

# SUFI NIGHT: MUSIC, RITUAL AND ECSTASY ON THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

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## Resumo

Às vinte horas dos dias 14 e 15 de maio de 2004, a Sala de Concertos da Cité de la Musique, em Paris, abriu suas portas para quatro ordens sufis do mundo muçulmano - Murid (do Senegal), Yesevi (do Egito), Kadiri (do Afeganistão) e Chisti-Qawwali (do Paquistão) - uma após a outra, apresentarem seus concertos espirituais. A audição (al-sama) da Nuit Soufie (nome dado ao concerto) terminou, nas duas noites, de madrugada. Através das recitações e cantos poéticos dos Murids do Senegal, das recitações corânicas apresentadas em elaboradas técnicas vocais, pelo Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tûni (do Egito), do círculo de zikr (repetição dos nomes de Deus), liderada por Mir Fakr al-Din Agha (do Afeganistão) e do canto alegre e contagiante dos Qawwâli (do Paquistão), sob a batuta de Asif Ali Khan, os rituais sufis rivalizaram com os "trances" techno da cultura rave atual. Neste texto - que é fruto de uma etnografia de passagem - a autora faz uma reflexão comparativa entre os "trances vertiginosos" produzidos nas pistas rave de dança e os "trances esotéricos" experimentados pelos participantes ("musicantes" e "musicados") dos e nos concertos ou audições (al-sama) públicos, sufis.

## Palavras-chave:

Música Sufi; Sama; Zikr; Rituais de Transe; Tribalismo.

At eight o'clock on the 14th and 15th of May 2004, the Salle des Concerts of the Cité de la Musique, in Paris, opened its doors to four Sufi orders of the Muslim world - Murid (from Senegal), Yesevi (from Uper Egypt), Kadiri (from Afghanistan) and Chisti-Qawwali (from Pakistan), one after another, present their spiritual concerts. The audition (al-sama) of the *Sufi Night* (the name given to the concert), on the both of the two nights, ended in the small hours.

## Abstract

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## Keywords:

Sufi Music; Sama; Zikr; Trance Rituals; Tribalism.

With the recitations and poetic songs of the Murids from Senegal, led by Sérigne Abdourahmane Fall Siby, the Koranic recitations presented in elaborate vocal techniques by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tûni (from Egypt), the *zikr* circle (repetition of the names of God), led by Mir Fakr al-Din Agha (from Afghanistan) and the joyful and contagious Qawwali songs (from Pakistan), led by Asif Ali Khan, the direct disciple of the legendary Pakistani



Figura 1 – Murids, led by Sérigne Abdourahmane Fall Siby (Murid Order, from Senegal) Cité de la Musique, 14th of May 2004 (Paris, France)

musician Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the Sufi rituals rivaled the profane techno “trances” of modern rave<sup>2</sup> culture. One can not, however, say that the “vertiginous trances” produced on the rave dance floors are the same esoteric<sup>3</sup> “trances” or “ecstasies” experienced by the participants (“musicians” and “listeners”)<sup>4</sup> of and in the public Sufi concerts or auditions (*al-sama*). Although we could say that, in both auditions, rave (which means “to dance in trance”) and *Sama* (which could also be translated as “to dance in ecstasy”), the emphasis on the present or mythic<sup>5</sup> time (“life as a flux”, “all passing”), the experience of the “here and now”, the emptying of the self, the non-identification (which in the Sufi context, could be translated as detachment from things, people and the world)<sup>6</sup> and the sensation of unworldliness (for the Sufis: Unity<sup>7</sup>; for the ravers, tribalism<sup>8</sup>) are, really or ideally, lived by the followers<sup>9</sup>, the way that each of these groups goes about “getting there”, as well as the means used as “triggers” of the “trance” and of the “ecstasy”, together with the intention that orients the course of the two events are completely distinct - with the rave, seeking unlimited pleasure (above all physical); and the other, *Sama*, spiritual realization:

Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) opens the heart (*qalb*) to mystical perception, converting sensual pleasure into spiritual delight, establishing harmony between the two. It is not a question of a concept or of a thought, but rather an experience lived, a

way of living [...] which conducts the person, little by little, to union with God. [...] Art is not, however, the objective of Sufism. In the ceremonies and rituals carried out by the Sufis, [...] the dance, in its broadest sense, plays an important role, as does the music and literature, in their highest forms. But these arts do not correspond to the goal of Sufism: they are only means to lead the human being to Allah. The music, the dance and even the style of clothes [...] awaken the aesthetic perception inherent in human nature, transforming sensual pleasure into Divine realization. This is the purpose of Art in Sufism because the only objective of Sufism is Allah.<sup>10</sup>

The fact of having emphasized the category “ecstasy” in the title of this communication to the detriment of the “trance” category, does not mean that I consider “ecstasy” to be the only “altered state of consciousness”<sup>11</sup> experienced by the public during the performance of the four Sufi orders. If we consider that “ecstasy”, as it is conceived of by the ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget (1991), is a mental state characterized by deep contemplation done in silence, stillness and sensory privation, and that the “trance”, on the contrary, is always marked by hyper-sensorial stimulation, manifesting itself in body movements, sounds and communication between the participants, I would say that the audience, to be more precise, experienced, alternately, one or another state, either more or less intense, according to the type of stimulation and other variations which, certainly, escaped my perception.<sup>12</sup>

The “ecstasy” and the “trance”, as Rouget<sup>13</sup> relativized very well, have to be seen, always, as belonging to a continuum in which each of them are at a pole. The poles are connected by an uninterrupted series of intermediary states, such that it is sometimes difficult to decide if we are dealing with “ecstasy” (*tadjali*) or with a “trance” (*wajd*).

