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English as an Islamic Cosmopolitan Vernacular: English-Language Sufi Devotional Literature in Singapore

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The key question this paper addresses is why Sufi devotional literature has been published and consumed in English, and the implications of this phenomenon. The material examined here focuses on literature that is consumed in Singapore: available in bookstores, in institutional archives, online, distributed at Sufi events, and in the private possession of practicing Sufis. I argue that English is used as both a Singaporean vernacular and a cosmopolitan *lingua franca*, allowing Sufis across the world to communicate with one another. I also argue that the adoption of English is necessarily tied to the rise of digital media and the perception of English as a “modern” marker of prestige and sobriety. This paper is organized in three parts. First, it traces the evolution of a reading public for Sufi devotional literature in Muslim Southeast Asia. Second, it investigates how and why producers of such literature have expressed themselves in English. Third, it analyzes how English operates in conjunction with Arabic in Sufi literature consumed in Singapore. I conclude that Sufi print culture’s adoption of English is a response to both the opportunities and the challenges of the present, constituting a reflection of Sufis’ pedagogical needs as well as an active appropriation of a loaded language.

Keywords: Sufism, Singapore, Southeast Asian Islam, Sufi print culture, English

Introduction

This paper studies the emergence of Sufi devotional literature in English, as consumed and produced in Singapore. In the broader context of South and Southeast Asian Islamic literary networks, this paper traces the historical evolution of the publication and consumption of Sufi devotional literature in various media: in print, audio and video recordings, and digital media. It tracks how Sufi devotional literature has adopted new languages, such as English, while retaining its fundamental relationship with Arabic. This is an understudied phenomenon, even as the broader field of scholarship on Islamic spirituality

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in South and Southeast Asia has undergone significant expansion since the 1990s. This paper will focus on Singapore, both because of the country's traditional role as a hub of print culture for Muslim Southeast Asia since the nineteenth century, and because it is a linguistically heterogeneous country that has embraced English as the *sine qua non* of all public discourse. Because of Singapore's peculiar linguistic makeup, I argue that the country constitutes a particularly rich case study for the dynamics of Sufism's engagement with different media and languages.

Sufi devotional literature can broadly be defined as works in various media that aid the individual seeker (*murid*) in his/her quest for spiritual gnosis, whether they be a learned treatise penned by a shaykh, a guide to performing specific forms of *dhikr* (a ceremony of remembrance of God, often involving repetitive, meditative chanting), the hagiography of a Sufi shaykh, a biweekly newsletter, or a website explicating Sufi concepts. They can be meant for private edification or to be used in ritual settings. Devotional texts play an important role in the construction of Sufi identity and its propagation: "Sufi identity [is] textual and contextual. It is envisioned and articulated within *texts*. At the same time, it is experienced and expressed in ritual *contexts*" (Rozehnal 2007, 14). Such literature is a key part of how Sufism is presented, transmitted, and practiced, functioning as a repository of a *tariqa*'s (pl. *turuq*) traditions and precepts.

Historically, Singapore has acted as a key node in the regional network of transmission of Islamic knowledge (including *tasawwuf*, the mystical/spiritual element of Islam popularly called Sufism), which justifies the attention paid by this paper to relevant developments in the Indonesian Archipelago, the Malay Peninsula, and the Indian Subcontinent (Roff 2009, 99–100). The need to consider developments in Singapore in the context of South and Southeast Asian Sufism is justified primarily by the trans-local nature of Sufi *turuq* (Chih 2007, 26–28). In the context of this study, *tariqa*, while often translated as "brotherhood" or "order," is better understood as a community built around the spiritual lineage, or *silsila*, of a spiritual master, or shaykh. Sufi *turuq* active in Singapore often have counterparts in Indonesia and Malaysia that adherents themselves understand to be part of the same community of *muridin* (seekers, or students), though this identification has more to do with shared practices and spiritual and pedagogical relationships with specific shaykhs than with any notion of belonging to a brotherhood or order in the monastic sense (*ibid.*). Therefore, a *tariqa* that bears the name Qadiriyya would be a *tariqa* that embraces the spiritual tradition and precepts laid out by the Qadiri tradition, and whose leading shaykhs have received their *ijazah* (license to teach) from Qadiri shaykhs that preceded them. These spiritual traditions are dynamic, and not mutually exclusive; a *tariqa* named the Qadiriyya-wa-Naqshbandiyya would be a *tariqa* that embraced the precepts of both the Qadiri and the Naqshbandi traditions, and its shaykhs

would have received *ijazah* from both, reckoning their double-barreled *silsila* accordingly. Moreover, a regional focus is necessary because of the functional unity of the Southeast Asian region as both a producer and consumer of Sufi devotional literature. Numerous works in both English and Malay, interpolated with Arabic and published in Indonesia or Malaysia, can be found in Singapore. Thus, Muslim Southeast Asia can be reasonably theorized as a single publishing and consumer network, one that shares shaykhs, *muridin*, and historical trends in the publication and consumption of Islamic knowledge.

The analytical framework used here is derived from two sources: first, Sheldon Pollock's concept of Sanskrit functioning as a cosmopolitan "code for literary and political expression" within the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis"; and second, Ronit Ricci's subsequent adaptation of it to characterize an "Arabic Cosmopolis" across the Indian Ocean (Pollock 2006, 11; Ricci 2011, 2). Pollock compares the use of Sanskrit in diverse societies in conjunction with the adoption of Indic culture and the forms of legitimacy that the use of Sanskrit conferred. Ricci adapted the concept of a Cosmopolis underwritten by a common language to the Islamic *ummah* (the global community of Muslims), another geographically diverse Cosmopolis underpinned by its use of Arabic as a language of civilizational discourse and a marker of identity. Moreover, she understood this Arabic Cosmopolis to be held together by written as well as spoken Arabic; the *ummah* existed as a trans-regional community partially because manuscripts and printed texts, written in Arabic, were circulated in shared "literary networks" (Ricci 2011, 4). Arabic plays a unique role in Islam as the language of the Qur'an, the irreplaceable original language of scriptural revelation. The emergence of Sufi literature in English has to be understood within the context of Arabic's primacy. Even where Arabic is not the primary medium of transmission, it is often incorporated into the text—partly because it provides an irreplaceable common idiom of expression, partly because it functions as a marker of religious identity, and partly because it carries the weight of sacred authority.

I draw on Pollock's notion of how a Cosmopolis, an *oikouménē*, can be bound by a shared vocabulary of religion and power embedded in a language. Specifically, I relate Pollock's description of a cosmopolitan *lingua franca* interacting with local vernaculars to Sufi devotional literature in Arabic, Malay, Tamil, and English (Pollock 2006, 12). In the same vein, I draw on Ricci's concept of an Arabic Cosmopolis in which Arabic interacts with vernaculars such as English. English serves the cosmopolitan function of connecting a linguistically diverse *ummah* while continuing to operate in close relation to older *lingua franca* such as Arabic, as illustrated by the generous retention of Arabic words and transliterated Romanized Arabic in the primarily English-language texts studied here. Ultimately, I argue that English exists in a diglossic relationship with Arabic; both languages are necessary to facilitate the transmission of Sufi knowledge, but

Arabic has clear precedence over English.

In Singapore English has been appropriated by Muslims, including Sufis, as a medium for the transmission of Islamic knowledge. At one level, the use of English as a language of Islamic discourse in Singapore simply reflects the changing educational profile of Muslims, given Singapore's imposition of English as the primary medium of public discourse and national education. However, English has been appropriated by Muslims also because of the sobriety and professionalism associated with the language in the Singaporean and global context. The expression of Sufi knowledge in English represents not just Sufism reflecting the social context it inhabits, but also the effort Sufis have made to selectively engage with various forms of modernity (Rozehnal 2007, 7). Singapore was—and is—certainly an important node in the publishing and transmission of Islamic print culture in the Indian Ocean, but Singaporean Sufis' use of English should not be thought of as a unique outlier or an Anglophone abnormality in a sea of vernacular-dominant Sufi literary culture. I contend that the case study of Singapore is instructive in a broader sense because it illustrates the latest example of a long-standing process coterminous with the spread of Islam: Islam's interaction with new languages, demographics, and technologies, all the while retaining the centrality of both spoken and written Arabic. In the process, English has become naturalized as one of many Islamic vernaculars while retaining the cosmopolitan function of connecting Singaporean Sufis to the broader Islamic world, a significant proportion of which is now Anglophone.

Modernity, where referenced here, refers not to the objective reality of a “modern” condition but rather a perception of modernity. This perceived modernity is often associated with English and spans various cultural and geographic contexts (Lee 2006; Lim *et al.* 2010; Lanza 2014). English is inextricably tied up in narratives of development and education, is acknowledged as the language of global capitalism, and continues to bear the mantle of prestige bestowed upon it by colonial education systems. In other words, English is widely perceived as a facilitator of social mobility in Southeast Asia, with all its attendant cultural connotations of value and legitimacy. English is an agent, or signifier, of that condition called “modern.” Modernity is a perceived state of being, and inherently subjective; this paper makes no claims regarding its theoretical validity or even its existence, but rather explores how English is invoked and utilized in relation to conceptions of modernity in Sufi devotional literature.

Sources and Methodology

Fieldwork for this study was conducted primarily from 2011 to 2012, with some additional

research conducted in 2017. The focus is on documenting and analyzing textual sources available in bookstores, institutional collections, and mosques and privately owned by Singaporean Sufis. The study focuses also on material hosted on websites or distributed via mailing lists that cater to the devotional needs of Sufi *muridin*. This is supplemented by interviews and personal communications with a limited number of Singaporean Sufis, including *muridin*, shaykhs, and booksellers. I fully acknowledge the anthropological limitations of my approach, in that my arguments are grounded in my analysis of how English-language texts, both printed and digital, function, rather than the result of sustained and structured interviews with Singaporean Sufis themselves. This is an approach that privileges textual analysis: I acknowledge that I surrender valuable insight by forgoing systematic interviews, but I contend that the printed and digital materials I examine are sufficiently rich to warrant specific attention. I believe that this paper makes a contribution to the extant literature on Singaporean Sufism, and the relationship between English and Sufism, by examining a key aspect of how Sufism functions both historically and in the present: its relationship with print culture, whether physical or digital. This paper further serves as an invitation to complementary and deeper anthropological or sociological studies of Singaporean Sufism, which remains an understudied phenomenon.

The sources canvassed here are drawn from Wardah Books, one of Singapore's most prominent Sufi bookstores; the Majlis Ulama Islam Singapura (MUIS) Resource Centre at its headquarters on Braddell Road; the English Bookstore, a subsidiary of Darul Arqam, the Singaporean Muslim Converts Association; the private collection of the Simply Islam offices on Tanjong Katong Road; and finally, the holdings of the Ba'Alawi Mosque on Lewis Road. This paper also draws on the private collections of Sufis who are personal friends, primarily from the Tijani *tariqa*. The final, but substantial, corpus of material examined is digital: I examine Sufi devotional literature, whether audio, video, or text, hosted on websites and distributed via mailing lists. The few personal communications from 2011 to 2012 cited here were based on unstructured face-to-face interactions, and these are supplemented by structured interviews conducted via e-mail in 2017.

