

Mark Sedgwick

Theme section

# Eclectic Sufism in the Contemporary Arab World

**Keywords**

Rumi; Elif Shafak; eclecticism; hybridity; Sufism; localization; sectarianism

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**Abstract** Eclectic Sufism that might be interpreted as a modern form of subjectivity construction has been observed in Morocco and Pakistan. This article reports comparable phenomena elsewhere, using the case of the Arabic translation of Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. The article argues that, in the wider Arab world as in Morocco and Pakistan, the localization of eclectic Sufism is an instance of the reinterpretation of Islamic traditions to incorporate globally relevant social imaginaries. It questions, however, the association between eclectic Sufism and individualism, and argues that there is also a further form of localization: the application of eclectic Sufism to contemporary political conditions, notably the problem of sectarianism.

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Among the various modern subjectivities that are being formed across the Muslim world are subjectivities, generally found among the cosmopolitan upper middle class, that draw on eclectic forms of Sufism, sometimes called “New Age” Sufism. These eclectic Sufi subjectivities have been observed in Casablanca, Morocco by Patrick Haenni and Raphaël Voix (2007), and in Lahore, Pakistan by Alix Philippon (2014). Véronique Altglas has compared these to similar processes noted among Jews, where forms of New Age Kabbalah are found (2014, 12). This article adds to these studies with a study of eclectic Sufi subjectivities elsewhere in the Arab world. It argues that eclectic Sufi subjectivities, an instance of “the interlacing of Islamic traditions with globally relevant social imaginaries” (Jung 2016, 19), show how the reinterpretation of Sufi traditions can help construct modern forms of subjectivity, and how these forms of subjectiv-

**Mark Sedgwick** is professor MSO of Arab and Islamic Studies at Aarhus University. He is by training a historian, and works on Sufism in both the Arab world and the West. His most recent book is *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age* (New York: Oxford University Press).

ity rest on “global social imaginaries.” It thus addresses two of the three main questions asked by the Modern Muslim Subjectivities Project (Jung 2016, 23).

For Haenni & Voix, eclectic Sufism is a way in which the Moroccan bourgeoisie can “re-inscribe” New Age spirituality into Islam, re-affirming “the centrality of the Islamic reference” while retaining “contemporary notions of individualism” (2007, 250). For Philippon, it is also a form of Islamization of the New Age that enables “the reinvention of subjectivity” in a way that “affirms... the centrality of the individual” (2014). This article agrees that the subjectivities it studies are indeed built on the Islamization of global social imaginaries, though it questions the use of the term “New Age.” It also questions the importance of individualism, and emphasizes a point made not by Philippon but by one of her key Lahori informants, Ayeda Naqvi, who reported that she felt that her participation in the US-based Sufi Order International helped her avoid “general intolerance and the aggressive declarations of all those groups that think they have the monopoly of religious truth.” Instead, it helped promote “love, peace, tolerance and inter-confessional dialogue” (Philippon 2014, para. 23-24). In the Arab world, too, eclectic Sufism is associated with the avoidance of intolerance and the promotion of peace and dialogue. Modern subjectivities built on eclectic Sufism, then, are about Islamization and about tolerance, and not especially about individualism.

Haenni & Voix analyzed Moroccan eclectic Sufi subjectivity in the context of the intersection of yoga with a Moroccan Sufi *tariqa* (order), the Budshishiyya. Philippon analyzed her eclectic Sufi subjectivity in the context of the Lahore branch of the Sufi Order International, a US-based global *tariqa*, and does not mention yoga. In Cairo, to take one major Arab center, there is no real equivalent to the Budshishiyya or the Sufi Order International, though it might be argued that the local branch of the Haqqaniyya occupies a similar position. Instead, this article will analyze eclectic Arab Sufi subjectivity in the context of the reception of a phenomenally successful book, the Arabic translation of *The Forty Rules of Love: A Tale of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, by the Turkish author Elif Şafak (b. 1971).<sup>1</sup> This translation reflects the global nature of contemporary publishing, one of the “structural features of modernity” (Jung 2017). Its reception in the Arab world reveals subjectivities in two ways. In broad terms,

1. In Turkish, Elif Şafak, but this article follows Şafak’s own preferred English spelling.

its popularity indicates widespread enthusiasm for its perspectives in certain circles, since people normally recommend and buy books that they like, and thus reflects subjectivities that exist within those circles. In more precise terms, individual reactions to the book, revealed through reviews and social-media comments, indicate what exactly is causing the enthusiasm, and so indicates particular subjectivities more precisely.