The *Sufi Night* began with recitations and poetic songs of the Murids from Senegal, led by Sérigne Abdourahmane Fall Siby. Participating were Fall Siby himself - the religious head of the group - and the singers Babacar Mbaye Ndur, Mawa Diop, Babacar Siby (vocals), Abubakrine Siddikh Siby, Mbaye Seck, Mamadu Lamine Siby, Mohamed Siby, Magueye Siby and Detubad Seck.

Wearing elegant silk tunics, the members of the Murid or Muridiyya order walked on to the stage



Figura 2 – Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tûni (Yesevi Order, from Egypt) Cité de la Musique, 14th of May 2004 (Paris, France)

towards a mosaic of oriental carpets situated in the centre and formed a semi-circle where they sat down. Right from the start of the recitation of poetic songs (*khassidas*), written by the Senegalese Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba (1853–1927) or Sérigne Tuba, as he is also known, the clear and harmonious voices of the Murids of Senegal, together with the simplicity, the elegance and the serenity with which they were delivered, impressed the audience, both visually and aurally, taking them to a collective state of contemplation.

Born in 1853 (1272 Hegira) in Mbacke Baol, a small town in Senegal, Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba was a disciple of the great Persian mystic Al-Ghazzali (1085–1111) – famous for having reconciled Koranic wisdom with rationalist philosophy, earning him the title of “Proof of Islam”, becoming one of the most prestigious sons of the Muslim community. Combining his inherent religious qualities with his pedagogical skills, Sheikh Amadu Bamba founded the Murids in 1883: “I received the order to lead men to God, the Most High, from my Lord. Those who want to take this way will only have to follow me. As for the others who want nothing other than instruction, the country has various scholars”. After a short stay in Mbacke Baol, Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba founded Daru Salam and Tuba in 1886. Tuba was transformed into a “city of peace” where the Koran was taught and the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed were applied. With the growing influence of Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba on the local population, the colonial power imprisoned him in Saint Louis, Senegal, in August 1895, and later condemned him to deportation to Gabon. After seven and a half years in exile in the forest of Magal, Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba,

one of the greatest Muslim pilgrims from Africa, went to live in Dakar in 1902, where he died on July 19th 1927. His mausoleum in Tuba is visited by men and women from all five continents. The teaching of the Murid order is intimately linked to the philosophy of work: “Work as if you were never going to die and pray as if you were going to die tomorrow!” This valuing of work, which originated from the monarchical caste system (*wolofs*)<sup>14</sup> of the time, ended up being transformed into a powerful revolutionary force and the struggle for the liberation and economic independence of Senegal.

Once the Murids of Senegal had finished their presentation, the Yesevis presentation began with Koranic Recitations by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tuni – known as the Sultan of Upper Egypt. The Yesevi or Yeseviyya *tariqat* was founded by the Turk Ahmad Yesevi (?–1165), who lived in the twelfth century in the part of Persia known as Khorasan. Ahmad Yesevi received his first Sufi teaching in the city of Yesi, where he became the disciple of Arslan Baba, a well-known *murshid* (spiritual guide) of the region. After the death of Arslan Baba, he moved to Bukhara, where he continued his studies and he became the *murid* (disciple) of the famous Sheikh Yusuf Hamadhani (?–1140). When Hamadhani died, Ahmad Yesevi remained in Bukhara for some further time before returning to Yesi, where he lived out the rest of his days surrounded by a large number of disciples. It is said that Ahmad Yesevi was so decided on imitating the Prophet Muhammad in every respect that he wished to die with the same age as that of the Prophet, sixty three years: “with this in mind, he had a tomb built for himself under his quarters. When he had completed sixty three years, he went into the cell, swearing that he would not leave for the rest of his life. As his date of birth is unknown, it is not known for how long he really lived in this *chilakhana* [death house]”.<sup>15</sup>

The recitations by Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tuni were accompanied by the musicians Ahmad Soliman Turny (vocals), Mohamed Ahmed Turny Soliman (percussion: *tabla* and *reqq*), Mustafa Abdelhadi Abdelrehman (*ney* flute), Mohamed Ahmed (lute: *ud*), Sayed Ali Mohamed Hassan (violin: *kamanga*) and Hamada Ahmed Hassanein Ahmed (percussion: *derbuka*).



