followers and responding to the changes occurring with modernity.