

Neo-Sufism: Examining the Roots of the Islamic reform Movement called “Neo-Sufism”

Master’s thesis

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## Introduction

Islamic fundamentalism is capturing the headlines in today's world. IS (Islamic State) is spreading rapidly. Horror stories concerning IS's activities are reported extensively by the media, especially the Western media. However, less attention has been given to the origins of IS, or how Islamic fundamentalism has evolved in recent history. This can be related to the fact that Western scholarship has taken little interest in phenomena concerning the Islamic world and, as a consequence, there is a lack of objective information about these kinds of phenomena. Also, the academic literature that exists about these topics is still based on colonial sources. There is a growing need for more academic research on phenomena concerning the Middle East and the existing literature should be deconstructed. It is important that this lack of knowledge and gap in the academic literature about these kinds of phenomena diminishes in order to get a better understanding of the violent encounter of Islamic fundamentalism with the contemporary world.

This study aims to contribute to closing this gap in the academic literature by analysing the phenomenon of neo-Sufism. This movement is an Islamic reform movement and it has played an important role in resisting Western imperialism in the late 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Although this phenomenon took place centuries ago, there is no consensus in the academic literature on the interpretation of this phenomenon. The polemical discussion of the concept neo-Sufism is about whether a 'new' and clearly distinctive form of Sufism can be appropriated for the movement called neo-Sufism.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the roots of neo-Sufism and particular attention is paid to its reaction to Western colonial powers. Also, attention is given to the relationship between neo-Sufism and Salafism. Salafism is another reform movement of Islam that emerged in the 19th century and can be characterised as fundamentalist and extremist. Although the Sufi philosophy and the range of ideas found in Salafism are diametrically opposed to each other, possible parallels can also be drawn between the rise of both movements.

In order to understand the roots of neo-Sufism and possible continuities or discontinuities with earlier Sufism, first Sufism is explained and then the socio-political role of Sufi brotherhoods during the Middle Ages is outlined. Secondly, the phenomenon of neo-Sufism and its reaction to Western colonial powers are assessed. This chapter ends with a description of how this phenomenon is interpreted in the academic literature. Finally, the relationship between Sufism and Salafism will be addressed by drawing parallels between the rise of neo-Sufism and Salafism and investigate possible influences of Sufism in Salafism.

## Chapter 1. What is Sufism?

Sufism is a contested concept in both the Western and Islamic worlds. Ernst (2011) argues that the current concept of Sufism was created by European sources. Some of these sources are Orientalist constructions of Sufism as a sect with an unclear relation with Islam (Ernst, 2011:2).

‘Orientalism’ is a term used by Western scholars or artists to denote the East. In his book ‘Orientalism’, Edward Said (1978) created a more restricted definition of the term. Said (1978) considered the Western definition to be characteristic of a patronising Western attitude toward Eastern societies, used to justify Western imperialism. The West, in his analysis, depicts these societies as underdeveloped and static. Implicit in this fabrication of the East is the idea that the Western world is developed, rational, flexible and superior, while Oriental societies embody the opposite values (Said, 1978:33).

Carl W. Ernst (2011) argues that the concept of Sufism originates from European sources and stresses that these sources emphasise exotic behaviour that is very different from European norms. In a colonial context this terminology emphasised the dangers of the fanatical resistance of Sufism to European rule (Ernst, 2011:3). However, he also describes how European Orientalists discover Sufism as a mystical form of religion and that these so-called ‘Soffees’ were much more attractive than the hated Ottoman Turks; they were poets who loved music and dance. Some considered them freethinkers who had much in common with true Christianity and Greek philosophy (Ernst, 2011:9). Ernst (2011) stresses that the term ‘Sufism’ was invented at the end of the 18th century as an appropriation of those portions of ‘Oriental’ culture to which Europeans were attracted. It is important to examine the historical development of the European study of the term in order to disentangle the issues underlying the current debate (Ernst, 2011:9).

In light of these views, I intend to offer a more objective and two-sided perspective on the meaning of Sufism and to trace its history in order to disentangle the issues, following Ernst’s suggestion.

### 1.1 Defining Sufism

In Arabic, Islamic mysticism is called *Taşawwuf* (literally, ‘to dress in wool’), but has been called Sufism in the West since the early 19th century. Mainstream scholars of Islam define *Taşawwuf* or Sufism as the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam, which is supported and complemented by the exoteric practices of Islam, such as the Islamic law, also called ‘Sharia’ (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). Sufism is a spiritual path that runs parallel to the mainstream Islamic experience of prophetic revelation and is comprehended within Sharia law and theology

(Trimingham, 1998:8). Sufis themselves claim that *Taşawwuf* is an aspect of Islam similar to Sharia, inseparable from Islam and an integral part of Islamic belief and practice. Sufis believe that the Quran and the strict rules of Sharia are the external dimensions; moreover, the aim of Sufism is not to reach a certain goal, as the spiritual journey is more important (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

Sufis strive to obtain direct experience of God by focusing on the spiritual aspects of religion and by making use of intuitions and emotions that one must be trained to use. Sufi teachings and training deals with the purification of the inner self and can consist of various rituals, for example dances or the repetition of divine names (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

Scholars of classical and medieval Islam consider Sufism to be a study of mystical philosophy. Scholars of modern Islamic historiography consider it to be a *de facto* synonym for popular Islam, or for its organisational manifestations in the brotherhoods (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:54). There seems to be an assumption that post-classical Sufism can be regarded as simply a set of symbols, prayers, litanies, miracles and tomb visitations. The inquiry into post-classical Sufism is the study of Sufism that immediately followed ancient times and preceded modern history (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:55).

John O. Voll (2008) argues that the definition of Sufism as the mystical current in Islam obscures the complexities of its nature and role (Voll, 1998:7). According to him, most discussions identify two dimensions as critical to understanding the nature and history of Sufism, namely the intellectual and the organisational dimensions. The first deals with the content of Sufi teachings, the second with the manifestation of Sufi teachings and their increased importance (Voll, 1998:8).

Such manifestation or organisation of Sufi teachings is called a ‘*tariqa*’, the ‘*path*’, or is often referred to as ‘orders’ or ‘brotherhoods’. These trainings take place in the ‘orders’ or religious centres of the Sufi brotherhoods, and are transmitted from a teacher to a student. Sufis believe that this allows the adept to progress in spiritual rather than worldly knowledge. In this thesis the word *tariqa* will be used to refer to the spiritual path of Sufism and the term ‘brotherhoods’ to refer to the groups of people that practice Sufism, while the term ‘orders’ will be used to refer to the physical places in which the Sufi brotherhoods practice the *tariqa* (Oxford Studies, 2016).