Figura 3 – *Zikr* circle, led by Mir Fakr al-Din Agha (Kadiri Order, from Afghanistan) Cité de la Musique, 14th of May 2004 (Paris, France)

Coming from the city of Hawatka, close to Assiut in Egypt, Ahmad Al-Tuni is a symbol of a generation which has seen the recent great revival of Egyptian music represented by singers such as Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Omm Kalsum. The charisma of Ahmad Al-Tuni in a certain way reflects this key period in which the *inshad* (Sufi song) began to receive the influence of the urban songs. The *munshid* (*inshad* singer)<sup>16</sup> was already a public figure in this time and came to mold his style according to the model of Omm Kalsum, that is of mixing vocal techniques of Koranic recitation (*tajwid*) with classical and popular ornamentations:

The learning of a Sufi musician - which we call *munshid* - [...] and the collection of songs he sings, originate from the old texts of the great Sufi and Muslim saints such as Abdal Qadir al-Gilani [1077-1166] [...]. and it is through these texts that they have come into the mystical path [Sufism] and that they learned the Sufi song [*inshad*]. And it is from these texts that they in fact transmit the message. So what is more important: they transmit the message to all, Muslim or non-Muslim, because they are a part, all, of the Unity.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst Ahmad Al-Tuni sang the *inshad* (Sufi song), he rhythmically passed his rosary beads (*sibha*) into a glass, in dialogue with the percussion instruments (*tabla* and *reqq*) and with the violin (*kamanga*) of the group. There was no concern about the acoustic quality - amplification would modify the gifts of listening! - and the group was

reduced, at one stage, to the simple percussion of the *tabla*, the *reqq* and the *kamanga*. The latter, thanks to a distortion pedal, covered the sound spectrum of the ancient instruments in the same experimental spirit of the 1970s or of the new electronic music of today. Far from any possible conservatism, the voice of Al-Tuni seemed to be remodeled<sup>18</sup> continually, allowing the emotion to be the principal conductor of the expression. Combining simultaneously tradition and modernity, Ahmad Al-Tuni set the Parisian audience alight with his unexpected vocal improvisations. On his singing style and the way he forms his singing with other Yesevi musicians, Al-Tuni himself says:

I don't prepare anything usually. There are singers who rehearse, work [...]. I am completely under Divine inspiration; I follow the spirit of the moment, the spirit of the lyrics I am singing. Before I get to the microphone, I don't yet know what I am going to sing and not even how I am going to sing. [...] [As for the musicians], what ever the place where I am singing, they will follow me, what ever rhythm I am in. They accompany my inspiration completely. [...] I never follow the music. The musicians always accompany my word.<sup>19</sup>

Besides the practice of *inshad* (Sufi song), the Yesevis normally recite some *zikr(s)* or *dhikr(s)* (repetition of the Divine names) in a characteristic way. The most notable of them, but which was not recited in this show, is the so-called "saw *zikr*", due to the sound of a saw produced in the throat of those doing the reciting. The performance of this *zikr* was described by Sheikh Muhammad Ghaws in the following manner:

Placing both hands on the thighs, and expelling the air downwards in the direction of the belly button, the *ha* sound is articulated (with the prolonged "a"). Thus taking the air from the gut upwards and keeping the body straight, the sound *hay* is pronounced (the *hay* is lengthened and aspirated). In this way, the *zikr* is continuous. The desired result is obtained by sawing the heart just as a carpenter saws wood [...].<sup>20</sup>

The exaltation provoked by the infectious singing of Al-Tuni contrasted with the sober *zikr* recitation (repetition of the names of God) by the Kadiri or Kadiriyya Order from Masar-i Shariff (Afghanistan), led and executed by Sheikh Mir Fakr al-Din Agha and by the musicians Said Fakhruddin Said Abdullah (vocals), Abdulrashid Khan (vocals), Mohammad Yasin Ghulam Mortaza (vocals), Ghulam Ali Aminullah (vocals), Said Ishaq Said Mustafa (vocals) and Abdulhakim Abdulaziz (vocals).



Figura 4 – Qawwali, led by Asif Ali Khan (Chisti–Qawwali Order, from Pakistan) Cité de la Musique, 14th of May 2004 (Paris, France)

Afghanistan is a part of the ancient initiatory route which crossed the steppes, the deserts and mountains at the time of the Silk Road. Ever since the second century, important commercial routes have crossed China from north to south and from east to west, meeting in Xi'na, the ancient capital, at the markets of the Middle Empire. With ever increasing density, the network of routes was extended considerably over the centuries, combining both the routes traced out previously by the eastern conquests of Alexander the Great with those founded by the Turkish Mongols of Central Asia under the leadership of Gengis Khan and Tamerlaine. In this way, from China to the Arab world, passing through India, the musical traditions became interweaved with those of nomadic and tribal Shamanism, from Buddhism and later through Islam. Nowadays, unfortunately, Afghanistan, which has been transformed into the object of covetousness and geopolitical manipulation. At present it is concentrating its efforts on conservation of the land and, principally, of life, of the last great tribes of mountain horsemen. The Sufi presence, which is very important in Afghanistan, is represented by the four Sunni orders: the Chisti or Chistiyya order, set up in India by the Sufi Saint Mu'nuddîn Chistî 'Kwa'jâ Gharîbnawâz', who died in 1236 in Ajmer; the Suhrawardi or Suhrawardiyya order, founded by Abû Nagîb al-Suhrawardî (1154–