Part I Consumers of Sufi Devotional Literature: The Development of a Muslim Reading Public in Southeast Asia

This section will trace the historical development of the Muslim reading public in the Malay Archipelago, an integral part of broader trans-regional literary networks, and explore the ways in which devotional literature was, and continues to be, used by Singaporean Sufis. It is important to begin by establishing the historical importance of texts

for Sufi praxis. Sufi devotional literature was often incorporated into communal rituals such as *hadra*, a Sufi ritual that covers a range of practices such as recitation of the Qur'an, sermons, collective study of a text, and communal *dhikr*, the defining ritual of Sufi praxis. In the 1970s the Ahmadi Shaykh Muhammad Murtada conducted *hadra* and *dars* (regular lessons) in Singapore "based around the reading of a text, as had been the practice of such scholars for centuries" (Sedgewick 2005, 171). The two main texts for *dars* used by the Ahmadiyah were photocopies of a selected commentary on *hadith*, and a *fiqh* textbook (*ibid.*).¹ Similarly, when the *mawlid* (anniversary celebrations) of various Ahmadi shaykhs were celebrated in Thailand throughout the twentieth century, Malaysian and Egyptian imprints of the Ahmadi *awrad* (distinctive prayers of a *tariqa*) were used for communal *dhikr* (*ibid.*, 175). The provenance of these texts testifies to the trans-regional circulation of texts, which continues to be the case for Sufi devotional materials today: English translations of classical Sufi texts such as Imam al-Ghazali's *The Revival of Religious Sciences* and the Shadhili Shaykh Ibn Ataillah's *The Refinement of Souls* continue to have broad appeal to Singaporean Sufis' various *turuq*.²

Sufism's Relationship with Print Culture

Sufism has had a long and fruitful relationship with print culture, with Muhsin Mahdi going so far as to argue that "Sufis were in fact the main patrons of printing in Muslim countries during the 19th century" (Mahdi 1995, 6–7). The religious economy of Muslim Southeast Asia was drastically influenced by the explosion in print culture from the early nineteenth century onward. Sufi enthusiasm for print is evident in the hagiographies of Qadiri shaykhs that were produced specifically for the Southeast Asian market (Laffan 2011, 102–104). Similarly, *Majum'a* (compendiums) of stories about the seventeenth-century Shattari Shaykh Shah Wajih al-din 'Alawi circulated in the Malay Archipelago (Green 2008, 130, 135). The technology of print and its potential power was appreciated by the literate Muslim elite, many of whom were themselves Sufis: texts found in looted *kraton* (Javanese royal palaces) in the early 1830s indicate that printed Sufi manuals were used by combatants in the Padri War (1821–38) as talismans in battle and as religious guidebooks (Laffan 2011, 93–94).

Sufi *turuq* themselves were popularized through the adoption of print as a means of

1) Here, Ahmadiyah refers to the *tariqa* claiming spiritual descent from Ahmad ibn Idris al-Fasi (1760–1837), rather than the Ahmadi sect of Mizra Ghulam Ahmad. The Ahmadiyah *tariqa* originated in North Africa but claimed adherents across the Muslim world. It is sometimes referred to as the *tariqa* Idrisiyya or the *tariqa* Muhammadiyah (the latter should not be confused with the Modernist Islamic mass movement founded by Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta, Java, in 1912).

2) Ibrahim Tahir, proprietor of Wardah Books, interviewed by Lin Hongxuan, Singapore, April 8, 2017.

disseminating their ideas and practices, particularly from 1850 to 1890 (*ibid.*, 60). Southeast Asian branches of the Naqshbandiyya *tariqa* benefited immensely in this regard. Nevertheless, print never completely superseded older vectors of transmission such as manuscripts; they coexisted and worked in conjunction with one another (Green 2011, 61). The Khalidiyya, a branch of the Naqshbandiyya, were particularly popular in this period, and Khalidi shaykhs successfully inserted themselves into the system of Ottoman suzerainty, partly as a result of the high profile their publications had brought them (*ibid.*, 50–51). Trans-regional debates over the heterodoxy of the Khalidiyya, such as that between the Patani-based Khalidi *murid* Ahmad al-Fatani and the chief imam of the *Shafi'i madhhab* (school of jurisprudence) of the *Masjid al-Haram* in Mecca, Ahmad Khatib al-Minankabawi (1860–1916), were conducted publicly through printed pamphlets and *fatwas*. This revealed the existence of a whole body of Naqshbandi literature that Ahmad Khatib drew upon in order to criticize his opponent and substantiate his arguments (Laffan 2011, 178–180). Evidently the ability to master, translate, and provide commentary on Sufi devotional texts—if only to prove their heterodoxy—was of central importance to Muslim intellectual discourses and evinces the intimate relationship between Sufism and the printed word.

Singapore itself was an important part of the nexus of Sufi print culture. It was the main base of the Qadiriyya-wa-Naqshbandiyya in Southeast Asia (a noted member of this *tariqa*, Ahmad Khatib of Sambas, was based in Singapore) as well as the fulcrum of the “Sumatran-Malay nexus of transmission,” acting as a publishing center for polemics such as Salim bin Sumayr’s refutation of Ismail al-Minankabawi, in print from 1852 to 1853 (*ibid.*, 53–54). This was made possible by the establishment of printing presses in Singapore, as well as the expertise of printers and the commercial means of dissemination (*ibid.*, 55). Singapore also hosted a reading public deeply interested in issues of Sufi praxis, mirroring broader regional concerns; *al-Imam*, a Modernist journal that often debated Sufi orthopraxy (publishing an attack on Sufism in general and the Ahmadiyya in particular in 1908), was printed in Singapore from 1906 to 1908 and had its 2,000 monthly copies distributed throughout the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, and Borneo (Sedgewick 2005, 130; Laffan 2011, 183). The scene is one of a vibrant and connected Muslim community enthusiastically using print as a medium to air grievances, attempt reform, and issue polemics or apologetics.

Presently, Singaporean Sufis continue to embrace the use of devotional literature as an essential component of their praxis and pedagogy. The owner of a Sufi bookstore in Singapore, himself a Sufi, had this to say about the present importance of printed materials:

Print materials are usually used for instruction and for inspiration. These materials are in English and Malay. The novice might rely on printed material for *awrad*, but after a couple of months they would have memorized it. The advantage of the *awrad* being available in print is the standardization that it brings with it. During *dhikr* we just use our *misbaha* (prayer beads). Yes, shaykhs do use print materials when teaching. They usually teach from books, and these books are also available to the students.³⁾

Moreover, devotional literature can also function as a doorway to Sufi spiritual discipline. Given the educational and social terrain of Singapore (discussed in the following section), English-language devotional literature plays an important role as the first “point of contact” with Sufism for younger Muslims. While long-established networks linking *muridin*, *turuq*, prestigious shaykhs, and famous mosques continue to play an important role in structuring how Singaporean Sufis organize themselves, and consequently how new adherents are drawn into the fold, younger Muslims overwhelmingly educated in English-medium schools are often first drawn to Sufism through devotional literature. The aforementioned bookstore owner also recognized the importance of English-language Sufi devotional literature as a gateway to deeper engagement with the Sufi path:

As an Anglophone, I have to say yes [to the importance and relevance of English-language print material] . . . The printed text, at least for my generation, is usually the first encounter a seeker has of the Sufi path and all its myriad possibilities. Initially the aspirant is hungry for material and consumes a lot of print work; this then usually culminates in finding a shaykh. Then the aspirant reads deeply within his or her own path (books of the particular path). At this point some continue reading and some others slow down their consumption of texts, but not with the initial fervor.

Devotional literature, then, was historically important for Sufis across Southeast Asia but remains important today both as a means of accessing Sufism as well as a means of facilitating its praxis.

Islamic Educational Institutions in the Colonial Period

Historically, Sufi *turuq* were often supra-local, linked by the shared lineages of their shaykhs (*silsila*), and many *turuq* straddled different regions but identified themselves as part of a larger *tariqa* built around a common *silsila* (Howell 2007, 217). In the Netherlands East Indies, Sufi *turuq* in the nineteenth century were often linked to networks of *pesantren*, whose *kyai* (traditional Javanese scholars/teachers) were virtually always Sufis (*ibid.*, 218). *Pesantren* thus acted as platforms for the dissemination of Sufi knowledge and were the sites of mutual reinforcement of different realms of Islamic knowledge: the Islamic sciences as well as *tasawwuf* (Van Bruinessen 2007, 96). Print technology (spe-

3) Ibrahim Tahir, proprietor of Wardah Books, interviewed by Lin Hongxuan, Singapore, April 8, 2017.

cifically, the lithograph press and the later movable-type press) was introduced to South and Southeast Asia around 1820 and was enthusiastically taken up by Muslims by the 1840s (Green 2011, 162). So was English, and surprisingly early: Islamic Modernist organizations such as Anjuman-e Islam set up English-medium schools in the 1880s to “teach young Muslims the forms of knowledge that the Anjuman’s fathers considered essential for the modern age” (Laffan 2011, 37).

Singapore’s status as a point of transit for itinerant scholars from Hadramaut, Patani, Aceh, Palembang, and Java, as well as its networks of *madrasahs*, *pondok*, and *surau*, made it “a publication and distribution center for religious writings” in the late nineteenth century (Roff 2009, 82). Sufi tracts in circulation both in Singapore and around the region included Muhammad Arshad bin Abdallah al-Banjari’s *Sabil al-Muhtadin* (The way of the guided) and Abd al-Samad al-Palembani’s Malay translations of portions of al-Ghazali’s *Ihya Ulum ad-Din* (Revival of the religious sciences) under the titles *Sayr us-Salikin* and *Hikayat us-Salikin*, all of which were intended for use as teaching materials (*ibid.*, 84). Evidence from the nineteenth century, though scant, also suggests that *tasawwuf* was taught in larger *pondok*, which were reliable consumers of Sufi print culture (Van Bruinessen 1990, 226–229). The development of a Southeast Asian Muslim reading public was thus “. . . greatly helped by the publishing facilities which now sprang up in Singapore, and ultimately by the gradual spread of literacy” (Roff 2009, 83).

In the Netherlands East Indies the elimination of courtly centers of patronage, the benign neglect of *pondok* and *pesantren*, and the policy of co-opting allies from amongst the native *ulama* allowed *pesantren* to flourish (they were also often tax exempt), as was the case of the prominent Hadhrami *ulama* Sayyid Uthman’s network of *pesantren* (Laffan 2011, 62). It was apparent by the late 1840s that “*pondok* located near commercial towns had become key nodes of intellectual exchange” (*ibid.*). These developments relate directly to Singapore in that *pesantren* in the Indies were often a stepping stone to further education in Surabaya or Singapore as well as far-flung Mecca, Medina, and Cairo. Noted scholars such as Abd al-Rahman al-Saqqaf and Salim bin Sumayr were based in Singapore, a testament to its centrality in trans-regional educational networks (*ibid.*, 47). By facilitating commerce and urbanization, and promoting the colonial state as a patron of indigenous religions, British and Dutch colonialism allowed *pesantren* to flourish and Islamic learning to proliferate, with a concomitant spread of Sufi teachings if not *turuq* themselves.