## 1.2 History and development of Sufism

The origins of Sufism can be traced back to the ‘Golden Age of Islam’ (8th to 13th century). During this period, scientific, cultural and economic development flourished in the Islamic world. Sufi orders started to appear at the beginning of the 12th century and later established strong links with the state. Sufism contributed to the flourishing intellectual culture throughout the Islamic world during this period. All the important domains in Islamic civilisation were affected by Sufism. It was

an important factor in the historical spread of Islam and in the creation of regional Islamic cultures (Oxford Studies, 2016).

John Spencer Trimingham (1998) was the first to offer a comprehensive survey of the history and development of Sufi brotherhoods and his book has been widely used since its first publication in 1971. He provided a general schema of the different modes of Sufi organisation, describing the development of *tariqas* in three stages: the first stage was the golden age of Sufism, when it was basically an expression of individual religious practice under the guidance of a spiritual master. The second stage, which developed in the 12th and 13th centuries, was the '*tariqa*' stage. In this stage more devotional paths were developed as 'ways' to be followed. The third stage involved a more rigid institutionalisation of the orders and brotherhoods; in the 15th century the brotherhoods became highly developed hierarchical associations (Trimingham, 1998:9).

### 1.3 The Socio-political role of Sufism during the Middle Ages

In order to understand the role Sufi brotherhoods performed in the 18th and 19th century, one needs to understand its roots. Sufism has played an important socio-political role in Islamic society since its inception in the 8th century. This section will describe the role of Sufism during the Middle Ages.

When describing the first stage of the development of Sufism, Trimingham (1998) refers to a private movement of like-minded people in the early Islamic centuries. This was the golden age of Sufism and took place from the 8th until the 12th century. This stage grew into a major social force in most Muslim societies in the 12th and 13th century (Ernst, 2011:120). The appearance in the 10th century of theoretical manuals that contained explanations of Sufism written by Sufis themselves was followed by the establishment of many circles of teaching. This began mainly in the central areas of the old caliphate in Iraq and Persia, and soon reached the frontiers of Spain, Central Asia, India and East Africa. Through the orders, Sufism became widely known and was practised by people in all levels of society. Marshall Hodgson (2011) states the following regarding the growth of Sufi orders in the Middle Ages: "*A tradition of intensive interiorisation re-exteriorised its results and was finally able to prove an important basis for social order*" (Hodgson, 2011:120).

Ernst (2011) argues that the strong sociological and political interest of Western scholars led to a fascination with Sufi orders as authoritarian structures. There has been an automatic tendency to view the brotherhoods as something akin to political parties with distinctive ideological characteristics. Yet Sufi theorists tend to take a different approach when describing the Sufi orders. Instead of describing them as social institutions, they focus more on the orders as centres of mystical transmission. Instead of viewing them as corporate entities, they acknowledge the different ways and spiritual methods the brotherhoods used to help their community with their spiritual

development. This is an example of how phenomena, in this case the role of Sufi brotherhoods, can be viewed differently from different perspectives. While Western scholars emphasise their political role and label them as corporate entities, Sufi theorists see Sufi brotherhoods merely as centres where the community can practice their religious development (Ernst, 2011:122).

Sufi orders played an important role in traditional society, especially during the Middle Ages. The Islamic world was culturally unified and diversified at the same time. There were different types of societies, such as the nomads, the people of the river valleys, and those in the mainland regions and ensconced in the multifaceted life of the cities (Trimingham, 1998:218). These differences resulted in various expressions of Islam in these societies. Legalistic Islamic culture was strongest in the cities and weakest among nomads. There were also many different regional cultures in the Islamic world. Regional diversity derived from internal factors such as geographical and ethnic factors, and pre-Islamic religions. External factors also contributed to the regional diversity of cultures, such as the nature of and differences in the historical penetration of Islam (Trimingham, 1998:219).

Although regional differences were distinctive, the dynamic tension between Islam and regional culture found expression in a remarkable unity of culture, namely that of an all-embracing and common Islamic heritage. Islamic institutions spanned their various strata, with a key institution, the Sharia, the ideal law, the binding force of the communities in the Islamic world (Trimingham, 1998:218).

Between the 12th and 14th centuries, Sufism transformed the spiritual nature of Islam. Although Islamic scholars and intellectuals were not so keen to recognise Sufism and as a result neutralised mystical intellectual expression in the Arab world, the practical and institutional parts of Sufism were indeed much recognised and exploited. It represented the religion of the ordinary people, since most people's religion was actualised by means of behaviour. It was the function of the orders to mediate to the ordinary man the inner aspect of Islam. Sufis differed considerably in all types and all directions. All this remained parallel to legalistic Islam, the orthodox institution. At the same time, the Sufi orders were truly Islamic. Although the orders were not responsible for the remarkable unity of popular religion, they did contribute a lot toward this achievement (Trimingham, 1998:237).

Sufism played an important role in family life in the Middle Ages. The family was the most important binding unit of society, yet the order was seen as a holy family, bound by sacred obligations. On almost all crucial family occasions, the family visited the local Sufi order (Trimingham, 1998:238).

The political role of Sufism can be found in the way it bound men in allegiance to a leader, who had the power to influence men's emotions. Therefore, those orders had immense cohesion

that influenced the political sphere. Order leaders sometimes aspired to political power. They revolted against established authority and succeeded sometimes in founding a dynasty (Trimingham, 1998:239). Although the leaders of Sufi orders were normally the pillars of society and the established order, sometimes they aspired to rule the world. A great advantage that they had was the blind obedience accorded to a leader by his fanatical followers (Trimingham, 1998:239).

#### 1.4 The Relationship between Sufis and Rulers

State authorities were well aware of the power and potential of Sufi leaders. Not only did they sometimes revolt against the established authorities, and could only be successful under special conditions, but Sufi leaders could always intervene directly in state affairs. As a consequence, state authorities sought to control, regulate and conciliate the Sufi leaders rather than suppress them (Trimingham, 1998:239).

This relationship between Sufis and rulers created ambiguities. There were strong contradictions between the ideal of Sufi poverty and comfortable and luxurious ways of living of the rulers. Sufi leaders saw the advantages of having power over the political rulers; this way they could intercede on behalf of the poor in important matters for society (Ernst, 2011:115).