1191) and his nephew Shahabuddin Suhrawardî (1145–1235); the Naqshbandi or Naqshbandiyya order which belongs to a long initiatory tradition (*silsila*), of which the last great notable figure was Bahauddin Muhammad al-Bukhari (1318–1388), better known as Shah Naqshbandi who died in Bukhara; and, finally, the Kadiri or Kadiriyya order, founded by 'Abd Al-Qâdir Al-Jilânî (1077–1166). It is to the latter that Mir Fakr al-Din Agha belongs. Born in Balkh and raised in Kabul, he has been singing since 1958 and is one of the great figures of Afghan religious singing. As is common amongst the great singers of his generation, he can sing the poetry of *Hafiz* in Persian or recite the Koran throughout the whole night. The members of this school can often be found on Thursday nights in the Mazar-i Shariff mosque, in a circle practicing the *hadra*<sup>21</sup>, the Sufi ritual ceremony of withdrawal and meditation.

The practice of the *zikr* (repetition of the names of God) by the Kadiri from Afghanistan little by little transformed the sensorial exaltation ("trance") provoked by the Yesevi music into "contemplative ecstasy". The extroversion of the Yesevi songs was replaced by the sober and centred repetition of the Divine names by the Afghan Kadiris. The audience, which, moments before, was dancing euphorically on their feet in front of their seats, were now sitting in silence with their eyes closed, experiencing another type of "state of consciousness". There was no sound other than the voices coming from the circle (*halka*) of dervishes (or sufis). When the presentation ended, there seemed to be an invisible blanket of energy hanging in the air. The people seemed to be really have been affected by that subtle influence, which the sufis call *baraka*<sup>22</sup>, of an intangible kind which was wrapped around them, very subtly, creating an atmosphere of unexpected lovingness. It took some time before the audience started to applaud.

In an interview given to Benjamin Minimum (the organizer of the *Sufi Night*), Sheikh Mir Fakr al-Din Agha gave a statement, soon after the end of the Kadiri ceremony, which confirmed, to a certain point, my impressions of the ecstatic event in question, both as a "listener" and as an "ethnographer" (closing up the two categories)<sup>23</sup>:

There is, obviously, the language barrier. (I can't converse with people!) Even so, the feeling is passed. I felt that people understood. That they felt it, and

this is truly from Sufism, because the words sung pass through us in a trance [*wajd*] which is known throughout the world, that everybody can feel, which goes beyond the words. The trance, in fact, creates a common language which brings people's hearts together, which brings people together. [...] The spectators had a very good perception of this common language; they felt it very well; they apprehended it very well. [...] Spoken language changes over time, the meaning of the words changes, but when one is dealing with the language of the heart [*qalb*], of the trance, here nothing changes, and I felt the listener's hearts were open tonight [...], impregnated with our song.<sup>24</sup>

During the interview, Benjamim Minimum asked the Afghan Sheikh what made him accept the invitation to give a show for the first time in Europe. The Sheikh replied:

When you invited me to come here [to Paris], I asked myself the question: how would I do it? How could I sing to people who could not understand my language, who didn't belong to the same culture? How could I make them feel? and you explained to me that no, that once the language barrier was broken, we could communicate very well with the audience, making them feel it, and that was why I came. And here is the proof: everything which they apprehended of our songs, they felt with their hearts, they understood well. [...] The heart is able to communicate good things and the bad things, from one heart to another, in a secret way. So, even if they haven't understood a word of what I sang, from the linguistic point of view, they understood almost everything from the point of view of feeling.<sup>25</sup>

When the *zikr* (repetition of the Divine names) of the Kadiri from Afghanistan ended, the Sufi Night was already into the small hours. There then began the musical performance of the Qawwâli from Pakistan: Asif Ali Khan (vocals), Hussain Shibli Sarafrâz (vocals and *harmonium*), Ali Raza (*tabla*), Hussain Raza (backing vocals), Fayyaz Hussain Bakhat (*harmonium*), Nawaz Hussain Shah (vocals and clapping), Hussain Shibli Imtiaz (vocals and wind), Hussain Aftab Omer Draz (vocals and clapping), Ahmad Zahoor (vocals and wind) and Normann Yasser (vocals). The audience, once again, experienced another radical change of state of spirit and/or consciousness without any resistance.

The *Qawwâli* song, a Sufi expression from the Indian-Pakistani region, has survived thanks to the *Qawwâl*, singers-musicians belonging to the Sufi Chisti or Chistiyya order, founded in India by the Saint Mu'nuddîn Chistî 'Kwa'jâ Ghar'bnawâz', who died in 1236 in Ajmer, in the heart of Rajasthan.

Every year hundreds of pilgrims and followers of Chisti Sufism go to the *dergah* (or *zawya* [Arabic form] or *tekke* [Turkish form] or also *tekkia*) - the physical place where the Sufis meet to carry out their mental-body-spiritual practices - from Ajmer where the tomb of Mu'nuddîn Chisti is located to celebrate their 'urs<sup>26</sup> (literally, marriage), on the anniversary of his death.