No sales figures for *The Forty Rules of Love* are available, as there are no Arabic equivalents of the New York Times bestseller lists or of Nielsen BookScan. One young yoga teacher in Cairo, Yogi Ali, however, described the book as “super popular,” noting that he did not know many people who had *not* read it (interview, Cairo, June 4, 2016). The piles of copies that could be observed selling at one popular Egyptian bookstore, Diwan in the upscale Zamalek district, confirmed this view, as did the 100,000 followers of the more important of the book’s Arabic Facebook pages (Qawā’id 2016). The book is also popular in Turkey, where it sold 150,000 copies in its first month (Munro 2010). It has now been published in 35 languages.<sup>2</sup>

Although Shafak self-identifies as Turkish, she was born in France and lives mostly in London, and wrote *The Forty Rules of Love* in English, drawing on Western sources as well as on the classic Persian story of Shams and Rumi. *The Forty Rules of Love* is thus a quintessentially eclectic work, an aspect of “entangled” modernities (Jung 2016, 19), at least as much as it is New Age. This article will first consider the book, then its reception, and finally how that reception can best be understood.

### ***The Forty Rules of Love* as an eclectic book**

*The Forty Rules of Love* was Shafak’s seventh novel, and the third that she wrote in English, a practice she adopted while teaching women’s studies in America, at the University of Michigan. It was the first of her novels to focus on Sufism, but she had been interested in Sufism before. This interest arose not in an Islamic devotional context but in the context of an exploration of alternatives, at a period when she was, in her own words, “leftist, agnostic, nihilist, feminist, anarcho-pacifist, environmentalist” (Shafak in Kortian 2010, 79). It also arose in a context where many of her sources were Western.

2. Apart from English, and Turkish, in Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Bosnian, Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, Georgian, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Catalan, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Norwegian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Taiwanese Chinese, and Urdu (Shafak 2016).

*The Forty Rules of Love* tells two interlinked stories. The framing story is set in contemporary America, and chronicles the transformation of Ella Rubinstein, an unfulfilled American housewife, by the encounter with Aziz Z. Zahara, a (male) wandering Sufi of Dutch origin. This story is of Shafak's own creation. The central story is the classic tale of the transformation of Jalal al-Din Rumi by the encounter with Shams of Tabriz, also a wandering Sufi. Shafak retells this story in her own way, but generally remains fairly close to the thirteenth-century original. This central story is itself the framing for the forty "rules of love" that are revealed as the novel progresses, and that are referred to in the title (Shafak 2010a). Asked about the origin of these rules, Shafak responded that they were "shaped as I kept writing the novel. It was the characters in the novel that inspired them" (Munro 2010). The rules are available on various websites, in English and in Arabic, having been extracted from the book by enthusiastic readers.

*The Forty Rules of Love* is clearly eclectic, then. The story of Rumi and Shams is a great Sufi classic, and Shafak's story of Ella and Aziz in some ways follows it. The story of Ella and Aziz is also modern and Western, however, as are the forty rules of love themselves. They, and the book as a whole, reflect the impact of Shafak's Western sources, which are themselves eclectic.

The authors on Sufism whom Shafak read and re-read, she told an American interviewer, were Annemarie Schimmel, Idries Shah, Coleman Barks, William Chittick, Karen Armstrong, Sachiko Murata, and Kabir Helminski (Munro 2010). All of these are Western (Murata was born in Japan, but has been living in the US since 1979). These were approximately the authors whom she later gave as her sources in a note to *The Forty Rules of Love*, omitting Armstrong and Murata, and adding R. A. Nicholson, Camille Helminski, Refik Algan, and Franklin D. Lewis (Shafak 2010a, 355). These sources fall into four categories. Firstly, there are scholars whose work would be used by anyone making a serious study of Rumi, scholars who happen to be Western, but who write primarily as scholars. Nicholson's edition and translation of the *Mathnawi*, published between 1925 and 1940, remains the standard work, and Chittick's 2004 translation and arrangement of the *Maqālāt* of Shams of Tabriz (as *The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabriz*) is also an important source, and scholarly more than Western. Lewis is a respected academic author-

ity on Rumi. Secondly, there are writers on Sufism and Islam who straddle the line between academia and inspiration: Schimmel, Armstrong, Murata, and—in some of his works—Chittick, who is Murata’s husband. Thirdly, there is Coleman Barks, who is a poet rather than a scholar, and whose translations of Rumi (done from other translations, as he does not know Persian) have made Rumi so popular in the West. Fourthly, there are Western Sufis: Idries Shah, Kabir and Camille Helminski, and Refik Algan. It is especially from these Western Sufis that the eclectic elements in *The Forty Rules of Love* derive.