The orders occasionally participated in the militant advancement of Islam. Associated with this was their role in the defence of Islam against external threats during the Crusade period, for example. In the 19th century the orders were in forefront of Muslim reaction against the expansion of colonialist powers. This will be further described in the next chapter (Trimingham, 1998:240).

#### 1.5 The modern variant of Sufism

Although teaching approaches vary among the different Sufi orders and varied at different periods, Sufism as a whole is primarily concerned with direct personal experience of God and has been compared to other non-Islamic forms of mysticism. The rise of Islamic civilisation coincides strongly with the spread of Sufi philosophy in Islam, and the spread of Sufism has been considered a definitive factor in the spread of Islam.

Several important topics relating to the history of Sufism have been debated in recent years, such as the rise of early modern Islamic renewalism and the scholarly reassessment of the middle centuries of Islamic history. Central to Trimingham's thinking is that revivalism involved a reorganisation of the *tariqa* (Trimingham, 1998:240).

The Sufi aspect of Islam in the pre-modern era is widely recognised today. In the 18th century, Sufi-dominated renewal and reformist movements emerged. This project had two parts, namely reform regarding the inner critique of 'unlawful' Sufi beliefs, which prevailed in most



places, and increased involvement in worldly affairs (Ridgeon, 2015:18). This project was very broad and implemented differently, which is further explained in the next chapter

## Chapter 2. The Phenomenon of “Neo-Sufism”

In this chapter, I aim to explain the phenomenon of neo-Sufism. Hence, attention is given to its interaction with Western colonial powers during the 18th and 19th century. In addition, I explain how scholars have discussed this topic and how this led to a discussion about the use of the concept neo-Sufism. Finally, I elucidate what continuities and discontinuities exist between earlier Sufism and so-called neo-Sufism.

### 2.1 Defining ‘Neo-Sufism’

Neo-Sufism is used by scholars to describe a set of Islamic renewal movements in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The activist sense of renewal and reform of Sufism developed over a long period. Fazlur Rahman was the first to label these tendencies “neo-Sufi”. The term began to mean a cluster of developments and organisations. This led to various interpretations of the concept, no consensus on the use has been reached (Voll, 2008:318).

Alexander Knysh (2002) argues that the concept of neo-Sufism was created by Western colonialists to refer to a reformed Sufism that emphasised political activism and the enforcement of the Sharia. This reformed brand of Islamic mysticism had been relieved of the ecstatic elements of Sufism and was more orientated toward a set of moral and practical practices. Neo-Sufism can be characterised as having a more positive attitude toward direct involvement in world affairs, in contrast to the more traditional Sufism (Knysh, 2002:142). Neo-Sufis were contrasted with traditional Sufis by their concern for “the socio-moral reconstruction of Muslim society”, their pre-occupation with Hadith studies (studies of the sayings of Muhammad) and a negative view of Ibn al-‘Arabi (this will be discussed later) (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:71).

What seems to be the neo-Sufi consensus is that at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century a new ‘reformist’ Sufi order arose that differed considerably from the pre-existing Sufi brotherhoods (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:56).

### 2.2 Organisation of new brotherhoods

The organisation of the Sufi brotherhoods changed at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Distinct from the earlier 18th-century Sufi brotherhoods, which can be characterised as peaceful and mystical, the brotherhoods adopted an outward-looking, reformist orientation. Sir

Hamilton Gibb agrees and states: “*In the early part of the nineteenth century, the most striking of these newer developments was the formation of reformist missionary congregations on a strict orthodox basis, but organised along the lines of the Sufi tariqas*” (Cited in O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:54). Rahman states: “*They bring to the centre of attention the socio-moral reconstruction of Muslim society, as against (the older) Sufism, which had stressed primarily the individual and not the society*” (Rahman cited in O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:55).

Here Rahman confirms one of the most important generalisations of neo-Sufism, namely the discontinuity of the new with the old Sufism (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:55). Rahman and Gibb illustrates this by using the example of Ibn Idris, who had rejected the Sufi doctrine of union with God entirely. Instead, the goal of the mystical life was a mystical union with the spirit of the Prophet (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:56).

The new brotherhoods consisted of lodges that provided the physical and institutional foundations of the brotherhoods. There was an improvement in their topography, economic resources and manpower. As a result, the new brotherhoods expanded and their political role grew (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:81). This development needs to be understood in the context of the European colonisation of Muslim territories.

### 2.3 The Rise of Western Powers in the Islamic World

At the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, European powers invaded Islamic territories and attempted to conquer them on the political, cultural and economic levels. There was no reversal of the expansion of the West into the world of Islam. The conquest of Egypt in 1798 by Napoleon is generally cited as an important point from which to date the first realisation of the threat of European expansion (Trimingham, 1998:105).

Almost all Islamic countries were colonised by the beginning of the 20th century. Exceptions were Saudi-Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. Islamic countries wanted to strengthen their identities in order to free themselves from the domination of colonial powers. Even though many of the intellectual elite of the Islamic countries were proponents of the Western idea of modernisation, the Sufi brotherhoods were strongly against Western imperialism. The Sufi brotherhoods provided an alternative to the foreign invasion, and by restructuring their orders they strengthened their influence and power (Seyed-Gohrab, 2015:160).

The European powers that were expanding in North and West Africa encountered resistance led mainly by leaders of Sufi brotherhoods. French scholars developed various theories in order to explain this resistance. One was the notion of a type of reformist Sufi leader with fundamentalist and pan-Islamic ideas who consciously created and managed brotherhoods whose *raison d’etre* was

resistance to the European colonisers. The neo-Sufi idea originates from the Western colonial encounter with Islam (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:61).

#### 2.4 Characterisation of Sufi leaders by Western Powers

From the 19th century, Western scholars began to note the importance of Sufi brotherhoods and examine Muslim activist movements. These scholars were associated with colonial administration and were concerned with issues such as security. In their descriptions they thus emphasised “pan-Islamism” and the possible militant aspects of their activities (Voll, 2008:316).

In the 20th century, the Sufi brotherhoods again featured strongly in the framework of the general analysis. The coordination and organisation of the activities of these movements, later identified as neo-Sufi, were improving. Pan-Islamism was considered to be an important element of world affairs as major movements opposing European imperialism were defined. This was especially true of the Sanussiyya, one of the most visible orders at the time, because of its resistance to the Italians in Libya (Voll, 2008:316).

Both French administrators and Anglo-Saxon missionaries constructed an elaborate demonology in which Sufi leaders such as Ibn Idris were depicted malignantly. This was because Sufi brotherhoods were the most active agents of resistance to European invasion. The French sought to explain the basis of their influence. This process of intellectual colonialism can be traced back through a number of books that laid out a typology of popular Sufism, which continue to be cited today as works of unbiased scholarship (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:62).