According to the ethno-musicologist Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, all the Chisti sanctuaries have one or more *samakhana*(s), rooms reserved for the practice of the *Sama* (musical audition)<sup>27</sup>. Just like the rooms (*diwan-e'am[s]*) where Muslim rulers used to hold open audiences, mostly in India, the *samakhana* is the place of *mahfil-e'am* (general meeting) of Sufism, an enormous auditorium especially for the spiritual audition (*al-sama*). In the more spacious sanctuaries, Qureshi adds, there is usually also another room, in general, where the saint used to meditate and teach, for the more intimate *Sama* auditions. There, only a small number of elect Sufis have permission to take part in the *mahfil-e khas* (special assembly), which generally uses a special repertoire of ancient songs. In each of these sanctuaries, the yard, in front of the saint's tomb, is also considered appropriate for the holding of a *Sama* assembly. It is here that the ritual commemoration of the death of the saint ('*urs*) is held, with recitations of appropriate readings from the Koran (*qul*), followed by songs from the traditional Chisti *Sama* repertory:

In the *Sama* assembly, the presence of the saint [is made] through the participants who represent the saint directly. Such representation is possible thanks to the affiliation and to the spiritual authority transmitted by the saint along the *silsila*, the chain of masters chosen to communicate the spiritual message. This spiritual authority is reinforced by a family connection with the saint or one of his near relations, although many of the saints have no descendents, as with 'Kwa'jâ Mu'nuddîn Chistî and Nizamuddin Auliya. In the sanctuary, the two leading principles of affiliation are combined in the person of the *sajjada nashin*. Occupying the *sajjada* (prayer carpet) or the *gaddi* (seat) of the saint, the *sajjada nashin* or *gaddi nashin* is the closest representative of the saint, and, also, together with the other members of the community of descendents, his most direct representative: they are also the living connection to the dwelling which houses the terrestrial presence of the saint.<sup>28</sup>

In the *mahfil sama* (general audition), the representation of the saint is always set in a

structured organization in accordance with this principle of spiritual hierarchy. The highest representative of the holy authority, together with the *mir-e-mahfil*, the person conducting the *Sama*, takes on the directing of the assembly. The order of the places is established taking into account all the members present in the spiritual hierarchy, depending on the case, including the direct descendents of the saint and the Sheikhs who occupy a purely spiritual (non-family) place in relation to the saint or to his lineage.

Considering the spiritual hierarchy of all the members present more than ever, the sufi rules of etiquette (*adab*) must be observed so that the relationships are established conveniently. In this way, the Sufis who are to listen to the music during the audition (*al-sama*) can not give free expression to their spiritual experience unless it is in accordance with the established form (*adab*). The person (*mir-e-mahfil*) conducting the ritual is the one who establishes the rules and sees to the good conduct of the participants. In this context, the people interpreting the music of the *Sama* occupy a place separate from the ceremony: under the orders of the *mir-e mahfil*, they "serve" the spiritual objectives of the assembly. Professional specialists derive their spiritual identification from the saint, not from the fact of being his disciples, but rather from being linked to his sanctuary or to a living Sheikh. What allows them to take on the musical part of the assembly, however, is due less to their being within the spiritual hierarchy than to the fact of being recognized skills in the textual, musical and ritual areas:

Through the musical interpretation of the *Sama* [...], the entire court of saints gains life because [the *Sama*] invokes their presence, thus confirming the legitimacy of the living Sheikhs, their spiritual descendents. Certain members of the Sufi community recognize that this activity is crucial to the activation of the power of the saint.<sup>29</sup>

The heart of the vast vocal repertoire of the *Qawwâl* includes the poetic and musical compositions of Amir Khusrau (?–1325), the great Sufi poet of Hindu–Persian literature. Khusrau is considered to be the founding father of the *Qawwâli*, the musical genre of the *Sama* practiced by the musicians of the Sufi Chisti Order (as the *Ayin* is the musical genre of the Mevlevi order *Sama*, founded by the Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi [1207–1273] or Mevlana, in Konya (Turkey) in the thirteenth century). The

following explanation has been given about the origins and the objectives of the Chisti *Sama* by an important contemporary Chisti Sheikh:

*Sama* allows us to attain spiritual elevation. Many people think that *Sama* goes back to Amir Khusrau. Others to Gharîbnawâz'. In fact, it comes from even further back. We believe that, from the spiritual point of view, the mystical concert comes from Imam Ali and from his four disciples: Hassan, Husseyn, Hassan Al-Basri and Fazal Bin Miâzi. The Order linked to Hassan Al Basri is our one, the Chisti. The mystical concert [*Sama*] was born in that time. *Sama* requires perfect audition.<sup>30</sup>

The apogee of *Qawwâli* music was assimilated in the west with the personality of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the sacred giant of this art, who was able to induce hundreds of people to a collective "trance" state. The term *qawwâl* derives from the Arabic *qaul*, which means the verb, the word or the action of to say. *Qawwâl* sing the holy word of the inspired poet, whether in Persian, Hindi or Urdu, depending on the origin of the poetry<sup>31</sup>. Besides the extremely sophisticated and emotional vocal effects, the singer has to have the gift of the speaking and of the word so that they are able to provoke the state of grace (*amad*) in the audience. When the musical session reaches its peak, the singer, backed by the rhythm of clapping, repeats his song (*takrâr*) like a *crescendo*, until it provokes a complete state of collective hypnosis. The praise for the Saint is repeated by the chorus as an invocation, at times lacerating and ecstatic, provoking the effect of *tarab*, the state of being lost in oneself in which the sultans of olden times, taken by a strange emotional force, would tear their clothes. It is thanks to the great Hindu–Persian poet Amir (Abul Hasan Yaminuddin) Khusrau, that the classical music of Hindustan, as well as the *qawwâli* singing achieved its great modal and poetic flights. This great mystical poet, a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, one of the most celebrated Sufi masters of the Chisti or Chistiyya Order, whose mausoleum in Delhi is the site of frequent pilgrimages and mystical meetings, is the origin of the rich classical Indo–Pakistani poetic repertoire, which is sung to this day by the *qawwâl* in Farsi (Persian), the erudite language of the end of the nineteenth century.

