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**World Musics and World Religions:  
*Whose World?***

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Introduction:  
Sufis and That Global Old-Time Religion

In May 1993, Berlin's "Haus der Kulturen der Welt," the House of the World's Cultures, featured among its other concerts staging world music a series called "the Music of the Sufis." Centrally located in Berlin, the House of the World's Cultures took special pains to display its concerts of Sufi music as an emblem of openness to Islam and Islamic culture, thereby publicly repairing the damage caused by recent fire-bombings and attacks on Germany's Turkish population, some of which had led to death. In the pamphlet describing the "Music of the Sufis" and the ensemble of Sufi musicians, called "Sheikh Hamza Chakour and Al Kindi," the concert-goer is promised an encounter with a truly world music anchored in a truly world religion ("Musik der Sufis" 1993, 14-15):

Sheikh Hamza Chakour and Al Kindi are experts of classical Arabic and Andalusian-Moorish music. Sheikh Hamza Chakour, head of the whirling dervishes of Damascus, sings the sacred and secular repertory with centuries-old tradition. Abdelsalam Safar is well-known as the most venerated among all Syrian players of the end-blown flute, the nay. Adel Shams Eddin, an Egyptian playing the tambourine-like instrument, the riqq, is the last specialist of

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classical rhythms utilizing long, asymmetrical intervals. The Frenchman, Julien Jalal Eddin Weiss, already studied the music of Morocco as a young boy; he plays the qanun, the Arabic zither, with virtuosity. After they played a concert in Switzerland, the newspaper, *Berner Woche*, passed this judgment on the ensemble: "Their songs and instrumental pieces unite tremendous inner peace with the sensibility of a reserved beauty."

Sufi music had come of age in Berlin, come of age as a music mixing bits of Syria, Egypt, Morocco, and France, all in the future German capital city, itself containing the largest Turkish and Muslim population in Central Europe. But whose music was this? Was it the music of the residents of Berlin's Kreuzberg district, home to the Berlin Muslim community? The Turkish *Gastarbeiter* who were increasingly the objects of attacks from the German Right? Quite the contrary, ownership was marked by the construction of the title for these concerts: "Musik der Sufis," "Music of the Sufis." Ownership belonged to the Sufis, and it resided in the great age of the instruments and traditions of this international ensemble of musicians. Authority emerged from the great age of Sufism and its musical traditions, as well as from its capacity to transcend the boundaries of time and region. The structures of Sufi music itself—its "long, asymmetrical intervals"—enhanced the transcendent potential of Sheikh Hamza Chakour and Al Kindi, allowing the ensemble to mix and remix the instrumentarium of North African and Middle Eastern traditions. Classical Arabic music becomes spiritual Islamic music, universalized for international audiences in the waning years of the twentieth century.

In any musical or sacred sense, however, the "Music of the Sufis" is an invention, a mixture of sound and spirituality marketed for mass consumption. One might even argue that "the Sufis"—the definite article standing as an icon of community—are also an invention, albeit a much older invention, well canonized in the West, at least for the Germans, by the time of Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* ([1819] 1988). Sufism, as a category in and of itself, stripped of local practice and the meanings conveyed through the individualized genealogies descended from specific sheikhs, has taken a

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place in the global imagination as a world religion.<sup>1</sup> As a religion effaced of local meaning, Sufism has been forced to represent a postmodern otherness, whose differences perforce disappear as those who gaze upon it draw it closer to the West in ways artfully executed by Goethe and the House of the World's Cultures.<sup>2</sup> In the past decade, Sufi music has been marketed globally on records, video-cassettes, and CDs, and tours by Sufi musicians regularly sell out concert halls throughout the world; the stars and superstars of Sufi music—for example, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan—find themselves equally at home in the popular-music recording studio as on the stages of the South Asian Diaspora (see Ruby 1992).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By and large, the history and polity of Sufism are local, with patterns of worship and ritual determined through genealogies that extend from the influence of specific saints. Local musical practices often provide ways of maintaining the genealogy through performance, again with emphasis on individualized means and texts that encode and transmit specific versions of Islamic thought. Shrines in and around Delhi devoted to the Sufi saint and musical innovator, Amir Khusrau (1253–1325 c.e.), sustain musical and religious practices that connect the larger aesthetic of Hindustani music to the meanings of *qawwālī* about the life and family of Nizamuddin Auliya, the spiritual figurehead for these shrines (cf. Neuman 1990, 85–90 and Qureshi 1995, 20–23).