The new Sufi orders were regarded as having the pan-Islamic aim of resisting the Christians, with no time left for traditional Sufi practices. Ibn Idris’ ideas were regarded as anti-civilising and radical. These French assertions could be found in English works as well, especially in the Christian missionary ‘Islamic Peril’ literature. The notion that Ibn Idris failed to create a pan-Islamic anti-Christian brotherhood is still repeated to this day. These attitudes profoundly influenced French and Italian colonial policy and are still present in more recent scholarship, for example in the writing of J.S. Trimingham (1998) and A. Schimmel (Trimingham, 1998:44). The intellectual link between colonial official and modern scholarship has to be agreed upon in order to avoid the continuing usage of biased information (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:64).

Whether or not there is consensus regarding the term ‘neo-Sufi’, the activist Sufi brotherhoods were a significant force in the Muslim world. Although the imperialist Western scholars were biased, their attention to these movements was not misplaced (Voll, 2008:317). Sufi brotherhoods played an important role in the reaction in the Islamic world to Western colonial powers. In the next section I will outline the responses of the Sufi brotherhoods to the Western powers.

## 2.5 Responses of Brotherhoods to Western Powers

Many Muslims sought a recovery of authentic Islamic teachings and practices to fend off Western hegemony in the late 18th and early 19th century. Some responded mainly in political terms, while others, such as the Sufi brotherhoods, tried to revive Islam's inner life. Voll (2008) states: "*Sufi tariqahs provided the organisational base for many of the most efficient movements of opposition to European imperialist expansion in the nineteenth century, from Algeria to the Caucasus to Southeast Asia*" (Voll, 2008:317).

While the many internal power constructions in the Islamic world fell apart because of the invasion of Western colonial powers, Sufi brotherhoods maintained their organisation and power. They provided an anti-colonial environment in which the fight against Western imperialism could take place (Seyed-Gohrab, 2015:160).

In the 19th and 20th centuries the various Sufi brotherhoods were involved in many different ways in helping to shape Muslim responses to the West and also in defining Islamic forms of modernity. Sufi leaders wanted to revive the Islamic heritage by focusing on what they considered to be the root cause of every disorder, namely forgetfulness of God (Oxford Studies, 2016).

One of the most important orders that resisted Western imperialism was the Idrisi-inspired orders. They expanded in two different forms: the establishment of lodges and the incorporation of pre-existing religious centres into a new supra-community (*tariqa*) network (O'Fahey & Radtke, 1993:79). There is a great deal of literature on the political role of the Idrisi brotherhoods. Within this literature there is a tendency to label some orders as collaborators and others resisters, which are simplified labels referring to complex realities (O'Fahey & Radtke, 1993:81).

Ahmad b. Idris (1749-1837) was a Moroccan Sufi teacher and the founder of the Idrisi tradition. His prayers and teachings had much influence and left considerable traces in the development of Sufi brotherhoods (Radtke, O'Fahey, & O'Kane, 1996:1) The Idrisi tradition opposed the schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Its teachings were antiauthoritarian, emphasising the individual's duty to seek God. The object of the mystical path was to achieve union with God. Ibn Idris differentiates between two forms of knowledge, the authoritative transmission of knowledge in books, the Koran and Sunna, and the other form is a higher form of direct revelation (*wahy*) from God or the Prophet. The mystic possesses this form of knowledge (O'Fahey & Radtke, 1993:61).

The main aim of Ahmad b. Idris was to revive the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. He was the founder of the Idrisiyya, sometimes known as the "Muhammadiyya". This was not a *tariqa* in the sense of being an organised Sufi order, but rather a spiritual method consisting of a set of teachings and litanies aimed at nurturing the spiritual link between the disciple and Muhammad

directly. The tradition spread to the Balkans and Istanbul, Cyrenaica, Syria, the central Sahara, Sudan, Somalia, Indonesia and Malaysia. His principal students were Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Sanusi, the founder of the Sanusi order; Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani, the founder of the Khatmi order; and Ibrahim al-Rashid, from whom stemmed the Rashidi, Salihi and Dandarawi orders. His son established the Ahmadi Idrisi order 40 years after his death. This has remained a local order in Egypt and Sudan (Oxford Studies, 2016).

Although the phenomenon of neo-Sufism took place in the 18th and 19th century, the discussion about the interpretation of the phenomenon is ongoing. In the subsequent section, I explain the academic debate on the concept neo-Sufism.

## 2.6 The Discussion on the concept “neo-Sufism”

The polemical discussion of the concept neo-Sufism is about whether or not a ‘new’ and clearly distinctive form of Sufism can be appropriated for the movement called neo-Sufism. Preliminary research shows that few of the generalisations about the neo-Sufi cliché have validity. It might be true that new Sufi brotherhoods brought new doctrines and organisational forms to certain areas (sub-Saharan Africa and southeast Asia), but this is not the same as what the neo-Sufi cliché proposes, namely that these reforms are in discontinuity with the Sufi past, rejecting the mystical and spiritual tradition (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:55).

In the 1980’s, Levtzion took the lead and organised a study group, in which he debated the nature of neo-Sufism. Rex Sean O’Fahey and Bernd Radtke (1990) argued that many scholars of the so-called consensus on the term ‘neo-Sufism’ had used it mainly because of convenience, rather than because they were establishing a particular theory. This marked an important next phase of the debate about neo-Sufism (Voll, 2008:319).

Basically, they provided the basis for objections to the so-called neo-Sufi consensus. One of the objections was terminological; they argued that many characteristics of the so-called neo-Sufi consensus were not “new”. O’Fahey and Radtke (1993) offered a critical analysis of the conceptual construct of neo-Sufism. They concluded that the term neo-Sufism seemed to be questionable if it was used to describe a new or different phase in the intellectual history of Sufism. There is a lack of documentation to prove the existence of such phase (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:73). They also stressed the fact that the term ‘neo-Sufism’ should be either discarded or used with great caution if it referred to a phase in the rich and complex history of Sufism. If used, it should be restricted to the organisational innovations of certain Sufi brotherhoods in certain regions of the Muslim world (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:87).

Voll (2008) argues that the development of the concept neo-Sufism as an identification of Sufi organisations in the 18th and 19th centuries was too simple. He agrees with O’Fahey and

Radtke (1993) regarding the idea that the movement called neo-Sufism was more a term of descriptive convenience than of a proposed theory of Muslim renewal movements (Voll, 2008:318). Voll (2008) argues that the critiques of the 1990s raised important issues, but need to be modified in view of recent scholarship (Voll, 2008:315).