Whether the people who participated in the audition of the Sufi Night were aware of the four *silsilas* (lines of transmission) which oriented the

musical performance of the four Sufi orders, Muridi, Yesevi, Kadiri and Chisti, or not, I was not able to verify in any systematic way, as I could only talk to a few people after the presentation. These few conversations, however, together with my "observation as a spectator", led me to conclude that the *Sama* of the four Sufi orders induced the audience, independently of any prior knowledge that they may have had about Sufism, to different spiritual states: some more contemplative or "ecstatic", like those induced by the Muridi from Senegal and by the Kadiri from Afghanistan; others more inclined to the desire to dance or "trance-like", such as those induced by the Yesevi from Egypt and by the Chisti-Qawwali from Pakistan.

To return to drawing of parallels between the "live concert" just described and the "partially synthetic concert" (as it involves the live DJ) of the rave parties, as we are on the great plateau of contemporary western culture, I would say that in both events, the music and also the dance (and only in the case of the Sufis, poetry), are the central elements to the realization of the sensorial condition of mental and bodily states (rave and *Sama*) and mystical or spiritual states (*Sama*). In both these contexts, they are the ordering and structuring elements of the rite.

The difference, however, is that in the *Sama*, the music is made for the spirit and in the rave, for the body. Whereas in the *Sama* the music has the function of awakening subtle faculties, in the rave it is to induce the audience to an unlimited sensorial and bodily "trip"; a trip which is also far from that lived during the rock concerts of the 1960's, when it was associated with the use of LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide). Whilst the "trip" undertaken at these concerts was more "mental", the "trip" taken at electronic music parties and the associated use of ecstasy (Methylene Dioxy Methyl Amphetamine), is more bodily. The use of drugs determines not only the physical state of the participants during the show, but also, and principally, the type of acoustic experience that they have during the "party" - to the extent that the recipients of the music take in the *techno, acid house, hard core, jungle, gabba, trance, cyberrave* rhythms, amongst others, varying between 120 and 220 beats per minute - as well as the degree of conscious assimilation of the experience:

[...] acoustic experiences whilst under the effect of drugs, are frequently not recognized afterwards. What remains is of an experience is the quantity and the intensity and not the quality of this experience and its conscious assimilation, as the drugs [...] lead, precisely, to the magical-mythical layers of the consciousness, where, without any conscious effort of will, no insight in any conscious state of awareness can take place [...] When the individual wishes to recall everything in a conscious manner, they find themselves on the border between the general fantastic vision and total confusion, with the latter not being manifested in any negative form at all, but rather as an absence of the self, and may be enjoyed as an activity carried out during a dreamlike journey.<sup>32</sup>

In the *Sama* (spiritual audition), on the other hand, the memory is consciously active in various ways: memory as the recall of what has been learned about oneself; and memory as a remembrance of something which has been forgotten but which is present deep inside the being and which can always be recovered: the connection to God. Both the *Sama* (spiritual audition) and the *zikr* (repetition of the Divine attributes) - a word meaning "memory", "remembering" - are ways of "remembering" the Divine presence.



## NOTES

01. The variety of Sufi orders (*tariqat[s]*) and sub-orders or brotherhoods in the Muslim world forms a vast system of extremely complex ramifications. It is, however, in the context of the *zawiya* (Arabic form) or *tekke* (Turkish form) or *dergah* (Persian form) - the physical place where the dervishes or Sufis gather to practice their rituals - that they are maintained. The teaching of the school is passed along the chain of oral transmission, called the *silsila*, which goes back to the founder (*Sheikh* or *Pir*) of the Order.

02. Rave: "One-off gathering, organized late in the night, listening to recorded music [and where drugs, such as 'ecstasy' are consumed]. Giving a musical definition is more difficult. In the kind of sound and the spirit of acid house, the music most commonly used is *fast techno* [up to 170 beats per minute] and *hardcore*, in the beat of 125 to 140 pulsations per minute" (GORE, 1998, p. 86). Rave culture, says Gore (p. 88), can be considered as "a microcosm of the contemporary metropolis, which the ravers themselves qualify as a metaphor of post-modernity, this 'state' which glorifies fragmentation, deconstruction, dispersal, discontinuity, rupture, the absence of subjectivity, transitoriness, superficiality, lack of depth, the lack of meaning, hyper-reality".