<sup>2</sup> Sufism is by no means the only case of an invented world religion with its own world music. Studies of African religion in Brazil and elsewhere in the African Diaspora, for example, rely not only on the notion that the Yoruba are a single culture and society, but that there is a set of religious practices recognizable as "Yoruba religion." Yoruba musical elements, furthermore, provide ways of documenting the connections between Nigeria and Afro-Brazilian cults. The Yoruba as a single society, nevertheless, is largely an invention of nineteenth-century colonialism and the consolidation of political power in Nigeria so that it would be held primarily by larger groups, rather than by hundreds of small groups (see Apter 1992). A "Yoruba music," such as *jùjú*, is itself a historical consolidation of many different repertoires and styles that have developed through the extensive processes of exchange throughout the diasporic cultural area of the Atlantic (cf. Waterman 1990 and Gilroy 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Record stores often provide a field for examining the ethnography of world musics (see Nettl 1985, 61–64). At the main Rose Records shop in downtown Chicago, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's recordings immediately precede those of Frankie Yankovich, the Slovenian-American superstar of polka, the result of the alphabetical relation between the bins, "Pakistan" and "Polka."

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During the twentieth century Sufi music has become fully transformed into a sound-mix of world musics and world religions (for the classic study of *qawwālī*, see Qureshi 1995). The earliest recordings of musics from the Middle East and South Asia established a position for Sufism as a “devotional” music with markets that were both local and international. Already in 1902, the Gramophone Company included a significant representation of *qawwāls* (singers of *qawwālī*) in its first attempts to record Indian music for the West (Qureshi 1992/1993, 112; and Joshi 1977). During the early decades of recording in South Asia, international recording companies deliberately identified religious communities as a potential market and created for these consumers of devotional music an appropriate style and repertory. For the diverse Muslim communities of South Asia, the Sufi genre, *qawwālī*, fitted the purposes of the recording industry perfectly, and by the 1930s it dominated the Muslim market (Qureshi 1992/1993, 113). *Qawwālī* was an egalitarian music, and its use of Urdu, a language understood throughout Muslim South Asia, assured that it had the broadest possible popular audience. When *qawwālī* recordings boomed in the 1930s, texts in a more or less vernacular Urdu far outweighed those in Persian or literary Urdu (Qureshi 1992/1993, 114; and Joshi 1988), and the subject matter of most texts was such that it included rather than excluded different sects. The popularization of musics connected to Sufi shrines in India and Pakistan during the twentieth century, therefore, follows a trajectory created in large part by the recording industry. Popularity itself had a distinctly global character, thus making it possible for *qawwālī* musicians such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan to establish their fame outside of South Asia rather than because of their association with a local shrine, the traditional path toward musical specialization.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The biographer of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan bemoans the “sad saga” that the popular *qawwālī* singer “has the singular distinction of getting recognition overseas earlier than at home” (Ruby 1992, 10), but then claims that his artistry results from “a quaint synthesis: Nusrat Fateh is the topical symbol of this exquisite East-West synthesis and the growth of individual talent from an inherent classicist to a ‘mod-vocalist’ of the orient, gaining growing appeal even to the continental, Japanese and trans-Atlantic folklore and country-music” (ibid., 9–10).