There are a number of distinct streams within Western Sufism, three of which are represented in Shafak’s sources. All are eclectic, drawing both on Western and on Sufi sources. Two of these streams can perhaps be characterized as New Age, not in the sense that they are part of a coherent school of thought or practice, but in the sense that they were prominent during the period that some defined as a “new age,” from about 1965 to about 1980.<sup>3</sup> The first stream is represented by Idries Shah, an English writer on Sufism of partly Indian ancestry who was widely read during the “new age” period, but whose influence faded soon after the end of the “high new age” and, especially, after his death in 1996. He influenced a number of writers other than Shafak, including the English poet and novelist Robert Graves, the Nobel Prize-winning English novelist Doris Lessing, and the world-best-selling novelist Brazilian Paulo Coelho. He was eclectic in that he had a background in the Gurdjieff movement and so, ultimately, in Theosophy and nineteenth-century psychology, and drew on classic Sufi literature and the Arab and South Asian folklore of the Nasr al-Dīn tradition (Sedgwick 2016, 208-21). The second stream in Western Sufism is represented by the two Helminskis, who run the Threshold Society, an American Mevlevi *tariqa* with branches in the United Kingdom that (like all Mevlevi) draws on Rumi (Pittman 2012, 210). Algan, a Turk, is associated with the Threshold Society.<sup>4</sup> The Threshold Society originated during the later “new age” period and favors liberal interpretations of Islam; not all of its members self-identify as Muslim. Kabir Helminski, like Shah, has a background in the Gurdjieff movement (Dickson 2015, 104). The Threshold Society draws on the Mevlevi tradition as taught in contemporary Turkey as well as on Western sources, and is thus also eclectic. Thirdly and finally, Chittick and Mura-

3. This article is not the place for a lengthy discussion of the “New Age,” but there is a tendency to treat it as a coherent school of thought and practice, which it is not. Many different verities of thought and practice, some of very ancient origin, became popular during the period (Sedgwick 2016, 222-23).

4. Algan and Kabir Helminski together translated Emre 1989, and Algan and Camille Helminski jointly translated Rumi 2015.

ta are linked to Western Sufism through Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Iranian who is now the American shaykh of the Maryamiyya, a *tariqa* of Algerian and Franco-Swiss origin that has no connection to the Gurdjieff movement, even though Theosophy does feature in its more distant origins. Its interpretations of Islam are primarily anti-modernist, and while it existed during the “new age,” it was extremely critical of the prevailing currents of that period, and declined to engage with them (Sedgwick 2016, 102-07, 203-04, 223). It is eclectic, then, but not New Age. There are also other streams within Western Sufism beyond these three, some more and some less eclectic, but they are not visible in Shafak’s book or biography.

*The Forty Rules of Love* sometimes reflects these eclectic sources. Shams and Rumi both see auras (Shafak 2010a, 134, 157), for example, and auras derive not from Islam but from Western esotericism, especially Theosophy. At one point, Shams explains that while “Christians, Jews, and Muslims... quarrel about the outer form, the Sufi is after the essence” (Shafak 2010a, 299). This is the understanding of Idries Shah and to some extent of the Maryamiyya, and is not normally encountered among Sufis elsewhere, who generally see Muslims as more right than Christians and Jews, and Sufism as the essence of Islam, not of religions in general. At another point, Shams gives a very modernist reading of Quran 4:34, which explains men’s status over women in terms of God’s favor and includes “*idrib*” among the actions men are advised to take if faced with disobedient wives. The issue is what *idrib* means in this context, as its obvious meaning of “beat” may seem problematic. Shafak solves this problem by having Shams first quote a literal English translation that follows the obvious reading, and then replace this with a “different translation” that ingeniously renders *idrib* not as “beat” but as “go to bed with them (when they are willing)” (Shafak 2010a, 196-97).<sup>5</sup> This reading is also eclectic, combining Quran 4:34 with contemporary Western views of proper relations between the sexes.