Most scholars agree that the developing organisational structures were indeed new (Levtzion cited in Voll, 2008:1; O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:87). Nevertheless, this begs for another reconsideration of recent scholarship, at least regarding the organisational structures of Sufism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Voll, 2008:320).

O’Fahey and Radtke (1993) provided a useful history of the development of the concept neo-Sufism and the usage of the term. They critically discussed the main activities and characteristics of what seemed to be the neo-Sufi consensus and included the writings of a group of Sufis who were regarded as neo-Sufis in their analysis. They focused on Ahmad b. Idris (1749/50-1837), Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Sanusi (1787-1859), Muhammad ‘Uthman al-Mirghani (1793-1852) and Ibrahim al -Rashid (1817-74).

Other objections to the so-called neo-Sufi consensus that Levtzion’s study group pointed out were: the rejection of ‘popular’ Sufi practices (dancing and saintly meditation); the rejection of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s doctrine of *Whadat Al-Wujud* (Unity of Existence) and the ‘Union’ with the spirit of the Prophet (*tariqa muhamadiyya*) instead of with God.

Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240) can be considered to be one of the greatest Muslim philosophers. He is famous for discussing the Sufi ideology of ‘*Wahdat al-Wujud*’, which literally means ‘Unity of Existence’ or ‘Unity of Being’. Ibn al-‘Arabi states: “*Wujūd is the unknowable and inaccessible ground of everything that exists. God alone is true wujūd, while all things dwell in nonexistence, so also wujūd alone is non-delimited, while everything else is constrained, confined, and constricted. Wujūd is the absolute, infinite, non-delimited reality of God, while all others remain relative, finite, and delimited*” (Cited in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s “*Fusus al-Hikam*”, 1240). This mystic perception focuses on the esoteric reality of creatures instead of the exoteric dimension of reality. Therefore, Ibn al-‘Arabi interprets ‘*wujūd*’ as one and unique reality from which all reality derives. Critics of this ideology argue that it means that no distinction can be drawn between God and the world (Stanford, 2016). The unspoken assumption seems to be that believing in Ibn al-Arabi’s the doctrine of ‘*Wahdat al-Wujud*’ leads to moral apathy and political quietism. Perhaps the reason the so-called neo-Sufi cliché rejects Ibn Arabi’s influence is because the new pragmatic and worldly orientated position of the Sufi brotherhoods had no space for mystic perception of God and the world (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:73).

However, there is no evidence of a rejection of Ibn al-‘Arabi in the writings of the Idrisi tradition and other Sufi brotherhoods. The influence of Ibn al-‘Arabi on the Idrisi tradition is very

important (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:72). It is questionable that the cliché arose out of a rejection of Ibn al-‘Arabi. O’Fahey and Radtke (1993) argue that a group of scholars is absolute in their statements regarding Ibn al-‘Arabi, but that the presentation is usually more nuanced. Ibn al-‘Arabi was perhaps being reinterpreted, but still had influence (Voll, 2008:324).

Another objection to the neo-Sufi cliché is the notion of “The Mohammedan Way”. The *tariqa Muhammadiyya* is described as the substitution of a mystical union with the spirit of the Prophet instead of with God. Trimingham and Voll agree with the assumption that there was a shift from the notion of union with God to the union with the spirit of the Prophet, and confirm this in their writings (Trimingham,1998 and Voll, 2008). Nevertheless, none of them have followed this up. This is for a great part the problem of the neo-Sufi consensus. If these statements were true, they would have marked a major shift in Islamic thinking (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:56).

O’Fahey and Radtke (1003) do not agree with what the neo-Sufi cliché proposes, namely the rejection of the union with God and substituting it for a mystical union with the spirit of the Prophet (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:70). The developments in practice of meditation on the Prophet are not static in Sufism. Perhaps there had not been radical innovations in the 18th century regarding the meditation on the Prophet, yet they were different from earlier ones (Voll, 2008:324). There are several opinions on the *tariqa muhammadiyya* and the notion of an exclusive authority. O’Fahey and Radtke (1993) argue – and substantiate their view by quoting a number of different sources – that the idea that Ibn Idris substituted union with the Prophet for union with God is nonsense. The imitation of Muhammad was a means for him and for Sufism since its inception, a way to union with God, not a substitute (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:70).

One of the main problems in the discussion about neo-Sufism is its historiography. As noted above, much of the Western historiography of neo-Sufism is set within the parameters of Western colonial literature, which continues to be used as if it were unbiased. This causes a big problem of sources. There is little available literature that was written by the neo-Sufis themselves (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:53). The levels of discourse within the sources are also problematic. In this field, reliable sources are difficult to find; there are a vast number of them and they are heterogeneous in character. This makes it hard to criticise the sources (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:54).

Another problem is the lack of information. As part of a general neglect in much of the historiography of modern Islam and later the Islamic intellectual tradition, even theoretical writings have been ignored for the most part. And when they are mentioned, its continuity with its own past is ignored or downplayed (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:54).

The writings of the neo-Sufi leaders should form the basis for a discussion of their ideas. Neo-Sufi leaders were highly educated and developed men, but their numerous works have been ignored almost entirely. The repetition from book to book of unsubstantiated generalisations about

their teachings as being reformist, activist and revivalist led to a number of generalisations about the neo-Sufi cliché (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:54).

Many Western studies concerning the emergence of revivalist and reform movements in Islam in the 18th and 19th century is, first and foremost, based on data from the *littérature de surveillance*. The *littérature de surveillance* was literature produced by European administrators during the colonial period. These administrators were in charge of the conquest and pacification of the indigenous Muslims (Knysh, 2002:140).

There is still a heavy dependence on this literature, but not without a cost. Up until today many Western scholars of Islam perceive this biased and influenced data as “objective”. Some examples of the underlying colonial and imperial perceptions about Islam are comments about its hostility to “progress”, its “irrationality” and the blind fanaticism of its followers. The underlying perspective is that of the superiority of European civilisation versus the “corrupt” societies in the Middle East (Knysh, 2002:140).

There is a growing need to deconstruct these interpretations in order to come to an unbiased interpretation (Knysh, 2002:140). These assumptions and stereotypes determined many later Western interpretations of historical developments in the 19th century Muslim world. Almost all literature on the orders’ political activities derives from colonial sources. Inevitably these perceptions were ‘coloured’. It is difficult to counteract these biased sources because there is no other documentation (O’Fahey & Radtke, 1993:82).