The growth of Modernist Islamic educational institutions in Singapore also contributed toward this dynamism, by increasing the numbers of the Muslim reading public. *Madrasahs* such as al-Mashur al-Islamiyyah and al-Haji Taib, both of which taught English as a language alongside religious sciences in Arabic, helped stimulate a market

for Sufi literature by promoting literacy (*ibid.*, 99–101, 122).⁴ Of particular interest is the early appropriation of English; given the economic realities of colonial Singapore, it was clearly recognized that functional fluency in English was a way to access public sector jobs. Modernist Islamic educational institutions responded accordingly, taking the first steps toward mass Muslim literacy in English. This was certainly true of the Madrasah al-Ma'arif in Tajong Katong, Singapore, founded by Shaykh Muhammad Fadhlullah Suhaimi, then head of the Aurad Muhammadiyah *tariqa*, in 1936. This Modernist *madrassah* pioneered English-language instruction alongside Malay and Arabic, as well as the teaching of secular knowledge such as science and mathematics (Ahmad Fauzi 2012, 75–76). Shaykh Fadhlullah's son, Shaykh Muhammad Taha Suahimi, would go on to achieve prominence both as the head of the Aurud Muhammadiyah *tariqa* as well as the first president of the Shari'a Court of Singapore; Shaykh Taha was also the first preacher to recite Friday sermons in English (*ibid.*). The *madrassah* still stands today, retaining its progressive vision (particularly in advocating Islamic education for women), and remains one of the foremost centers of pre-tertiary Islamic religious instruction in Singapore (*ibid.*, 85–86; Aljuneid and Dayang Istiasiyah 2005, 253).

Postcolonial Islamic Educational Institutions

The growth of state-sponsored Islamic educational institutions in independent Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia also helped stimulate the publication of Sufi devotional literature. These institutions combined secular and Islamic subjects to meet the developing economy's demands for skilled labor and helped foster an increasingly literate Muslim public. In some cases, they directly stimulated the articulation and dissemination of Sufi knowledge. The co-optation of existing *madrassahs* in Singapore as part of the national education system through the Administration of Muslim Law Act (1966) formalized English-medium instruction in *madrassah* curricula, thus further cultivating a market for Islamic literature in English (Aljuneid and Dayang Istiasiyah 2005, 250). The aforementioned Madrasah al-Ma'arif in Singapore is a good example of how educational institutions have deepened Sufism's engagement with English. Shaykh Muhammad Taha (d. 1999), son of the *madrassah*'s founder and his heir as the leading shaykh of the Aurad Muhammadiyah *tariqa*, was a prolific writer and speaker, publishing and preaching regularly in both Malay and English (Ahmad Fauzi 2012, 76). While not all students of the *madrassah* become

4) Islamic Modernism refers to a historical movement in the nineteenth century in which reformers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97), Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), and Rashid Rida (1865–1935) began the decades-long attempt to reconcile Islamic religious precepts and cultural values with “modern” ideas such as nationalism and “progress,” both technological/economic and socio-cultural.

muridin of the *tariqa*, elements of the *tariqa*'s *awrad* are incorporated into the curriculum, and the *tariqa* itself has experienced significant growth since 2000, with an estimated 18,000 adherents in Singapore alone (*ibid.*, 77). With the national education system having long since adopted English-language instruction, the full incorporation of the Madrasah al-Ma'arif into the education system in the late 1990s further entrenched the use of English as a suitable medium for Islamic discourse (alongside Malay and Arabic) amongst the many students who passed through its doors.

In Malaysia the establishment of government religious schools, *sekolah agama kerajaan*, in the 1920s and 1930s, and tertiary institutions such as Kolej Islam Malaya in 1955, reflects this trend (Roff 2009, 126–127). In Indonesia institutions such as IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah under the noted Indonesian scholar Harun Nasution (1919–98) and his successors actively promoted a holistic understanding of Islamic knowledge, with a curriculum that covered even controversial aspects of *mutazili* theology and ibn Arabi's writings, which equipped students with the conceptual tools and scholastic resources to explore other branches of Islamic learning such as *tasawwuf* (Riddell 2001, 231–233). Moreover, under Nasution's term as rector, IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah saw the systematic incorporation of secular subjects, Western academic disciplines, into the curricula alongside traditional Islamic sciences. The curriculum encouraged accommodation between two fields of knowledge often perceived as distinct—undoing “knee-jerk hostility and suspicion of all things Western” (*ibid.*, 231–232)—which made English an increasingly viable language for transmitting Islamic knowledge.

Of equal importance was the emergence of private Islamic educational foundations and businesses that equipped students with the intellectual tools to pursue *tasawwuf* and think critically about religion in general. These institutions helped disseminate both the desire and means to pursue Islamic knowledge, including *tasawwuf*. The most visible private Islamic educational institution in Southeast Asia was Nurcholish Madjid's (1939–2005) Paramadina Foundation and Paramadina University in Jakarta. Its adoption of university-style classes for adults and consultative, dialectical learning proved popular during the Reformasi era. Similar organizations included Tazkiya Sejati, the Intensive Course and Networking for the Islamic Sciences (ICNIS), the Indonesian Islamic Media Network, and the educational wings of major mosques such as Masjid At-Tin, al-Azhar, and Istiqlal (Howell 2007, 230). Notably, all these institutions integrated *tasawwuf* into their syllabi, and ICNIS even offered (short-lived) courses on *tasawwuf* studies online (*ibid.*, 233). Such curricula helped stimulate a renewed interest in Sufism and opened students' eyes to Sufi ideas and practices circulating outside of the traditional, *pesantren*-based Sufism of the Javanese and Malay world. “By displaying the sophisticated theological and ethical scholarship of the Sufi traditions, the new commercial adult Islamic

educational institutions . . . stimulated many ‘alumni’ to search further, beyond their *tasawwuf* courses” (*ibid.*, 231). Evidently traditional and modern, experiential and academic forms of Sufism mutually reinforced each other, stimulating the consumption of Sufi devotional literature. Tazkiya Sejati even actively encouraged its students to join a *tariqa* and developed links with the major *turuq* of Indonesia: the Qadiriyya wa-Naqshbandiyya, Rida’iyya, Shattariyya, and Tijaniyya (*ibid.*, 235).

The Symbiotic Relationship between Sufism and Islamic Modernism

Another important stimulant to Sufi print culture was the contest to define orthodox Islam, as expressed in the troubled but symbiotic relationship between Islamic Modernism and Sufism. Printed denunciations by Islamic Modernists of what they saw as syncretic, folk Islam provided an impetus to Sufi publishing: they prompted Sufis to reassert, defend, explain, and clarify themselves in print (Laffan 2011, 180). While this dynamic relationship reaches back to the late nineteenth century, a good example of the Sufi response to Modernist criticism remains Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah’s (1908–81, hereafter Hamka) attempt to reconcile Sufism with orthodoxy. Hamka went so far as to suggest in *Tasawwuf Moderen* (1939) and *Pelajaran Agama Islam* (1975) that knowledge of *tasawwuf* could be gleaned from texts, relegating the spiritual discipline and ritual praxis of *turuq* to the back seat (Riddell 2001, 216–219). While Hamka was no defender of traditional Sufism, his emphasis on individual agency and the importance of texts as pedagogical tools prefigures Sufism’s later embrace of English and digital media. The impact of Islamic Modernism was not just in stimulating Sufi polemics; the platforms for the propagation of Modernism, educational institutions, and civic organizations were also adopted by Sufis. Muhammad Zuhri’s (b. 1939, a Sufi spiritual teacher unaffiliated with any *turuq*) Pesantren Budaya Barzakh (Barzakh Cultural School) as well as its affiliates, Yayasan Barzakh (Barzakh Foundation) and Keluarga Budaya Barzakh (Barzakh Cultural Family), founded in the 1990s, all emphasized the study of *tasawwuf* in their publications (*ibid.*, 220).

This fraught but symbiotic relationship has continued well into the present: as late as 1986, Sufi apologetics were being published by Ahmadi shaykhs in Singapore, such as Abd al-Rashid’s *Zikir dan Wasilah*, which stresses the legitimacy and necessity of the shaykh-*murid* relationship, *tawassul* (intercession), and *hadra* (Sedgewick 2005, 192). Similarly, the foundation of journals such as the Nahdlatul Ulama-linked *Sufi* in Jakarta in 2000 illustrates the continuing stimulus to Sufi print culture provided by the need to engage with Islamic Modernism. The editor of *Sufi*, Luqman Hakiem, was ideologically close to Madjid as well as to Jaringan Islam Liberal, the Liberal Islam Network (Laffan 2007, 162–163).

The Bureaucratization and Institutionalization of Islam

Returning to Singapore, the postcolonial bureaucratization and institutionalization of Islam stimulated the articulation of Sufi knowledge and precipitated the use of English by reconfiguring religious legitimacy, reorienting legitimacy away from particular shaykhs or imams and locating it instead in state institutions (Sedgewick 2005, 180). Increasingly, it was not the shaykh's pronouncements or the community's traditions that shaped Sufi praxis: state institutions increasingly claimed the right to determine what constituted Sufi praxis. The bureaucratization of Islam through the formation of the Department of Islamic Advancement of Malaysia (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, JAKIM) in 1997 and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Majlis Ulama Islam Singapura, MUIS) in 1968 was accompanied by the rise of a Muslim middle class and an increasing aversion to perceptions of heterodoxy as well as a stronger preference for codified forms of *shari'a*. This stimulated the articulation of Sufi knowledge in the national(ized) languages of Southeast Asia, including English in Singapore, as part of an attempt to indigenize, demystify, and thereby regulate Sufism within the boundaries of the nation-state (Maznah 2012, 105–106).

The adoption of English by bureaucratic institutions such as MUIS helped push Sufi engagement with English: even the Ahmadi Shaykh Abd al-Rashid sent his children to English-medium secular schools (Sedgewick 2005, 191). In 2012 MUIS launched English-language outreach programs such as “YouthAlive!” and “TeensAlive!” which suggests that English was presumed to be the logical medium of communication with Muslim youth (MUIS 2012a; 2012b). Maznah Mohamad describes the Islamization of state institutions in Malaysia as a means of seizing and consolidating religious authority; she argues that “high culture reverence for law” is invoked to justify passing purportedly “Islamic” legislation, generating legitimacy for the state (Maznah 2012, 104). Conversely, in Singapore Islam is Anglicized so that it may be rendered local and thus made computable within the bureaucratic logic of the state. Certainly many Muslims speak English, especially Muslim youth; nevertheless, MUIS's use of English in its public messaging to young Muslims reflects the state's desire (refracted through obedient institutions such as MUIS) to assimilate Islam as just another religion within the body politic, a horizontal form of organization that dovetails neatly with the state's vertical and pervasive authority.