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Other world-beat Sufi musics have different histories, which demonstrate distinctive processes of mediation within international recording projects. The music of Mevlevi Sufis in Turkey, for example, already assumed forms subjected to the Western gaze through early Orientalist publications, which depicted “whirling dervishes,” a form of representation taken up by recording companies in the twentieth century (e.g., d’Ohsson 1788). It was hardly surprising that the two-record set designed to accompany the 1987 traveling exhibit, “The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent,” should have borne the title, *The Music of the Whirling Dervishes*. According to the author of the liner notes, this recording contained music inspired by the poems of “Rumi, the towering figure of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) in the 13th Century,” and that the performances were based on “the rituals of Rumi’s followers (known in the Western world as ‘The Whirling Dervishes’), [which] are among the enduring as well as the most exquisite ceremonies of spirituality” (*The Music of the Whirling Dervishes*). The popularity of Sufi musics from the Middle East has assumed diverse forms. Whereas “dervish recordings” may attract non-Muslim consumption in the West, the Syrian Abed Azrié has released recordings aimed largely at Muslim audiences in Paris (see, e.g., *Les Soufis*). Azrié’s style owes no particular debt to the sounds or practices of *dhikr*, the ceremony of remembrance, but takes on a wide variety of New Age sonorities and textures, over which he sings the traditional poems of medieval poets. Marketed primarily in France, *Les Soufis* represents a repertory for France’s large North African and Middle Eastern population.

Although all these musics claim explicit connections to Sufi music, their sounds are vastly different. How might we describe Sufi music after listening to the countless recordings produced during the past century? Are there elements of musical style or traces of music history that these examples share? Are the religious practices they accompanied the same? Or, indeed, is it the singular level at which they demonstrate a form of unity—that of the markets for which they were produced—that leads to claims that they are world music representing a world religion?

The questions I pose here contain numerous paradoxes, as does the interrogative subtitle of this article. On the one hand, the invention of a "music of the Sufis" offers a particularly striking example of such paradoxes, and I have chosen to introduce the issues lying at the center of this article with the troubling paradoxes of invention in mind. Still, I might have taken other examples, and, during the course of the article, it will become clear that we are not wanting for musics and religions that have invented themselves into the global imagination; the invention of world musics and world religions have, in many ways, become normative in the late twentieth century. On the other hand, the "music of the Sufis" is also a complex instantiation of the problem I wish to investigate here. It is not quite so easy to unravel this problem as my opening critique of the concerts at the Berlin House of the World's Cultures might have suggested. Indeed, the tour of the Sufi musical soundscape is not only made possible by the ready availability of sound recordings on the contemporary marketplace, but it also appears in the intellectual cartography of standard ethnomusicological discourse. The long intellectual history of weaving the representational fabrics with which the West has used Sufism to clothe the Other, moreover, is by no means unrelated to contemporary representational practices; nor is it conveniently packaged as merely or fundamentally postmodern. Sufism has provided us with one of the most privileged of all Orientalist tropes. It has also become one of the primary ways in which regional and national intellectual traditions in the Middle East and South Asia represent themselves, for example, in song anthologies published by the Turkish government or the center of traditional Islam at the Seljuk University in Konya, Turkey (e.g., Türkmen n.d.; and Halıcı 1983). Scholarly recordings, too, have included Sufi musics among their musical offerings, thereby also contributing to the authentication of the category as a world music (see, e.g., *Qawwali: Sufi Music from Pakistan*, which established the Sabri Brothers as an ensemble well worth studying). Given the problematic position of music in Islamic thought, Sufism has even become a unique *Ersatz* for music in Islam, a way of comforting Orientalist anxiety.