One of the issues Western scholars stress is the cause and motivation of revivalist and resistance Sufi movements. Several explanations can be found in Western academic literature. A commonly used explanation is that Muslim ruling elites in the late 18th and early 19th century tried to reassert Islamic values, and mobilise the masses against rival Muslim states and the invasion of European powers. This process of Islam’s ‘politicisation’ was accompanied by its “ideologisation”, according to the literature (Knysh, 2002:141).

Western scholars have distinguished some forms of mass mobilisation. Based on the colonial sources, they created the notion of “neo-Sufism”. This was a modernised or reformed Sufism that emphasised political activism and the enforcement of Sharia law. This reformed brand of Islamic mysticism was relieved from the ecstatic elements of Sufism and more orientated toward a set of moral and practical practices, also called the “*tariqa Muhammadiyya*”, which closely follows the Prophet’s example. Neo-Sufism can be characterised as having a more positive attitude toward direct involvement in world affairs, in contrast to the more traditional Sufism (Knysh, 2002:142, 143)

However, critics argue that Sufism’s history is not sufficiently taken into account. They argue that the “new” elements of neo-Sufism are not that new, but can be found embedded in earlier



Sufi teachings and institutions. Looking beyond the biased colonial sources is very important in this case; in these sources the neo-Sufi orders are characterised by alleged militancy and an innate propensity to wage jihad against the invading colonial powers. Even though neo-Sufi brotherhoods resisted the European invasion when events were forced upon them, it was not their original *raison d'être*, as much of the colonial literature insinuates (Knysh, 2002:143).

Knysh (2002) argues that the explanatory paradigm of Sufi resistance movements gained acceptance among Western scholars, but is unsatisfactory for several reasons. One reason is that it replaces one unverified assumption with another unverified assumption. There is a privileging role for Sufism that easily overshadows other explanations. Epistemological flaws can influence these errors. The epistemological flaw in this case, argues Knysh, is that the explanatory paradigm posits Sufism as the self-sufficient cause and driving force of these movements (Knysh, 2002:170).

Instead of appropriating the historically, politically and socially bound notion of Sufism and using it as a criterion to measure the authenticity of any manifestation of Sufi ideology (the resistance movements in the 18th and 19th centuries), it seems more appropriate to regard any Sufi-based movement as a creative reinterpretation of Islam, or as a rearrangement of certain elements of the Sufi tradition (Knysh, 2002:171).

This interpretation of the explanatory paradigm of Sufi resistance movements consists of various social, political and personal factors that often remain concealed from outside observers, especially historians who try to study and explain certain phenomena several centuries later. Phenomena that scholars recognise and interpret as belonging to the Sufi tradition are always situated in time and space, and result in creative adaptations to various concrete social and political circumstances (Knysh, 2002:171).

Our judgement of a phenomenon is heavily dependent on our pre-formed conception of what constitutes the phenomenon. This is determined by our intellectual and cultural background, our academic specialisation and differing life experiences. As a result, we shall probably never fully agree on this issue (Knysh, 2002:172).

Knysh (2002) concludes that it is time to move beyond the explanatory paradigm of “because of Sufism”. He argues that the role of Sufism should be viewed in a broader socio-political context. Instead of emphasising Sufism’s “natural” tendency to create and sustain resistance movements, one should focus more on how various Islamic communities across the Muslim world developed mechanisms of mass mobilisation against European expansion, and why the resistance to European colonialism took different shapes and forms in different parts of the Muslim world (Knysh, 2002:173).

In changing contexts, many of the main themes of the traditional forms of the brotherhoods continue. Among the many aspects of the history of the Sufi brotherhoods in the contemporary

world, it is important to examine a number of them more closely: the role of Sufi orders in serving an important basis for popular devotional life; they were important forces in responding to imperial rule and they helped to provide organisational and intellectual inspiration for Muslim responses to modern challenges to the faith (Oxford Studies, 2016).

### Chapter 3. Sufism and Salafism

The debate regarding the concept of “neo-Sufism” and the actual historical nature of the movement is important to understand the dynamics of the Muslim world in the 18th and 19th centuries. The neo-Sufism debate reminds us of the importance of looking at the actual modes of organisations and intellectual content of renewalist movements, either in the 18th century or in the 21st century (Voll, 2008:315). The comparison of neo-Sufism and Salafism facilitates a better understanding of these dynamics. Although both movements differ considerably, possible similarities or links should not be overlooked. In order to gain a better understanding of Islamic fundamentalist’s movements today, it is important to examine their roots. Some of the roots of Salafism can be traced back to Sufism. In this chapter, I explore these roots.

#### 3.1 What is Salafism?

Salafism, also known as ‘Wahhabism’, is an Islamic reform movement that emerged in the 19th century and is often described as ultraconservative or fundamentalist. It aims at returning to the traditions of the devoted ancestors, the ‘*salaf*’. The original movement of Ibn ‘Abn al-Wahhab (1703–1792) should not be considered as part of Islamic fundamentalism, yet the influence of the Wahhabi doctrine cannot be overlooked. Wahhabis were seen as true believers by the leaders of the Saudi state. They helped to persecute the Muslim Brothers in the common struggle against unbelief (Ridgeon, 2015:14).

Salafism consists of three groups: quietists, activists and jihadists. Quietists (or purists) focus on education and missionary work to consolidate the true principles of Islam; activists focus on political reform and re-establishing a caliphate by means of evolution, but not violence (sometimes called Salafist activism). Jihadists share similar political goals as the politicians, but engage in violent jihad (sometimes called Salafi jihadism).

The movement was established against two Others: the internal Other tradition, Sufism, and the external Other of the West. Fundamentalists’ critique of Sufism as superstitious and backward constitutes part of the collective forgetting of the leading role of Sufi reformist brotherhoods in pre-modern Islam (Ridgeon, 2015:9).

Some Islamic scholars argue that Salafism was an innovative and rationalist effort to reform Islam that emerged in the late 19th century but gradually disappeared in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Others argue the opposite, namely that Salafism was an anti-innovative and anti-rationalist movement of Islamic purism that dates back to the medieval period yet persists today. Though they contradict each other, both narratives are considered authoritative, making it hard for outsiders to grasp the history of the ideology and its core beliefs (Lauzière, 2016:1).

### 3.2 The Relationship between Sufism and Salafism

The concept of Islamic fundamentalism has come under increasing criticism of late. There is confusion as to the nature of the phenomenon, the spatial and temporal territories it covers and which of the religious thinkers and movements are included and which are not. However, the concept seems to be useful as a comparative device and offers the literal meaning of the phenomenon (Ridgeon, 2015:12).