Bureaucratization and institutionalization also stimulated the expression of Islamic discourse in new media. This was particularly evident in Malaysia: in 1973 Radio Television Malaysia, the state broadcaster, set up a “religious and *da'wa* unit,” which was by 1976 producing 22 programs a week on TV1 (Roff 2009, 111–112). This normalization of Islamic discourse in new media platforms eventually helped impel Sufi devotional literature to penetrate digital media such as the Internet, or at the very least created

conditions conducive to such an enterprise. This dynamism was characteristic of *turuq* such as the Aurad Muhammadiyah, which was quick to capitalize on the new opportunities for *dakwah* presented by television, radio, and the Internet in the form of supporting self-consciously Islamic musicians of the *nasyid* genre in Malaysia (Ahmad Fauzi 2012, 86).

Demographic Changes in the Ummah

One development that has had a significant impact on the kinds of Sufi texts circulated in Singapore (particularly English) has been the demographic changes to the *ummah*—specifically, Islamic migration to Anglophone societies and the consequent publication of materials that cater to Anglophone Muslims. Advances in communications technology have introduced “new modalities of global inter-connectedness,” while “technological and social innovations” such as the formal organization of voluntary groups “can be used to knit together previously loose networks of Sufis . . . [into a] transnational community” (Howell and van Bruinessen 2007, 11). The phenomena of Muslim immigration to Anglophone societies and conversion to Islam in Anglophone societies are relevant to Sufi devotional literature in Muslim Southeast Asia, because they stimulate the production, consumption, and dissemination of English-language devotional literature across the *ummah*. Given the truly global reach of the *ummah* and the circulation of devotional literature made possible by global publishing networks and the Internet, such materials have had no trouble finding their way to Singapore, where they often find a receptive audience.

Economic and cultural globalization—specifically the import of Western norms and consumer culture alongside business—has created the superficial but pervasive impression of religions under siege: in the case of Islam, it has led to an attempt “to establish a sphere of true ‘Islamicity,’” of which one manifestation is the turn toward Islamic spirituality or Sufism (Roy 2004, 154). This development mirrors the perceived need to establish, promote, and present a nonviolent and authentic articulation of Islam after the September 11 attacks. Through participation in the same literary networks as the global *ummah*, and given the prevalence of English-language education in Singapore, Singaporean *muridin* often end up reading the same materials that are published for the consumption of immigrants or converts in Europe or North America. A good example of one such text is *The Hundred Steps*, by the Darqawi-Shadhili-Qadiri Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi, who publishes mostly in English and is active in the UK, Spain, and South Africa. The conferment of an honorary degree upon him by the Universiti Sains Malaysia and the presence of his books in the MUIS Resource Centre in Singapore indicate a reasonably wide audience for his work in Southeast Asia (Abdalqadir 2004). Other texts consumed in Singapore but transmitted via Europe and North America include devotional

literature published by transnational *turuq* such as the Naqshbandiyya-Haqaniyya, whose shaykhs, most prominently the late Nazim Haqqani and Hisham Kabbani, proactively maintain a global following and have published numerous books such as those under the SufiLive and Sufi Wisdom series (SufiLive 2012).

Part II Producers of Sufi Devotional Literature: The Adoption of English and Digital Media

This section will examine the language and media in which Sufis have articulated themselves, and the historical developments that have influenced their adoption of English. The devotional literature I examined suggests that Sufis have been confident and assertive in expressing themselves in English. In these texts English supplements Arabic, serving as a kind of lubricant for the transmission of authentic Sufi knowledge. As a *lingua franca*, English is spoken fluently by several prominent Sufi authors with international followings while remaining a vernacular for many diasporic Muslims and recent converts. This dual nature of English is reflected in the enthusiasm with which Sufi publications have taken to using it.

Within the Indian Ocean literary network, texts published in South Asia, particularly Calcutta and Bombay, have long found receptive markets in Southeast Asia. Some 50 texts continue to be published by the Chisti Sabiri *tariqa*'s network of publishing houses (Rozeenal 2007, 120). Foremost among these is Mahfil-i Zauqiyya, based in Karachi, which mostly publishes English translations of works of the *tariqa*'s shaykhs (*ibid.*, 122). Works such as *A Guide for Spiritual Aspirants*, published by A. S. Noordeen (a Kuala Lumpur-based publishing house founded by Malaysian Chisti Sabiri *muridin*) and with the rights to it owned by the Chisti Sabiri Association for Spiritual Training (AST), are available at Darul Arqam in Singapore (Hadrat Maulana Shah 2001). Noordeen is well known for the publication of English works of Chisti Sabiri shaykhs, and its publications have been circulated in Singapore since the late 1970s (Rozeenal 2007, 124; AST 2012). The AST was founded by Chisti Shaykh Wahid Bakhsh and also publishes an English-language journal, *The Sufi Path*, representative of a wider canon of such journals read within *turuq* that have successfully penetrated Anglophone societies in the West (Rozeenal 2007, 121). *The Sufi Path* is available at the Darul Arqam bookstore and is particularly interesting in that multiple issues of the journal are bound and sold together (with 10–12 in one package), suggesting that the journal is consumed as a pedagogical tool for the individual aspirant, a series of devotional guides and articles a *murid* can refer to in his/her own long-term study (*The Sufi Path*, Vols. I–XII, 1999–2006). Moreover,

the use of Noordeen's publications has spread amongst various Malaysian and Singaporean *turuq*, with *muridin* using these texts as primers or for reference despite not being part of the Chistiyya *tariqa* themselves (Rozeznal 2007, 124).

Singaporean Sufi publications also evince their willingness to publish in English. Examples include *The Rare Gift and the Key to Opening the Door of Union* (hereafter the *Ratib al-Attas*) and *The Spread of Islam and the Role of the Sufis*. Both books were published by the Ba'Alawi Mosque, the focal point of the Ba'Alawi *tariqa* in Singapore (al-Attas 2007; al-Attas 2011). The foremost Ba'Alawi shaykh in Singapore, Shaykh al-Habib Hasan al-Attas, indicated that the Ba'Alawi Mosque was comfortable publishing in English given the increasing numbers of aspirants who were fluent in English and who attended its weekly recitation of the *Ratib al-Attas*, though it also continued to publish the *Ratib al-Attas* and other devotional materials in Malay.⁵⁾ Notably, an Arabic version of the *Ratib* continues to be appended to the end of each book, an indicator of Arabic's essential role in Islamic discourse and hinting at the diglossic relationship between English and Arabic. *The Spread of Islam*, unlike the *Ratib al-Attas*, is a quick overview of the history of Sufism in Singapore and represents an attempt to engage with young, English-educated Muslims who are potential aspirants, much the same way Robert Rozeznal described the role that Chisti Sabiri Sufis envisioned for books: a gentle invitation to practice (Rozeznal 2007, 12). Another example is *The Grand Saint of Singapore: The Life of Habib Nuh bin Muhammad al-Habshi*, a classic hagiography of a Singaporean Sufi *wali* (loosely translatable as saint), printed in English and juxtaposed against Arabic throughout (Muhammad Ghouse 2008).

English-language devotional literature published in the West is common in both Singaporean bookstores and institutional collections. This includes texts that have been transmitted via Western Muslims and academics, such as *The Mantle Adorned: Imam Busiri's Burda*, which is used for recitation during *dhikr* conducted at the Abdul Aleem Siddique Mosque, affiliated with the Naqshbandiyya-Haqqaniyya in the 1990s but which now welcomes *muridin* of various *turuq* (Hanisah 2010, 44). A British convert to Islam, the Cambridge academic T.J. Winter (Abdal Hakim Murad), translated the piece, and it was published by The Quilliam Press for an audience of Muslim immigrants and converts in the UK (Abdal Hakim Murad 2009). *The Mantle Adorned* has wide circulation in Singapore: besides being used in *dhikr* at Singapore's Abdul Aleem Siddique Mosque, it is available in multiple bookstores as well as in the MUIS Resource Centre.

Finally, in digital media such as websites hosting text, audio, and video recordings/livestreaming, Sufis have demonstrated their willingness to express themselves in

5) Personal communication, May 2011.

English and to engage new media to convey their message. Examples of such resources used in Singapore include SufiLive.com, a public video streaming website via which the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Shaykh Nazim Haqqani delivered weekly lectures until his passing in 2014.⁶⁾ Since 2014 Shaykh Hisham Kabbani has assumed Nazim's leadership role, and he is now the face of the *tariqa*'s digital presence as well. As of July 2017, the SufiLive Facebook page had nearly 36,000 followers while its YouTube channel had nearly 28,000 subscribers from around the world, which suggests a significant appetite for its publications, particularly those published digitally. Other examples include websites catering to a more regional audience in South and Southeast Asia, such as MoonOverMedina.com, the Malaysian Chisti Sabiri online bookstore. All of these resources are available in English, with MoonOverMedina specializing in English-language texts. Local websites such as SacredPath.sg, which grew out of a multi-*turuq* Sufi conference, "The Sacred Path of Love," organized in Singapore since 2010, as well as ancillary sites such as its community page on Facebook, act as organizational resources for the Sufi community in Singapore; their use of English reflects the educational profile of Muslims in Singapore (The Sacred Path of Love 2012a; 2012b). Members of the Facebook community page of The Sacred Path of Love continue to post links to YouTube videos, websites with Sufi resources, and invitations to related events on it, the vast majority of which are in English.

English in Singapore

English plays a special role as a language of national discourse and nation building, being promoted both as the language of modernity and economic development, as well as a means to "achieve politico-operational integration and to develop instrumental attachments to the supra-ethnic national system among the ethnically heterogeneous" (Tham 2008, 26). In the effort to transcend ethnolinguistic boundaries in a multicultural nation, Susan Gal rightly observes that "local languages are abandoned or subordinated to 'world languages' in diglossic relations," with English assuming a place of national prominence above vernacular languages (Gal 1989, 356). The use of English as a language of prestige as well as a social binder is highlighted by Pierre Bourdieu: "linguistic differences are the 'retranslation' of social differences . . . dominant legitimate language is a distinct capital which, in discourse, produces, as its profit, a sense of the speaker's distinction" (Jenkins 2004, 154). Language is theorized by Bourdieu as a form of social currency—specifically, "cultural capital," encompassing "skills and knowledge, acquired through

6) According to the Facebook page of the Naqshbandiyya-Haqqaniyya in Singapore, the *tariqa* has since 2014 renamed itself the Naqshbandiyya-Nazimiyya in honor of Shaykh Nazim. Its weekly *maulid* and *dhikr* sessions at the Simply Islam premises are broadcast live via SufiLive.com every Thursday, 8pm, GMT +8.

education, which can be used to acquire jobs, money and status” (Swartz 1997, 177). In the case of English in Singapore, this holds true; it is a language associated with modernity and the “appropriate” (politically correct or neutral) medium of discourse in a multicultural Singapore hypersensitive to issues of race and ethnicity (Kachru 1995, 291–292). These frameworks for understanding the function of language as social currency help illuminate why English has been appropriated by Sufi authors and publishers in the context of English-medium national education. In doing so, the authors and publishers both adopt English for social capital as well as reflect the pedagogical needs of their audience.