Sufis, after all, have no country, no single country—nor do they inhabit single geographic regions—and yet they are presumed to exist throughout the Islamic world. Their presence is timeless, and their music exists in a timeless present. World-music slogans have also recontextualized Sufi music, claiming it to be "spiritual," not religious, music.<sup>5</sup> Stated somewhat differently, Sufi music represents spirituality, not religion, whereby it can enter a realm cohabited by other world musics, for example the New Age sound of Native American flute that surrounds one in the growing number of shops that sell Native American art.<sup>6</sup> Its spirituality is presumably accessible to many, if not all, which means, by extension, that one needs neither to be Muslim nor to engage in Sufi ritual practice to penetrate the spirituality Sufi music conveys.<sup>7</sup> As recording companies repackage Sufi music as world music, they often undertake a gradual desacralization of the music as a prelude to spiritualizing it for more general consumption. We witness this rhetorical shift in an advertising blurb for the first of two CDs of *qawwālī* released by JVC in its "World Sounds Series." Even the way in which God is named—essential to the process of remembering and efficacy in musical practices used by many Sufi rituals, for example, *zhikr*—passes from a specifically Muslim ("Allah") to a generalized ("the Lord") and then finally to a generic level ("god"), all in the space of two sentences.

Qawwali is one form of traditional Islamic music, by which Sufi mystics sought to draw closer to Allah. Through these ballads, interpreted here by the legendary Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, melodies

<sup>5</sup> Mickey Hart, in a chapter devoted to Egypt and the drumming tradition of the *tar*, a frame drum, compares the response of an Upper Egyptian *tar* maker to Hart's own instrument, which was, not surprisingly, "finely crafted by a Sufi in Northern California" (Hart 1990, 192).

<sup>6</sup> Native American art has itself come to replace Indian crafts.

<sup>7</sup> Inscribed on the cover of a CD of *qawwālī* performed by Jaffar Hussain Khan (World Music Library KICC 5115) is the following invitation to "popular Islam:" "This disc is a recording of the Qawwali, a religious [sic] song of the south Asian followers of Islam, as sung by Jaffar Hussain. His songs, supported by classical vocal techniques, draw the listener into religious [sic] intoxication."

and rhythms combine to transmit the Lord's message and to assist listeners in their attempts to reach a higher plane of unity with their god (Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan 1994).

The world-music production of *qawwālī* at once depends on the aura of spirituality surrounding Sufism and on the possibility that music can specify meanings that consumers in a world market can recognize as their own. As if the chain of signification, Allah—the Lord—god, in the advertisement above were not fully capable of achieving this, its authors insert a musical, even ethnomusicological, signifier at a strategic moment, identifying *qawwālī* as “ballads,” thereby evoking familiarity, although *qawwālī* could not possibly be classified as ballads. This strategy of mediation, however, is not about classification but, rather, about ownership of musical and religious practice, and ownership has passed to the consumer of the music with the transformation of religious music to spiritual music.

### Interactions and Intersections of Religious and Musical Practices: Cultural Spaces In-Between

In this essay I concern myself extensively with questions of ownership and with the ways in which music and religion provide domains in which ownership is contested. The essay is not, however, an attempt to catalogue the ways in which world musics have participated in the disenfranchisement of everyday religious belief and practice through the commodification of a global music economy. The opening section presents one example, and I prefer to let this stand as Exhibit A. Rather than observing the globalization of musical and religious practice with despair, I want instead to look at the other side of the problem: the ways in which musical and religious practices actually repair the disenfranchisement and resist the crush of colonialism and global cultural economies. Accordingly, I prefer to invite the reader to think of “world musics” and “world religions” not so much as institutionalized structures of power—as hegemonic forces, that is—but rather as local practices and belief

systems, dependent on each other for responses to the politics of globalism.

Whereas considerable recent research in cultural studies theorizes local culture through its ultimate connections to global forces, I contend here that musical and religious practice cannot be reduced simply to evidence for processes occurring at great distance from the rituals and everyday conditions that instantiate religion and music. In this sense, music and religion both depend on performance and the agents that bring it about. Considered at the moment of its most sacred, religion is not just belief, nor does it allow itself to be defined as taxonomic categories in a belief system. Local religious meaning emerges only through active participation and the experience upon which practice depends. Through ritual and the performance of liturgical texts, music broadens the possibilities for participation and experience. Music enhances the everyday aspects of religious practice, thereby localizing it. Music, as I consider it here, does not exhibit a global ontology, but is in fact at its farthest remove from the universal. Through its local instantiations, the music of religion is not “Buddhist music” or “Sufi music,” but rather the composite of musical choices used to guide worship during a specific ritual at a specific shrine. Music combines with religious practice to look inward in order to specify meaning rather than outward to determine its connections to globalized constructs of meaning.<sup>8</sup>