03. According to the anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho, "esotericism" can be defined as "the search for arcane, transcendent meaning and for the individual and full initiatory experience, in an era of the world empty of doctrinal mysteries and of sacred values [...]; that is, in the case of modern esotericism, in the era of disbelief and criticism of official religion and of the definitive rise of the science as the primordial source of knowledge and of gnosis" (CARVALHO, 1998).

04. Categories used by Gilbert Rouget to designate, the point of view of the person who is in "trance", the "emitter" and the "receiver", respectively, of the music (ROUGET, 1990, p. 497).

05. "Sacred time is nothing like historical time, its past is mythical, it is a time which allows men and women to re-encounter the presence of the supreme Being, to recover the live and articulated unity of the cosmos, to dive into non-time" (OLIVEIRA, 2001, p. 72).

06. The Sufi maxim "to be in the world but not of the world" gives a good idea of detachment: "One could argue here that the seeker lives in the present, but in an absent way; however, for a mystic, this absence [...] is an absence which they would call illusory, mundane, in order to be able to be present and participating in the Divine ecstasy, in the true, absolute present. It is in this distancing and alternating it with the identification necessary for everyday life which the Sufi, according to some of the masters, becomes free" (*Ibidem*, p. 62).

07. We can illustrate the meaning of unearthliness and of Sufi Unity with the poem of the Persian Sufi Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273): "Neither of this world, nor of the next, neither of Heaven, nor of purgatory. My place is no-place, My step is the non-step. / I am neither body, nor soul. The soul of the Beloved has what is mine. I leave duality to the side, I see the worlds as just one. / I seek the One, I know the One, I seek the One, I invoke the One. He is the First and the Last, the exterior and the interior. - Nothing exists But Him" (RUMI, 1996, p. 84-85). According to the anthropologist Vitória Peres de Oliveira (op. cit., p. 60), a specialist in Sufism, a seeker wants to live this unity, to know this unity. "My step is the non-step"; for him, paradoxically, there is no reason to walk, "it is enough to be here", in the experience of the One.

08. It is the DJ (*disc-jockey*), a "shamanic" figure, to whom the ravers attribute "magical" powers, who conducts - through his electronic dialogue with the recorded and available musical material - the participants in the rave party with the sensorial and bodily trip comparable to the "liminal rituals" of some non-western cultures, whose objective is to attain both a collective celebration and/or trance. It is not a question, however, of an active process of recovery and of reproduction, even if a dominant and noisy faction of the rave movement claims an alteration of consciousness through ritual practices and the absorption of drugs (GORE, op. cit., p. 92). In the end, as the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli says, rave "neo-tribalism" implies tactile relationships, body to body; and the preference given to collective feelings, which serve as the "glue" which binds the individuals together, does not mean that

they seek, consciously, a “full union”, a “union of projects”; the union of the rave is a “union in the lack”, “in the emptiness”; a “communion of loneliness” (see MAFFESOLI, 1995, p. 224).

09. In its esoteric sense, it designates the initiate of a given mystical or esoteric tradition, whose knowledge, before being disseminated as culture or collective representation, acquires a personal nature, of interiorized gnosis (see CARVALHO, op. cit., p. 66). In its general sense, it designates simply the person in such and such a movement or of such and such a practice, of such and such an event, for example, like that of an assiduous rave partygoer.

10. Explanation by Mevlevi Sheikh Yakup “Baba” Efendi on the relationship between art and Sufism. Yakup “Baba” lives in Istanbul and answered my question by e-mail, in August 2005. (Translation: mine)

11. “An altered state of consciousness of a given individual, is that in which he, clearly, feels a qualitative change in his pattern of mental functioning, that is, he feels not just a qualitative change (more or less aware, more or less visual images, more acute or more languid etc.), but also some quality, or qualities, of his mental processes are different. More functions operate than do not operate, as an absolute, frequently; perceptual qualities appear which have no normal counterpart and so forth” (TART, 1969, p. 1–2).

12. See chapter “Transe et Possession”. (In: ROUGET, op. cit., p. 39–83)

13. *Ibidem*, p. 53.

14. The *wolofs* (*mahabutas*) used to withdraw to caves to practice *khalwa* (reclusion) and therefore to have Divine visions (*jenneer*) (ROUGET, op. cit., p. 47).

15. See ÖZTÜRK, 1998, p. 49.

16. The *munshid*, whether he be Egyptian, Moroccan or Pakistani, is not necessarily affiliated to any particular brotherhood; his role is only to create the *tarab* (profane trance) – as opposed to the *wajd* (mystical trance) – and he then becomes the *mutrib* (musician), the provoker of *tarab*, this emotion which provokes

the loss of sense of self: “Even the ancient sultans, under the effect of such emotional strength, tore their clothes, lost in this ocean of plenitude and knowledge. They bathed in that sea of voluptuousness, in that turmoil of the times described in the poems of the desert [...], ornamented by the rich metric of Arabic psalms. This poetry and this singing made Sufism into an entirely separate artistic expression which is able to communicate a feeling which at times may be therapeutic or spiritual or emotional” (WEBER, 2004, p. 23).

17. Explanation given to Benjamim Minimum – organizer of the *Nuit Soufie* – by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tuni. The interview was given on the first night of the presentation, soon after it ended. (Translation: mine) The full text of the interview is on the site: [www.mondomix.com/archives/cite-musiques04/main\\_citemusique.html](http://www.mondomix.com/archives/cite-musiques04/main_citemusique.html).