However, English in Singapore carries its own baggage, which inevitably colors the adoption of the language by Sufis. The foundation of numerous *madrassahs* in Singapore from the early twentieth century onward, beginning with the *Madrassah al-Iqbal* in 1907, reflects the Modernist ethos of education as a force for social dynamism (Aljuneid and Dayang Istiasiyah 2005, 252). Unlike the more traditional *pondok* (boarding school) and *surau* (prayer hall) of Singapore, which emphasized the authority of particular shaykhs and the importance of voluntary discipleship, submission, and rote memorization, these new *madrassahs* usually embraced a systematic approach to teaching traditional Islamic sciences alongside secular subjects such as science, mathematics, and languages other than Arabic (*ibid.*, 253–254). English-medium instruction became part and parcel of Islamic education, and the primacy of English was further entrenched by the postcolonial state’s embrace of English as the primary medium of instruction across the national education system, imposing its regulations on *madrassahs* as well.

It is undeniable that the adoption of English as a medium of instruction came as a response to the pressures of colonial encroachment across the Muslim world. The Modernist *madrassahs* were statements of civilizational integrity; they served as symbols of Islamic intellectual dynamism and relevance even under the yoke of foreign political domination. By their existence they protested the encroachment of colonial discourses such as the infamous “myth of the lazy native” or the tendency in Orientalist scholarship to dismiss South and Southeast Asian Islam as syncretic (Alatas 1977; Laffan 2011, 115, 235). However, their adoption of English-medium education and secular subjects constituted the beginning of an irrevocable change in the educational profile of Singaporean Muslims; this represented the first step in a process of utilizing English that would be further consolidated by the postcolonial state’s imposition of English-medium education. Speaking “good” English has been fetishized by the postcolonial state as a form of civic virtue: communalism is dangerous, and therefore speaking a common language (English, the convenient detritus of colonialism) in all public discourse is the first line of defense against the descent into intra-ethnic conflict (Pakir 2010, 270; Rafael 2016, 100–103). This is inextricably tied up with discourses of Western civilizational superiority, a com-

plex that haunts the Singaporean psyche because of the country's peculiar decolonization experience. The use of English, then, is never truly neutral in Singapore; it is bisected by vocabulary and accent, syntax and grammar, into basilectal and acrolectal tiers that reflect the socioeconomic status of the speaker (Alsagoff 2010, 111). Singaporean Sufis' use of English is likewise loaded, reflecting both the conscious attempt to appropriate a language of power, as well as an acknowledgment of the changing educational profiles and media consumption habits of Singaporean *muridin*.

Another aspect of Sufism's engagement with English is its appropriation of English's attendant knowledge structures, such as the perceived legitimacy embodied by Western academics who study Islam. Facilitated by the use of English, this engagement with Western academia suggests that producers of Sufi literature are able and willing to look beyond their *turuq* and their individual *silsila*, engaging with nontraditional knowledge and forms of legitimacy in order to enhance the legitimacy of Sufism as well as to cater to the diverse pedagogical needs of their trans-regional audiences. Articles published in the Indonesian journal *Sufi* regularly engage with Western academic work, and the journal itself carried advertisements for the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam* (Laffan 2011, 169). This enmeshment of Western academic and Sufi knowledge is also evident in Singapore: classic academic tracts such as J. Spencer Trimingham's *The Sufi Orders in Islam* and R. A. Nicholson's *The Mystics of Islam* (both in English) are available in various bookstores as well as the MUIS Resource Centre (Trimingham 1998; Nicholson 2006). Notably, the latter book has had its rights acquired by Malaysian publishers, who print and distribute it under their own imprint, attesting to its readership amongst Sufis in Malaysia and Singapore. Similarly, the 2011 Sacred Path of Love conference retreat saw Professor Zachary Wright of Northwestern University in Qatar invited to give a talk titled "Come Back to Allah: The Power of *Dhikr*" (Wright 2011).

"Rehabilitating" Islam through Sufism

Both in the United States and in Singapore, Naqshbandi-Haqqani shaykhs have positioned themselves as the "great renewers" (in the sense of prominent individuals who have periodically breathed new dynamism into Islamic religious praxis over the course of Islamic history) in an era of powerful new technologies, and have adopted English in the interest of reaching out to the greatest number in the most effective ways (Hanisah 2010, 42). The online pledging of *bay'ah* (allegiance) to a shaykh, lectures delivered on SufiLive.com, and short lectures by Shaykh Zakaria, Shaykh Nazim Haqqani's *khalifa* in Singapore from 1998 to 2009, conducted after *dhikr*, were all performed in English (*ibid.*, 45). Furthermore, Naqshbandi-Haqqani shaykhs have expressed their view that preaching and publishing in English helps to bridge entrenched ethnic divisions within the

Muslim community (the Chistiyya in Singapore, for example, are popularly thought of as a specifically Indian Muslim *tariqa*).

Moreover, post-September 11 Singapore has also presented opportunities for Sufi *turuq*: prominent Singaporean Sufis have defined Sufism in opposition to violent Islamic fundamentalism, manifest at the level of state institutions. The primary state-sanctioned organ for combating violent Islamic extremism has been the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), which prominent Sufis have participated in: “The co-chairpersons of the RRG committee, Ustaz Ali and Ustaz Hasbi, are local leaders of *tariqa* groups. Ustaz Ali is the local leader of the *tariqa* Qadirri wa Naqshbandi who holds their meetings at the Khadijah mosque. Ustaz Hasbi is the local leader of the *tariqa* Ahmadi Iddrisiyyah. A couple of others are also active *tariqa* members such as Ustaz Ibrahim who is the local leader of the *tariqa* Qadirri wa Chistiyya” (*ibid.*, 67). In doing so, they have raised the public profile of their *turuq*, increasing their accessibility and legitimating Sufism via their cooperation with state imperatives. They also, however, have had to use English in their dealings with the state, and I would suggest that this has had a subtle but important impact on Muslims, as Sufism is increasingly brought into the public eye as modern, peaceful, and articulate.

The advent of Islamic scholarly literature being published in English by prominent intellectuals has also created a regional climate conducive for Sufis to adopt English. Muslim intellectuals with an activist bent, such as Nurcholish Madjid and Chandra Muzaffar (a Malaysian academic and activist), have published prolifically in English as part of their efforts to reconcile the Islamic intellectual heritage they champion with mainstream academic discourse, which is dominated by English. Internationally, Sufi authors such as T.J. Winter, who is a *murid* of the Ba’Alawi *tariqa*, and Osman Bakar, a Malaysian academic, have published widely in English (Osman 2007; Winter 2007). They have helped build a climate in which English-language publication of Islamic knowledge is both desirable and accepted.

In Singapore, this process of “normalizing” the expression of Islamic knowledge in English is exemplified by The Reading Group. A private circle of Muslim professionals and scholars, The Reading Group produces a wide range of pedagogical materials in English, published under the *Reading Group Occasional Paper Series* and the *MUIS Occasional Paper Series* (Saeed 2005; Azhar Ibrahim 2008). These materials are used primarily for private study in *tabligh* sessions but are also available in institutional collections such as the MUIS Resource Centre. The Reading Group also maintains a public presence digitally, in the form of the Leftwrite Center Facebook page. The Leftwrite Center, established in 2008, describes itself as “. . . an enterprise that aims to promote critical consciousness and civic social participation and awareness among young intelli-

gentsia on various social and religious issues affecting Singapore society . . . [with a focus] on publishing and consultancy works.” It has approximately 400 followers and regularly posts links to Islamic scholarship on religious plurality, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue, all of which are in English (Leftwrite Center 2017). While the group is effectively bilingual in English and Malay, English-language material remains an integral part of the texts it studies and publishes, given the educational profile of most of its members: having been through an English-medium state education, many of them are comfortable with English.⁷ Intellectuals such as Muzaffar and Madjid, as well as organizations such as The Reading Group in Singapore, both reflect, and helped create, a climate in which the articulation of Islamic knowledge in English is acceptable and even desirable.

Part III Characteristics and Significance of English-Language Sufi Devotional Literature

Why should English be understood as a Cosmopolitan Vernacular in the sense that Pollock characterizes it? Pollock’s study of the relationship between Sanskrit and various South Asian vernaculars is concerned with “. . . not only how the vernacular reconfigures the cosmopolitan, but how the two produce each other in the course of their interaction” (Pollock 1998, 7). This is an accurate description of the manifold interactions between English and Arabic in the texts I analyze in this section. Building on Pollock’s insights, Ricci characterizes Islamic texts as being “written and rewritten in local languages” (in the case of Singapore, English, Malay, and Tamil) that were “profoundly shaped by the influx of Arabic”: in premodern and colonial Southeast Asia, this manifested itself in the numerous Arabic loanwords and syntactical changes to the Malay language in the production of Islamic texts (Ricci 2011, 3, 15). The linguistic composition of the sources examined here reveals that in contemporary Singapore, Arabic is used in conjunction with another *lingua franca*: English. These texts juxtapose English, Arabic, and transliterations of Arabic in the Roman script, evincing the continuity of Arabic’s function as a *lingua franca* that underwrites “a common repository of images, memories, and meanings that in turn fostered a consciousness of belonging to a trans-local community” (*ibid.*, 3). In other words, Arabic functions as a shared language with an accompanying idiom that connects the transnational Muslim *ummah* through its use in a canon of Islamic texts, what Ricci calls a “shared literary network” and Pollock calls “sociotextual communities” (Pollock 1998, 9; Ricci 2011, 6).

7) Personal communication, June 2011.

I would argue that English has come to occupy a similar role as Arabic in the transmission of Sufi knowledge, while functioning in conjunction with Arabic. I would further posit that the relationship between Arabic and English is essentially diglossic: Arabic carries more weight, but both are used to powerful effect (Ricci 2011, 14). This finds expression in the multilingual character of the texts examined here. In them, English functions as a Cosmopolitan Vernacular, though not strictly in the sense that Pollock uses in relation to Sanskrit. English is deployed in juxtaposition to Arabic, to clarify and annotate the sanctity of the Arabic text of the *sunnaḥ*. The Arabic original remains inviolate: the English frames it, providing a skeleton on which it may rest. It helps vernacularize Islamic knowledge, to the extent that it expositions the original Arabic, which many readers may have only an incomplete and partial understanding of. As a Singaporean vernacular, and a first language for many Singaporeans, English supports Arabic in transmitting Sufi knowledge; in doing so, it takes on the cosmopolitan functions of a *lingua franca*.