I am not only encouraging a shift of attention from the global to the local, even the subaltern, level but a rethinking of the conditions of world musics that further resituate them into a much longer and more complex history. This shift in my thinking, quite frankly, is a

<sup>8</sup> Ethnomusicology has recently embraced many of the cultural-studies theories that explain the local in relation to the globalization of world culture. In particular, Mark Slobin has theorized world music, especially in Europe and North America, as occupying various soundscapes that connect the local to the global (see Slobin 1993 for the most developed statement of this theory). Whereas these approaches create a framework that accounts for as many musics as possible, they extend with difficulty to sacred musical practices, which do not lend themselves to the objective and bounded nature embedded in the term “musics” or “micromusics.”

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 move away from invoking the “conditions of postmodernism” as explanations of the fissures and schisms in world cultures, as well as world music cultures. These conditions, too, collapse world musics and world religions to symptoms of a timeless present.<sup>9</sup> I argue instead that the responses of musical and religious practice are in themselves actively resisting this presumed timelessness of a postmodern age.

World musics and world religions come into contact and interact in contested moments and places (cf. Bhabha 1994). We witness their interaction, for example, in the contact of colonialism. We witness their interaction in the regions of juncture and disjuncture between world religions, for example, the centuries-long confrontation between Islam and Hinduism in northern India.<sup>10</sup> We witness their interaction in situations of domination and subjugation—apartheid in South Africa or the forced internment of Native Americans on reservations throughout much of American history. Historical moments of political instability, too, bring world musics and world religions into contact. The turbulence in the Balkans and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are but two obvious examples. Subaltern resistance and ethnic revival, too, juxtapose musical and religious practices to voice and mobilize their responses to political

<sup>9</sup> The explosion of Gregorian chant’s popularity that began in 1993, symbolized by the dramatic leap of Gregorian chant to the popular and world-music charts, exemplifies the ways in which the present becomes a timeless site for world music. Recordings such as the Angel release of performances by the Benedictine monks of Santo Domingo de Silos in Spain take local practices and package them for global consumption. The “chant experience,” however, cannot simply be dismissed as devoid of sacred qualities. Katherine Bergeron brilliantly describes the timelessness of chant recordings as a sort of “virtual sacred,” observing further that chant comes to occupy a “queer space of suspended faith, . . . an oddly comforting interval in which, neither believing nor disbelieving, we recognize the very experience we never expected to find as something already potentially lost” (Bergeron 1995, 34).

<sup>10</sup> The mass production of recordings of Muslim devotional music in the early twentieth century depended on and benefited from this conflict (Qureshi 1992/1993).

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 globalism, which they nevertheless do not consider to be ineluctable conditions of modernity or postmodernity.

These areas of contestation and interaction are unstable; indeed, they are defined by their instability. The religious and musical practices that constitute them—that further define them—are also unstable, or, I might say, changing and dynamic. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to examine the processes of musical change that participate in the religious transformations of such areas. In this essay I reflect upon three larger processes: resistance, historicization, and pilgrimage. By no means do these constitute the only religious-musical responses to historical and modern political globalism. I have chosen them to represent these responses, nonetheless, because they are themselves global, which is to say that, even though each must be examined locally, none is dependent solely on local conditions. I should add, furthermore, that I have myself researched aspects of these processes to varying degrees, which permits me also to interrogate them empirically. It is my concern, then, not to relegate these responses to the realm of high theory or to position them on globalist culture-scapes (e.g., Appadurai 1990; and Slobin 1993), but rather to identify areas of research that compel ethnomusicologists and historians of religions together to enter the field, the contested regions in which music and religion interact.

END - PART ONE