18. According to the musician and musicologist Peter Michael Hamel, founder of the group Between, some Sufi singers use the “voice in falsetto” when in trance: “In moments of ecstasy, the singer of sacred texts is able to produce a kind of gurgle in which the voice goes from the chest to the head very quickly, and which allows him to reach an acute region of harmonic sounds, as when a flute is blown hard. This singing technique affects the listener, even physically, and in such a strong way that the music, as it envelops them, may bring tears to the eyes. In the midst of this powerful singing, the mystical message of the texts or of the ecstatic invocations, is transmitted directly to the initiate. It is a technique which corresponds to the mystical Islamic union between rustic vigour and loving abandonment” (HAMEL, 1995, p. 109–110). Also according to Hamel, when the untrained listener suddenly notices this kind of “out of tune” interval, they may, in the beginning, have an unpleasant sensation; but when they open themselves to the mysteries of monophonic music, related to the “pedal notes”, they may gain an entirely new listening experience taking them to states of consciousness never before experienced.

19. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tuni, in response to a question by Benjamim Minimum: “How do you coordinate with the musicians?” (Translation:

mine) The full text of the interview is on the site [www.mondomix.com/archives/cite-musique04/main\\_citemusique.html](http://www.mondomix.com/archives/cite-musique04/main_citemusique.html).

20. ÖZTÜRK, op. cit., p. 54. (Translation: mine)

21. The *hadra*, psalmed and sung adoration, as with the *zikir* (literally: memory, remembering) - repetition of the different names of God coupled with a particular breathing technique, is a part of the set of techniques used in Sufism with the goal of awakening the consciousness of the student to contact with the Divine: "This technique is frequently enriched by whirling movements and/or intersecting gestures whereby the bodies become a receptacle for ecstasy. But it is in the deep interior [...] of the circle of brothers that the light is born which gives rise to the disorder of the sense, that trance of the absolute" (WEBER, op. cit., p. 23). (Translation: mine)

22. *Baraka*: blessing, Divine grace, impalpable beauty. Also designates the spiritual influence of a certain chain of the teaching (*silsila*).

23. I am inspired here by the extremely fertile comparison between the esoteric attitude and the anthropological attitude suggested by the anthropologist and ethno-musicologist José Jorge de Carvalho, in his essay "Antropologia e Esoterismo: dois contradiscursos da modernidade": "The anthropological attitude is quite similar to the [western] esoteric attitude, above all if we think of a central concept in the constitution of the modern esoteric attitude: the concept of tradition. Behind this word is the live and direct transmission of arcane and fundamental knowledge which resists the work of time, precisely in its capacity to renew itself with each generation, being incarnated in people with the gift of sensibility which we call esoteric. [...] and in this way things are passed on, the ethno-graphic practice leads the anthropologist to constantly note the masters who transmit the mystical and spiritual knowledge that circulates in the bosom of live religious traditions. This dimension of orality is brought about through the presence, the incarnation of remembered knowledge" (CARVALHO, J.J., op. cit., p.65). In the same way that esotericism can only be assimilated through direct experience, the ethnography of the religious phenomenon, says

Carvalho, can only be lived by the immersion of the ethnographer in the oral chain of knowledge which allows him to establish direct contact with the live presence.

24. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tuni. (Translation: mine) The rest of the interview can be heard on the site: [www.mondomix.com/archives/cite-musique04/main\\_citemusique.html](http://www.mondomix.com/archives/cite-musique04/main_citemusique.html).

25. *Ibidem*.

26. The word '*urs*' in India, and also in Pakistan, designates the anniversary or the day on which the final union of a Muslim saint with God is commemorated. Equivalent to the Turkish *Shab-i Arûs*, which means "nuptial night" or "spiritual nights".

27. QURESHI, op. cit., p. 130-131.

28. *Ibidem*, p. 132. (Translation: mine)

29. *Ibidem*, p. 133. (Translation: mine)

30. Current statement by a Chisti Sheikh from India. Taken from the film by Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud, *Le Soufisme des Qawwâli (Inde)*, **Les mille et une voix: terres et voix de l'Islam**. France: Artline Films / Les Productions du Sablier / Arte France / RTBF Bruxelles / Mezzo / SIC / Canal Horizons / Editions Montparnasse, 2003.

31. The most venerated poetry is that rewritten into Farsi, the original language of Sufism and poetic language of eminent saints and poets of the past. The second classical language of Indian Sufism is Hindi, which is normally associated to "primitive" Indian mysticism and to its strong devotional character. The third language, Urdu, is above all the contemporary one of the *Sama*, though it still lacks its own sacred and spiritual connotations. According to Qureshi (1992, p.135), a separate category is the quite limited repertoire of special songs using a form of Arabic: "Named '*qaul*' (diction), it expresses the aphorisms attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, above all validating a principle of spiritual succession deriving from Muhammad through his son-in-law, Ali. Although not directly connected to the saints, these songs illustrate the entire spiritual hierarchy of Sufism through their language and their content, and the position that each saint occupies".

32. HAMEL, op. cit., p. 55.

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