Devotional Literature Complementing Communal Rituals

Most commonly, Sufi devotional literature functions as a devotional guide in a ritual, communal context, such as *dhikr*, in which one might use a printed *ratib* to follow the recitation. According to my observations of the *dhikr* of various *turuq*, Rozehnal's description of the Chistiyya-Sabiriyya's use of devotional literature is applicable to Singapore. These materials are best understood as the discursive tradition of a *tariqa*, integral to the maintenance of spiritual/ritual discipline, which link *muridin* to a "sacralized Islamic past and [which] sacralizes the living present" (Rozehnal 2007, 129). They are used as sources of clarification and reinforcement in conjunction with a shaykh's teaching and guidance from fellow *muridin*, functioning as "a constant, renewable source of supplementary knowledge and insight" (*ibid.*, 162–166). Reading a text privately can also be an extension of the shaykh-*murid* relationship, an "act of conversation" between *murid* and shaykh in which questions that the *murid* would otherwise have asked his shaykh are answered in the course of reading (*ibid.*, 165). Presently, *muridin* in Singapore fully recognize the importance of English texts, though without denying the continuing importance of Malay and Arabic and the primacy of the shaykh-*murid* relationship. A Tijaniyya *murid* had this to say regarding English devotional literature:

Printed materials are a strong support and while not obligatory are very helpful—you would need to refer occasionally to the Qur'an, compiled hadith, and the writings, poetry, and sermons of your shaykh. Online and print media makes this a lot easier . . . [English] is necessary for outreach and to acknowledge the age and its people—so they can access and approach knowledge of God. But as always, printed material is just content—it must be coupled with an experienced traveler or

- [*The Rātīb*]
- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. I seek refuge in God, the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing from the accursed Satan. (5:76; 16:98) <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>2. I seek refuge in the complete Words of God from the evil of that which He created. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>3. In the Name of God Who causes no harm to come together with His Name from anything whatsoever on earth or in heaven, for He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>4. In the Name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate; there is no Power and no Strength save in God, Most High, Most Great. <i>Repeat 10 times.</i></p> <p>5. In the Name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>6. In the Name of God, in God do we find security; In the Name of God, in God do we trust. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>7. In the Name of God, in God do we have faith; And whoever has faith in God no fear shall come upon him. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>8. Glory be to God, to Him belongs Might; Glory be to God, to Him belongs Majesty. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>9. Glory be to God, and praise be to Him; Glory be to God, the Great. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>10. Glory be to God, Praise be to God, There is no Deity but God, and God is Most Great. <i>Repeat 4 times.</i></p> | <p>11. O One Who is Most Kind to all His creatures, O One who is Omniscient of all His creatures, O One who is Most Informed of all His creatures, Be kind to us, O Most Kind One, O All-Knowing One, O Most Informed One. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>12. O One Who is Most Kind, Who never ceases to be kind, Be kind to us in what befalls us, You are indeed the Most Kind Who never ceases to be kind, Be kind to us and all the Muslims. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p>13. There no Deity but God. <i>Repeat 40 times.</i>
Muhammad is the Messenger of God. <i>(Once)</i></p> <p>14. God is sufficient for us, and most excellent Manager of our affairs. <i>Repeat 7 times.</i></p> <p>15. O God! bestow Blessings upon Muhammad, O God! bestow Blessings upon him, and Peace <i>Repeat 11 times.</i></p> <p>16. I seek forgiveness from God. <i>Repeat 11 times.</i>
I am repentant to God. <i>(Thrice)</i></p> <p>17. O God! (grant me to die) by it—
O God! (grant me to die) by it—
O God! (grant me to die) by a goodly ending. <i>Repeat 3 times.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">[End of the <i>Rātīb</i>]
*****</p> |
|--|--|

12

13

Fig. 1 Sayyid Muhammad Naqib al-Attas. 2007. *The Rare Gift and the Key to Opening the Door of Union*, pp. 12–13. Singapore: Ba'Alawi Mosque.

guide on the spiritual path who can give context to the seeker, how all this material applies in their daily life and struggles, whether in English, Malay, Arabic, Mandarin, or Zulu.⁸⁾

The supporting role that English text plays is evident in the *Ratib al-Attas*, a slim volume distributed by the Ba'Alawi *tariqa* for its weekly *ratib* recitations and available in both English and Malay versions, which clearly stipulates that the text be recited in transliterated Arabic (in Roman characters), with clear emphasis on sequentiality and oral enunciation (see Fig. 1). Notably, an English translation is provided throughout. Another way devotional literature is used is as a reference for personal *dhikr*. One such example would be *The Evening Wird* (pl. *awrad*), a text used by a small *tariqa* known as the Nur Ashki Jerrahi community in Singapore, which juxtaposes an interlinear Roman transliteration of Arabic and English translation of Arabic against the Arabic text itself (without the text broken up for easy recitation, as is evident in the *Ratib al-Attas*), while including instructions on sequentiality and repetition in English (Nur Ashki Jerrahi Community

8) Zhafri Nasser, Tijaniyyah *murid*, interviewed by Lin Hongxuan, Singapore, July 10, 2017.

THE WIRD AL-SHARIF AL-SAGHIR



[Repeat 10 times:]
A'udhu bil-Llahi mina-sh-shaytani-r-rajim
 I take refuge in Boundless Loving Reality revealing Itself
 in the core of my heart as Allah, and I turn absolutely away from
 the principle of arrogance and separation.

[9 times:]
Bismi-Llahi-r-Rahmani-r-Rahim
 In the all-embracing name of Allah, Infinitely Compassionate
 and Merciful.

[100 times:]
Astaghfiru-Llah
 O Allah! Open my heart to receive Your forgiveness.

Astaghfiru-Llah, Astaghfiru-Llah, Astaghfiru-Llah,
Astaghfiru-Llah al-'Azim alladhi La ilaha illa Hu
Al-Hayyu-l-Qayyum wa atubu Ilayh
 I seek forgiveness for myself and for humanity from Allah
 the Magnificent and Sole Reality, Living and Self-Manifesting.
 I turn my whole being to Allah
Wa as'alahut-t-taubata wa-l-maghfirata wa-l-hidayata
 and beg for complete acceptance, forgiveness, and guidance,
Innah Huwa-t-Tawwabu-r-Rahim
 for Allah is infinitely Merciful and accepts all repentance
 and spiritual longing.

[3 times:]
Wa'fu 'anna Ya Karim
 O Source of all Generosity, erase from our hearts all traces of
 error and transgression.

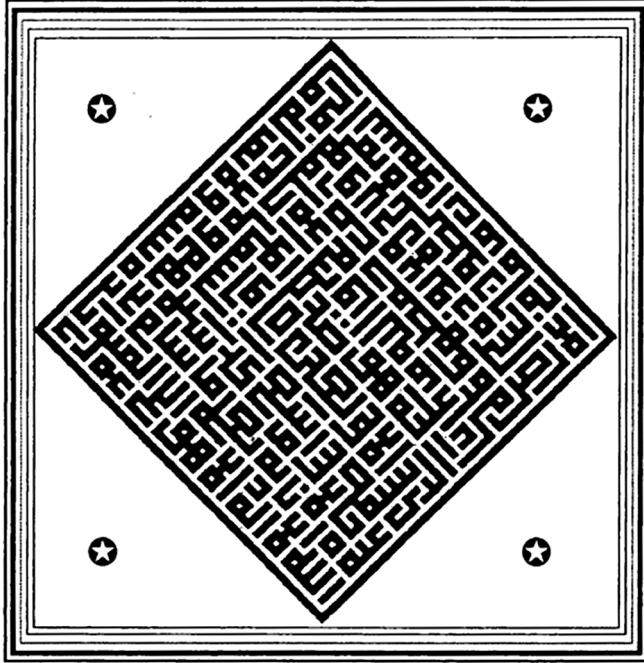
Fig. 2 Nur Ashki Jerrahi Community (anonymous author). 2008. *The Evening Wird of the Illuminated Saint Pir Nureddin al-Jerrahi*, pp. 4–5. New York: Deragh al-Farah.

2008) (see Fig. 2).

Another devotional text used in communal rituals that is circulated in Singapore is *Hizbu-l-Barr: Orison of the Earth*, a formulaic prayer authored by the founding shaykh of the Shadhili *tariqa*, Ali Abu-l-Hasan ash-Shadhdhuli, published by the Virginia-based An-Noor Educational Foundation (affiliated with the Shadhili *tariqa*) and sold in Singapore by Wardah Books (ash-Shadhdhuli 1997). It opens with a geometric pictorial representation of the *Ayat-u-l-Kursi* (*ayat* referring to a verse of the Qur'an) in highly stylized Arabic, with a short description of the *ayat* as a gateway to the hidden knowledge of the immanent, divine world and its puissance in fulfilling prayers when recited (see Fig. 3). Once again, Arabic is invoked in its role as the vehicle for the transmission of scripture, and the visual representation of the language itself is associated with the spiritual blessings that come from the message it carries, though the description of the *ayat* is in English and clearly meant for an English-speaking audience in the United States. Arabic is likewise integral to the text of the prayer itself; the text is split into boxed-up phrases (which indicates that it is used as a guide to recitation in a communal, ritual setting) in three

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ʿĀyātu-l-Kursī
(2:255)
(see pp 16-17)



Abi Amāma رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "The most magnificent Name of Allāh is sealed within the Verse of the Throne. Whoever calls by it—his prayers will surely be answered." (Abū Dawūd رحمته الله)

"These two [*al-kursī wa-l-ʿarsh*] are two of the greatest doors (*bābān*) to the Invisible World (*al-ghayb*). They are themselves invisible, and intimately connected in the Invisible; the Kursī is the Hidden Door (*al-bābu-l-bātin*) that contains the Knowledge of How, of Existence, of Quantity, of Limit, of Where, of Volition and of the Attribute of Will; it also contains the Knowledge of Words, of Movements and of Immobility, as well as the Knowledge of the Return and of the Origin."

ʿImām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq عليه السلام quoted by Ibn Bābuye, *Kitāb at-Tawhīd*, Ch. 50

Zamakḥshārī says, "The kursī is no more than an image that expresses the greatness of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم. In reality (*ḥaqīqah*) there is neither a kursī nor an act of sitting nor any body sitting on it." (Zamakḥshārī, I, p.385)

Fig. 3 ash-Shadhdhuli. 1997. *Hizbu-l-Barr: Orison of the Earth*, edited by A. N. Durkee, p.34. Charlottesville: An-Noor Educational Foundation.

versions: first Arabic, next a transliteration of Arabic, and finally an English translation of the Arabic phrase. Footnotes are included in English where necessary, to explain specific words that are transliterated even in the English translation to ensure fidelity to the complex concept being expressed. The handbook ends with a detailed guide to read-

ing and pronouncing Arabic, which uses the Middle East Studies Association of North America system modified according to Hart's Rules. Evidently the book draws upon Western modes of knowledge in conjunction with English to empower an audience of English-speaking Muslims to recite the prayer in Arabic. This constitutes an excellent example of how English and Arabic interact as *lingua franca*, each empowering the other, and testifies to the trans-regional nature of Islamic literary networks that see such texts being used in Singapore.