Sufism has always had a political ‘this-worldly’ dimension and any understanding of Islamic fundamentalism must take into account the inner relationship between Sufism and the Muslim tradition. The definition given in this chapter is: *“Islamic fundamentalism refers to the contemporary religio-political discourse of return to the scriptural foundations of the religion as developed by Muslim scholars, mystics and, increasingly, lay persons and movements, which reinterpret these foundations on the basis of their living traditions for application to the socio-political and cultural realities of the modern world”* (Ridgeon, 2015:12).

Weismann (2011) argues that Islamic fundamentalism and contemporary Sufism have helped construct as well as conceal each other as modern subjects. The relationship between Sufism and Salafism, as well as the relationship between Islam and the West, can be considered one of attraction and rejection. Salafism, although often neglected, is influenced for a great part by Sufism. Many Salafis have been in Sufi orders and practised Sufi teachings. Nevertheless, Salafis have rejected Sufism, mainly because they held Sufism responsible for the decline of Islam. Sufis were seen as deviators from the true path of Islam and depicted as an obstacle to modernity (Ridgeon, 2015:10). However, the reality is more complex. In pre-modern times Sharia-minded Sufism was a major force in efforts to renew and reform Islam, but Sufism had modernised itself (Ridgeon, 2015:10).

The antagonism of Islamic fundamentalists to Sufism reflects the existential gap between the ‘divine’ origins of the religion and its future degeneration. There was a constant opposition to Sufism in Islam almost from the beginning. Fundamentalist of all periods have shared an aversion to Sufism. However, they differ in terms of the extent to which they condemn it. For example, the Salafis were generally more tolerant of Sufism in the Arab world. For Islamic modernists the

question of miracles occupied a centre stage. There were several censures, not only against believing in miracles, also against tomb visits, popular practices, brotherhoods and mystical speculation. Although the usual fundamentalist aversion to Sufism has been displayed and many elements have been censured, the need for spirituality has been recognised by almost all major Islamic intellectuals (Ridgeon, 2015:17). The main targets of the fundamentalist attack on Sufism have been the veneration of Sufi masters, unscriptural popular practices and mystical speculation. However, gradually historians begun to realise that Islamic fundamentalism had its roots in Sufism too (Ridgeon, 2015:18).

In the course of the 19th century, Western modernity was imposed on the Muslim world by colonial domination. The conqueror's view led to a forced awareness and in the objectification of the Islamic self as against two 'others', namely the external other (the modern West) and the internal other (the mystical aspect of traditional religion). The ideological project of Islamic fundamentalism has been conducted along two lines; one is to 'prove' the compatibility of Islam with modernity and the other one is to 'expose' those responsible for Islam's failure to modernise (Sufism). Sufis who initiated pre-modern reformist trends agreed with the fundamentalists about the need for a quest for modernity, but were unable to frame this within their own mystical traditions (Ridgeon, 2015:20).

Fundamentalism could position itself as the modern subject by 'othering' Sufism and traditional religion in general. By positioning Sufis as irrational and apolitical fundamentalists, they could allow themselves to introduce a rationalist form of '*ijtihad*', the principles of the Islamic State. This construction was needed to conceal the roots of Sufism in Islamic fundamentalism and pre-modern reformist tradition to modernise and, on the other hand, to constitute itself as the modern Islamic Other. The hostile position of Islamic fundamentalism prevented Sufis from acknowledging the fundamentalists as their progeny and self-assumed role of representing modern Islam (Ridgeon, 2015:23). This need to conceal the roots of Sufism in Islamic fundamentalism is questionable because of the reformist character of Sufi brotherhoods in the 18th and 19th century in response to Western colonial powers. It could be stressed that Sufism was the precursor of Islamic fundamentalism.

### 3.3 Parallels between the Rise of Neo-Sufism and Salafism

Several parallels can be drawn between the rise of Salafism and the rise of neo-Sufism. First of all, they arose approximately at the same time, in the 19th century. Secondly, they both had a tendency to return to the scriptures and 'true' principles of Islam. Thirdly, they were concerned with resisting the pressure of Western colonial domination.

The three most important reform methods of the so-called neo-Sufi movement that overlap with the development of Salafism are, first of all, the return to the scriptures. Secondly, reorganisation and consolidation of the brotherhoods (this ensured the Sufi brotherhoods to cope with the social and political degeneration of Muslim politics in the 18th century). And thirdly, the leadership for resistance against European colonisation (Ridgeon, 2015:20).

The development of Islamic fundamentalism can be divided into three periods. The first emerged in the second half of the 19th century, when Western colonialists invaded the Islamic world. The 'Ulama' intellectuals were the main representatives and were divided into reformists and modernists. Rashid Rida (1865-1935), who is considered to be the founder of Salafism, marks the transition from the first period to the second period of Islamic fundamentalism. He wrote a religious journal for 35 years and formulated the innovative political ideal of the Islamic State (Ridgeon, 2015:13).

He was concerned with what he considered the backwardness of the Muslim countries, which he believed to be a result of a neglect of the true principles of Islam. This can be regarded as another parallel with the second neo-Sufi reform method mentioned above: the reorganisation and consolidation of the Sufi brotherhoods were to enable them to cope with the social and political degeneration of Muslim politics in the 18th century.

The innovative political ideal of the Islamic State, Rida wrote, consisted of an intellectual response to the pressures of the modern Western world on traditional Islam (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

To realise a political and cultural revival, Rashid Rida saw the need to unify the Muslim community. He advocated the establishment of a true caliph, who would be the supreme interpreter of Islam and whose prestige would enable him to guide Muslim governments in the direction demanded by Islam but adapted to the needs of modern society. His ideas were foundational to the establishment in 1928 of the religious and political organisation known as the Muslim Brotherhood (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

Rida focused on the relative weakness of Muslim societies vis-à-vis Western colonialism, blaming Sufi excesses, the blind imitation of the past and the resultant failure to achieve progress in science and technology. He held that these flaws could be alleviated by a return to what he saw as the true principles of Islam to suit modern realities. He believed that this could save Muslims from subordination to the colonial powers. Here another parallel with the rise of neo-Sufism can be made, namely the notion of organisation and leadership for resistance to European colonisation (Ridgeon, 2015:20).

The incoherent transition from Sufi reformist practices to the ideology of Islamic fundamentalists was determined by the changing socio-political and cultural configuration of the

various phases of modernisation: Western invasion, state consolidation and the struggles for a public sphere (Ridgeon, 2015:24).