Writings of Regional Sufi Shaykhs

Devotional literature used by Singaporean Sufis also includes English-language materials published in South and Southeast Asia and meant specifically for regional consumption by "diasporic" Sufi communities. A good example of Sufi shaykhs' work in circulation in Singapore is *al-Munjiyath*, published by Shaykh Thaika Shuaib Alim of the Aroosiyatul Qadiriyya, a *tariqa* based in Tamil Nadu that has a significant regional presence in Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong (Thaika Shuaib 2008). It was distributed in Singapore during the Sacred Path of Love conference, an annual Sufi conference that brings together regional *muridin* and shaykhs from various *turuq*, held at Masjid Sultan in 2011. Interestingly, the book opens with a brief English biography of the author on its cover, and the title page has the author's name and credentials as follows: "Afdalul Ulama Asshaikh [*ulama* and Shaykh] Dr. Thaika Shuaib Alim, B. A. (Hons), M. A., Ph.D."

The choice of language, the transliterations used, and the text's invocation of Western academic credentials indicate that the engagement of Sufis with Western constructions of scholarly legitimacy as well as languages is operative in Sufi literature consumed in Singapore, even while Arabic is invoked to describe Islamic religious credentials such as *ulama* and shaykh. The text of the book itself, however, including the title page, is presented in three languages: English, Arabic, and Tamil, both interlinear and in sections organized according to language. The contents page, for example, is provided first in Tamil then in English, but not in Arabic. This is telling, in that while Arabic clearly remains important (legitimizing and familiarizing the text by invoking the language of scripture), the audience at which this book is targeted is more conversant in vernacular languages such as Tamil and English. Nevertheless, important sections of the book, such as the *tariqa*'s *awrad* and guide to *du'a* (invocation; part of the act of worship), are provided in Arabic as well as in Tamil and English (in separate sections). This illustrates the multilingual character of Sufi texts, a consequence of the changing educational profile of Muslims as well as the willingness of Sufi shaykhs to engage with English as a language of modernity and utility. The *tariqa*'s website for Singaporean *muridin*, Taqwa.sg (Taqwa being a contraction of the *tariqa*'s full name, Tariqatu-l Arusiyatu-l Qadiriyyah), is also

in English, with Arabic translations appended to most posts, especially on the many occasions when Sufi texts are quoted (Taqwa 2012). It also functions as an online bookstore, distributing physical copies of texts such as *al-Munjiyath*. Clearly, this transnational *tariqa* is comfortable in various languages and media, using them to mutually reinforce each other.

The contents of the book show that it is meant to be used in the context of personal devotion, as well as a guide to mundane issues and problems: the merits of the recitation of various Qur'anic verses are outlined in the first third; the second third is concerned with the elaboration of the *tariqa*'s precepts (such as "Recitals for the Mureeds of Aroosiyatul Quadiriyyah"); and the final third lays out various formulations of *du'a* that, when recited a certain number of times in a particular sequence, address problems such as "[How] To Subdue Anger" (Thaika Shuaib 2008, 12–18). An important qualifier on how this book is used is found in the section titled "A Very Important Note," which reminds readers that "it is not proper to assume that these recitals alone are sufficient to get your intentions fulfilled," attributing agency instead to the grace of God and the guidance of one's shaykh (*ibid.*, 29). Evidently, while such texts function as a permanent link between the *murid* and the accumulated precepts of his/her *tariqa*, they remain in a supporting role to the shaykh-*murid* relationship. English, and in this case Tamil as well, serve as qualifiers of the Arabic text; they ease understanding, but always in deference to the primacy of the original Arabic.

Another example of a regionally circulated text authored by a Sufi shaykh is *Tarbiatul Ushaq* (the training of divine lovers), a collection of the speeches (*malfuzat*) given by Chisti Sabiri Shaykh Muhammad Zauqi Shah, compiled, edited, and translated into English where necessary by his disciples Shaykh Shahidullah Faridi and Shaykh Wahid Baksh Sial (Muhammad Zauqi Shah 2004). This text, like many other Chisti Sabiri texts, has substantial circulation in Southeast Asia, and it is written virtually entirely in English, with Arabic/Urdu words transliterated in Roman characters at selected points. While footnotes and citations are not used, a comprehensive index is included, and advertisements for other English-language A. S. Noordeen publications are appended. Clearly, in the Chistiyya-Sabiriyya the use of English is fully embraced as a necessity, and Western literary techniques of organization as well as business models are adopted in promoting the dissemination of Sufi devotional literature.

Materials Transmitted via Europe and North America

Two other examples of the writings of Sufi shaykhs, this time transmitted via Europe and North America, available at Wardah Books and the Darul Arqam bookstore, are *The Book of Assistance* and *Counsels of Religion*. Both were authored by the prominent

eighteenth-century Yemeni Ba'Alawi Shaykh Abdallah Ibn'Alawi al-Haddad (hereafter Imam al-Haddad) and have been published in the United States by Fons Vitae, a subsidiary of the aforementioned Quilliam Press (al-Haddad 2003; 2010b). Both these texts are almost entirely in English and are obviously targeted at an English-speaking Sufi audience. Several features of these books, however, distinguish them from mere translations and illustrate the supporting role English plays in relation to Arabic.

Both books retain chosen words in transliterated Arabic, such as *hulul*, or incarnation, and *ittihad*, or union (al-Haddad 2010b, 27). *The Book of Assistance* italicizes and provides citations in Roman numerals where Imam al-Haddad quotes from the Qur'an, an example being "Do you think that We created you in vain, and that to Us you will not be returned? [XXIII:115]" (*ibid.*, 32). This suggests that publishers of Sufi literature have appropriated Western literary conventions of organization for expediency as well as to familiarize their products for an English-speaking audience. At the same time, Arabic retains a central position as the original and irreplaceable language of Islamic knowledge transmission and continues to function alongside English and Western literary norms. This is supported by the retention of transliterated Arabic for ritual phrases, clearly meant to be spoken, that are embedded in the book: for example, "when you feel near to your orgasm recite within yourself, without moving your tongue: *'Wa huwa'lladhi khalaqa mina'l-ma'i basharan'* [He it is Who created man out of water] [XXV:54]" (*ibid.*, 57). At the same time, Western conventions that aid the English-speaking reader, such as detailed translator's notes and a glossary, are provided at the end of the book. In *Counsels of Religion*, detailed footnotes and a bibliography are provided for the texts that Imam al-Haddad cites in the course of his writing. These two books are widely circulated among Singaporean Sufis; both books are bestsellers at Wardah Books, and the Ba'Alawi *tariqa* is arguably the most numerous and established in Singapore (Abaza 1997, 62).

Perhaps no other example illustrates the relevance to Singapore of the Sufi appropriation of Western conventions of scholarly legitimacy and languages better than *The Doctrine of the Sufis* by Arthur John Arberry, a translation of the tenth-century Sufi writer Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi's *Kitab al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf* (al-Kalabadhi 1994). It was published by an Indian publisher, Kitab Bhavan, and, like R. A. Nicholson's *The Mystics of Islam* and J. Spencer Trimingham's *The Sufi Orders in Islam* discussed earlier, is an example of Sufis appropriating classic studies on Sufism to better represent Sufism to aspirants and *muridin* alike. The reprints of these classic studies are meant to enhance accessibility or familiarity—Arberry's English-language translation of the text is certainly more accessible than the Arabic original for Singaporean readers—as well as a means of invoking the prestige associated with an English-language scholarly work on Sufism. Furthermore, the fact that a classic study of Sufism, with detailed footnotes and

all the other conventions of academic works, was published in New Delhi and distributed in Singapore attests to the transnational literary network of Sufi literature that Singapore participates in as well as the prestige of English as a pedagogical medium for Singaporean Sufis.

A related example is *The Mantle Adorned*, a translation of Imam Busiri's *Burda* (a poetic ode of praise for the Prophet), which juxtaposes each Arabic line of the poem against an English translation but also provides an accompanying English quote to each line—these quotes vary greatly in provenance, ranging from classical Sufi shaykhs such as Rumi to French *littérateurs* such as Victor Hugo (Abdal Hakim Murad 2009) (see Fig. 4). This is a text clearly directed at a Western audience, sometimes appropriating Western sources for both familiarity and prestige, printed to aesthetically resemble an illuminated manuscript, yet using English in conjunction with Arabic. The structuring of this text to suit Western sensibilities and increase its marketability evinces the appropriation of Western business and literary norms; at the same time, however, the Cosmopolitan Vernacular of English, in its role as a *lingua franca* connecting a global *ummah*, is clearly at work in conjunction with Arabic.

Materials Produced in Singapore

Sufi devotional literature produced in Singapore and targeted at a local audience also evinces the use of English as a Cosmopolitan Vernacular. *Taqwa and Knowledge*, a translation of the first two sections of Imam al-Haddad's *al-Nasaih al-Diniyyah*, was produced by The Islamic Texts for the Blind (Kitaba), a charitable Muslim organization from Britain that sold *Taqwa and Knowledge* as a fund-raiser. *Taqwa and Knowledge* contains a foreword by the prominent Ba'Alawi Shaykh al-Habib Hasan al-Attas, and the book was sold as a fund-raiser in Singapore. *Taqwa and Knowledge* is largely in English, but on the many occasions where Imam al-Haddad cites Qur'anic *ayat* in which the passive voice of God is invoked, the Arabic text is provided with an English translation below it. By contrast, *ayat* that are attributed to other characters, such as those of Jacob in *surat Yusuf* [Qur'an 12: 101], are provided without the accompanying Arabic (al-Haddad 2010a, 10). Clearly, Arabic remains closely associated not just with the Qur'an as a text but with divine revelation; it is subtly invoked as the language of God. English is used in this text in a diglossic relationship with Arabic; both are necessary to convey the message, but one has clear precedence over the other, even though English is the primary medium of transmission here.

Another locally produced text, the aforementioned *The Grand Saint of Singapore*, is a hagiography of the nineteenth-century Singaporean Sufi Shaykh Habib Nuh bin Mohammad al-Habshi, published by a local mosque and clearly targeting a local audience

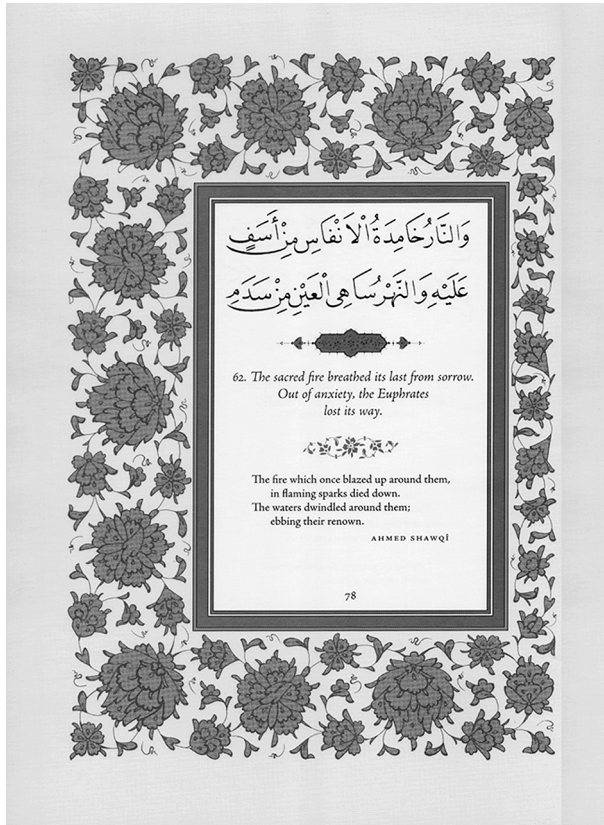


Fig. 4 Abdal Hakim Murad. 2009. *The Mantle Adorned: Imam Busiri's Burda*, p. 78. London: The Quilliam Press.

(Muhammad Ghouse 2008). In its many prefaces and forewords, it juxtaposes the original Arabic of the *ayat* against an English translation; the actual hagiography, however, apart from an Arabic *ayat* left untranslated at the end of each chapter, is entirely in English. The particular usage of Arabic and English in this text suggests that Arabic is invoked as a seal of legitimacy (the relevant analogue here is perhaps the practice of citation in academic writing) while the main message of the text is conveyed, according to the needs of the audience, in English. The use of Arabic *ayat* at the close of each chapter parallels the use of the stylized *Ayatul-Kursi* in the preface to *Hizbu-l-Barr*; it invokes the power of the Qur'an as the repository of God's instructions to man, something intimately connected with the language, Arabic, used to convey those instructions. While acknowledging the pedagogical needs of a diverse *ummah*, these texts never lose sight of the importance of Arabic, and use it comfortably in conjunction with English.

Digital Media

Finally, Sufis' appropriation of the Internet's capacities for disseminating text, audio, and video resources, as well as the organizational capacities it affords them, highlights the importance of English as a vehicle for connecting disparate components of the *ummah* in powerful new ways. Online, English is the undisputed *lingua franca*, and the adoption of English goes hand in hand with digital media. Sufi websites, Facebook groups, mailing lists, and YouTube channels—overwhelmingly in English—collectively amount to a novel form of social attachment for Sufis, which supplements rather than undermines traditional forms of Sufi organization. The Naqshbandiyya-Haqqaniyya are an exemplar of Sufi willingness to use digital media in their service; websites such as SufiLive.com allowed users to stream a video or audio recording of a weekly lecture by the *tariqa*'s senior shaykh, Nazim Haqqani, until his passing in 2014, with past lectures still hosted on the website (SufiLive 2012). The *tariqa*, through its publishing organs, the Islamic Supreme Council of America and the Institute for Spiritual and Cultural Advancement, also publishes transcriptions of these English lectures in print—the SufiLive series (*ibid.*).⁹ These texts are distributed in Singapore by Simply Islam, an affiliate that sells them through its online bookstore, as well as at public events such as the public lecture given by Shaykh Hisham Kabbani in Singapore in 2011 (Simply Islam 2012). Evidently, diverse formats of knowledge transmission are being employed, with online video/audio, printed books, and live lectures mutually reinforcing each other to better convey the Naqshbandi-Haqqani message to the greatest possible number.

The organizational opportunities provided by the platform of the Internet have been enthusiastically taken up by Sufis in general, including the Naqshbandiyya-Haqqaniyya. SufiLive.com itself acts as a community organization resource, by allowing users to donate to the site to pay for its upkeep, and maintaining a regularly updated touring schedule of its major shaykhs. Similarly, Shadhili-Darqawi *muridin* in Singapore participate in transnational conversations with their fellow *muridin* via portals such as the South Africa-based Shaykh Zawia Ebrahim's community page on Facebook (Zawia Ebrahim Community Page 2012). Other *turuq* use the Internet as a platform to host pedagogical text: the Shadhili-Darqawi-Qadiri Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi, whose book *The Hundred Steps* is widely available in Singapore, has made some of his work available in full on third-party websites (Bewley 2012). Simply Islam has also offered explanatory courses on Imam al-Haddad's and Imam al-Ghazali's works (specifically, *Counsels of Religion* and *The Books of Assistance*), which were advertised on the Simply Islam website (Simply

9) An example of a book in this series is Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, *The Sufilive Series: Spiritual Discourses of a Sufi Master* Vol. 1, ed. Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani (Fenton: Institute for Spiritual and Cultural Advancement, 2010).

Islam Advertisement 2012a; 2012b; 2012c). These courses are an excellent example of how Sufi texts, media, and praxis are mutually constitutive: a taught course explicating a printed book that was organized and advertised on the Internet, all of which was done in English. English then serves to connect trans-regional communities of Sufis, from Egypt to South Africa to Singapore, from the twelfth century to the present, both online and in person, in a single discursive field. This cosmopolitan function is what drives the publication of English-language Sufi literature, but given the demographic, educational profile, and interconnectedness of Sufis around the world, English has attained the status of a vernacular language both within and outside Singapore.

Other Sufi organizations, such as Sout Ilaahi (Soutilaahi.com), established in 2010, have matured as platforms for the digital propagation of Sufi knowledge and engagement with younger Muslims.¹⁰ The website is entirely in English and hosts various articles, including expositions on Sufi knowledge as well as exhortations encouraging Sufi praxis. It also serves the important function of facilitating and publicizing public events, usually noted scholars or shaykhs conducting workshops or public lectures. A recent example is that of a public lecture held at Masjid Sultan titled “When Adam Met Hawa: The Purpose of Creation” (Sout Ilaahi 2017a), given by Shaykh Mohammed Aslam, an imam from the British city of Birmingham. Sout Ilaahi not only publicizes talks by Anglophone Sufi speakers but also sells tickets to them; powered by Eventbrite, tickets for such lectures may be purchased on Soutilaahi.com, which accepts a range of credit cards. It also includes a “Sponsor the Needy” option, which allows buyers to purchase tickets for those who would like to attend but cannot afford the entrance fee; a key part of Sufi praxis is compassion and almsgiving, which Sout Ilaahi facilitates. Here, Sufi engagement with English and digital media has served as a kind of force multiplier, enabling Sufi networks to project themselves to new audiences while maintaining their traditional sanctity and authority alongside a crisp, professional image.

Sout Ilaahi’s digital platform also serves as a means of structuring a disciplined and committed body of *muridin* across different *turuq*: since early 2017, Sout Ilaahi has disseminated an English-language biweekly digital newsletter via e-mail, titled *Sanctity Within*. This newsletter is disseminated in addition to topical e-mails advertising specific events or celebrating special occasions such as Ramadan. *Sanctity Within* represents unprecedented organizing capacity; where traditional Sufi networks of shaykhs and *muridin* would have been built around specific mosques, family lineages, and personal connections, Sout Ilaahi is able to maintain a recurring psychical presence in the minds

10) Sout Ilaahi grew out of the Sacred Path of Love Facebook community page, which facilitated the eponymous annual conferences in Singapore.

of *muridin* outside of *dhikr* and *hadra*, a direct line of communication to *muridin* that complements traditional forms of Sufi organization. The mailing list keeps up a steady flow of links to articles such as “Volunteerism and the Sacred Path of Love,” an eloquent exposition of the spirit of sacrifice and service to others that is central to Sufi praxis, while soliciting volunteers to help organize the Sacred Path of Love conference (Abu Sofian 2017). Through the mailing list, subscribers may also access resources such as the transcript of a question-and-answer session at the end of a public lecture in 2016 held by a visiting shaykh, Shaykh Adeyinka Mendes of Atlanta, Georgia (Sout Ilaahi 2017b). Through the Sout Ilaahi website and mailing list, aspiring *muridin* may access what amounts to an incomplete but impressive archive of Sufi discourse in Singapore, a digital repository that allows them to benefit from past events that they missed or wish to refresh their memories of. The May 8, 2017 issue of *Sanctity Within* included a link to a transcript of a talk titled “Emptying the Heart: The Power of *Dhikr*” by Professor Zachary Wright, which he delivered in English at the Sacred Path of Love conference retreat in 2011 (Wright 2011). The mailing list also makes possible amplification of Sufi events, as in the following:

Good news everyone! We are going live on Facebook tomorrow with a lecture by Ustaz Amin! InshaAllah Ustaz will be speaking on why Sha’ban matters for our Ramadan. He will also be taking questions from the audience. Do tune in and text your questions to 9140 4532.

Living with the Prophet: Why Sha’ban Matters for our Ramadan
Tuesday, 9 May 2017, 8pm

Watch it at our Facebook page. See you there! (Sout Ilaahi, *Sanctity Within* newsletter, May 8, 2017)

Publicizing Sufi events online is a well-established practice, but the facilitation of the transmission of Sufi knowledge down to the “last mile,” conveyed directly to the individual *murid* digitally in the comfort of his/her home, is a choice example of how Singaporean Sufis have embraced the opportunities afforded by digital media, which is partially predicated on the use of English. Clearly, the organizational opportunities and new modes of knowledge transmission the Internet offers have been enthusiastically appropriated by Singaporean Sufis, who use them in conjunction with more established vectors of knowledge transmission such as printed texts, as well as in new languages that reflect the pedagogical needs of their target audience.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how, for a constellation of reasons, English has become an accepted medium of Islamic discourse, functioning in conjunction with Arabic in a diglossic relationship. By adapting Pollock's framework, English can also be reasonably conceptualized as a Cosmopolitan Vernacular, a framework that helps illumine how English operates in transmitting Sufi knowledge alongside Arabic within a long-standing Arabic cosmopolis. English allows both shaykhs and *turuq* greater reach, facilitates access for *muridin*, and supports the pedagogical shaykh-*murid* relationship across linguistic, ethnic, and geographical boundaries. In Singapore, where actual literacy in Arabic—beyond the ability to recite the Qur'an in it—is rare even within the Muslim community, and many Muslims are comfortable reading English, these texts and resources constitute key elements in both autodidactic and pedagogical processes, reinforcing the relationship between shaykh and *murid* even if both parties are not in physical contact with one another. Moreover, this paper has highlighted Sufi print culture's relationship with English and its adoption of new forms of digital media, examples of how Sufism has perpetuated its relevance in a rapidly changing world. By studying the genesis, characteristics, and functions of English-language Sufi devotional literature circulating in Singapore, this paper makes a small contribution to how Sufism in Singapore is understood in all its spiritual and textual richness. More broadly, this paper sheds light on some of the ways in which Sufism has negotiated the challenges and opportunities presented by new technologies, new languages, new media, and demographic changes within the *ummah*.

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