However, the modernisation of Islam resulted in the splitting of Islam into two equally hostile camps. The desertion of the moderating force of Sharia-bound Sufism opened the way for the violence and terror of the fundamentalists' radical wing (Ridgeon, 2015:23). Nevertheless, many Islamic fundamentalists had been brought up within the pre-modern Sufi reformist tradition. The roots of Sufism can be found in the first, second and third phase fundamentalists. For example, the founder of the Muslim Brothers, Banna, was active in the Hansafuyya brotherhood in his youth. Many leaders of contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups studied at secular universities. To illustrate, Osama bin Ladin graduated from an elite school in Beirut in business administration and civil engineering, and Ali Shariati read for a doctorate in sociology and Islamic studies in Paris (Ridgeon, 2015:24).

## Conclusion

An examination of the roots of neo-Sufism necessarily starts with examining Sufism. In the first chapter I explained the terminology, the history and the development of Sufism. Sufism has had an important role in the Islamic world for centuries. The term 'Sufism' was created in the West and Western scholars have been interested in Sufi movements ever since. The strong sociological and political interest of Western scholars led to a fascination with Sufi orders as authoritarian structures. There has been an automatic tendency to view the brotherhoods as something like political parties with distinctive ideological characteristics. Yet Sufi theorists tend to take a different view on Sufism. Another characterisation of Sufism by Western colonial sources is one that emphasises the dangers of the fanatical resistance of Sufism to European rule. This reflects how perceptions can differ largely from different points of view. The Western view clearly differs from the Sufi theorist' view. Although relatively little has been written on Sufism and its influence on Islam, it has shaped Islamic thought and history. Sufis were influential in spreading Islam, particularly to the furthest outposts of the Muslim world in Africa, India and the Far East. The current debate on Sufism should disentangle itself from underlying Orientalist constructions by Western scholars. Therefore, more research is needed on the topic.

In the second chapter I discussed the phenomenon of 'neo-Sufism'. This concept refers to the Islamic "revivalist" movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. These movements seem to derive their strength from "reformed" Sufism. Western scholars argued that these new movements and ideologies were a response to the new reality of a growing European ascendancy and the decline of the Muslim world. Yet, this interpretation consists of various social, political and

personal factors that often remain concealed from outside observers, especially historians who try to study and explain certain phenomena several centuries later.

I attempt to offer an objective examination of the phenomenon, describing its development during the colonial period of the 18th and 19th century. Although this phenomenon occurred centuries ago, the discussion on the interpretation of the movement called neo-Sufism is still ongoing. One of the main concerns in the discussion of the concept of neo-Sufism is whether or not this movement can be considered to be a ‘new’ movement, distinct from traditional Sufism. What does distinguish them from the 18th century Sufi brotherhoods, which can be characterised as a peaceful mystical tradition, is their outward-looking reformist orientation. And as almost all scholars agree, the organisational innovations of the Sufi brotherhoods in the late 18th and 19th centuries were indeed new.

Yet, phenomena that scholars recognise and interpret as belonging to the Sufi tradition are always situated in time and space, and the results of creative adaptations to various concrete social and political circumstances. What if the ‘new’ elements of neo-Sufism are not that new and can be found in earlier Sufi teachings and institutions?

Our judgement of a phenomenon is heavily dependent on our pre-formed conception of what constitutes it. This is determined by our intellectual and cultural background, our academic specialisation and different life experiences.

As with the concept of Sufism, there are problems with the historiography. Most of the literature in the academic debate originates from colonial sources and is biased; thus, a limited amount of reliable information is available and there is no source criticism concerning the topic.

It is important to look beyond the biased colonial sources. In these sources the neo-Sufi orders are characterised by alleged militancy and an innate propensity to wage jihad against the invading colonial powers. This is another main concern in the discussion of neo-Sufism, namely whether or not its main aim is resistance to Western colonial powers. Even though neo-Sufi brotherhoods resisted the European invasion when events were forced upon them, it was not their original *raison d’être*, as much of the colonial literature insinuates.

Up until today, many Western scholars of Islam perceive this biased and influenced data as ‘objective’. There is still a heavy dependence on this literature, but not without a cost. The debate over the validity of the concept of “neo-Sufism” and the actual historical nature of the movement is important to understand the dynamics of the Muslim world in the 18th and 19th century. Yet it is useful to revise this debate with new research and new understandings. Simplistic generalisations need to be continually reconsidered.

In the last chapter, I addressed the relationship between Sufism and Salafism. Although Salafism and neo-Sufism differ largely, there are similarities. The aim of both movements was to

strengthen Islam in order to cope with internal and external threats. The internal threat was the decline of Islam, while the external one was the invasion and domination of Western colonial powers. The most important similarity is their urgency to resist Western imperialism and staying loyal to their own traditions. The innovative political ideal of the Islamic State, Rida wrote, consisted of an intellectual response to the pressures of the modern Western world on traditional Islam. To realise a political and cultural revival, Rashid Rida saw the need to unify the Muslim community. Sufi brotherhoods saw a similar need to strengthen their power in order to fight Western imperialism. Many Islamic fundamentalists had been brought up within the pre-modern Sufi reformist tradition. The roots of Sufism can be found in the first, second and third phase fundamentalists. The desertion of the moderating force of (neo-)Sufism opened the way for the violence and terror of the fundamentalists' radical wing. I would argue that the reformist movements of the Sufi brotherhoods in the late 18th and beginning of the 19th century can be regarded as precursor of Islamic fundamentalism.

This thesis was an attempt to contribute to academic research regarding the phenomena that have been little studied, while its importance and relevance is growing. Especially regarding phenomena concerning interactions between the Western and Islamic world. It shows that many of the prevailing ideas in the West about phenomena that have occurred in the Islamic world are wrong and that a more nuanced view is needed.

With the findings I can conclude that the concept of neo-Sufism is outdated because it is limited to the Western colonial view on Sufism, Sufism should be viewed in a much broader socio-political context. Aspects of this study that would be subject for future research are the transition from Sufi reformist practices to the ideology of Islamic fundamentalists and the deconstruction of orientalist constructions in Western academic literature.

Sufi brotherhoods, whether or not they were called neo-Sufism, played an important role in the resistance of Western imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Although many Muslim intellectuals agreed with Western ideas about society, such as the need for modernisation in the Islamic world, Sufi brotherhoods were suspicious about the growing Western dominance and stayed loyal to their own traditions and beliefs.

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