Shafak’s understanding of the sharia and the ulema is also somewhat eclectic. Many of the ulema in *The Forty Rules of Love* are suspicious of Sufism or even hostile to it. A confrontation between Shams and the senior member of the ulema of Baghdad at the beginning of the book is repeated several times during the book, and the struggle between Sufis and ulema is a ma-

5. The literal translation is by M. H. Shakir, and the modernist translation is by Ahmed Ali (1910-94), an Indian writer who became Pakistan’s first ambassador to China (Ali 2001).

jour element in the plot. This has often been the case in reality. One central issue, for centuries, has been the relationship between Sharia and *haqīqa* (truth, the Divine). This comes up early in *The Forty Rules of Love*, when Shams tells a senior member of the ulema of Baghdad:

The sharia is like a candle. It provides us with much valuable light. But let us not forget that a candle helps us to go from one place to another in the dark. If we forget where we are headed and instead concentrate on the candle, what good is it? (Shafak 2010a, 50).

This draws closely on Rumi:

The [sharia] is like a candle showing the way. Unless you gain possession of the candle, there is no wayfaring; and when you have come on to the way, your wayfaring is the Path; and when you have reached the journey's end; that is the Truth. Hence it has been said, "If the truths were manifest, the [sharia] would be nothing" (Rumi 1932, 5: 3).

Shafak uses Rumi's simile, then, and agrees that the sharia is a means to an end. The difference is that while Rumi stresses that the sharia is an essential means, Shafak's Shams does not, and that while Rumi suggests that the sharia may be superfluous once one has reached the end of the journey to God, as truths are then manifest, Shafak's Shams suggests that the sharia is secondary to the journey in the first place. This is not the same thing.

Similar approaches are also found in Shafak's forty rules. Most Sufis would disagree with rule one, that "How we see God is a direct reflection of how we see ourselves. If God brings to mind mostly fear and blame, it means there is too much fear and blame welled inside us. If we see God as full of love and compassion, so are we" (Shafak 2010a, 30). Most Sufis would maintain that love of God does not preclude fear of God. Most Sufis would also disagree with rule forty, that "A life without love is of no account. Don't ask yourself what kind of love you should seek, spiritual or material, divine or mundane, Eastern or Western... Love has no labels, no definitions. It is what it is, pure and simple" (Shafak 2010a, 350). Most Sufis would make a clear distinction between two kinds of love, the love of God and mun-

dane love. The love of Rumi for Shams is generally understood among Sufis to have been a form of the love of God, following the idea that a God-realized or *kāmil* person such as Shams can be a conduit for the divine for other people. Rumi never went up to Shams's bedroom after dinner, as Ella goes up to Aziz's hotel bedroom in Shafak's novel (Shafak 2010a, 302-04). Ella does not in the end have adulterous sex with Aziz, but even so the conclusion of the novel, which has her leaving her husband and family for a new and free life in Amsterdam, is distinctly modern and Western, and parallel between her love for Aziz and Rumi's love for Shams can feel uncomfortable, as it clearly includes the sexual, which Rumi's love for Shams does not. Ella's search for fulfillment sometimes seems to have more in common with Coelho's "follow your dreams" than with the yearning for God, a point made by some English-language reviews of the book (Adil 2010, Sufi 2013).

The view of *The Forty Rules of Love* as eclectic is challenged by Elena Furlanetto (2013) and, implicitly, by Amira El-Zein (2000). Furlanetto accuses Shafak of "self-Orientalisation," on the grounds that she "has internalised a Western perspective in her account" (Furlanetto 2013, 204). Furlanetto evidently assumes that it is possible to distinguish distinct Islamic and Western perspectives in the first place, that there is "a principal alterity between Islam and the West" (Jung 2017). As we have seen, the perspectives from Western Sufism that Shafak has incorporated are themselves eclectic rather than purely Western. Islam itself may also be eclectic; Sufi theology, for example, draws on Late Antique Hellenistic philosophy (Sedgwick 2016). All culture, arguably, is eclectic.

El-Zein discusses "the Rumi phenomenon," the phenomenal popularity of Rumi in the West in general and in America in particular, a popularity that is reflected in *The Forty Rules of Love*. It is often said that Rumi is America's best-selling poet,<sup>6</sup> which is not true—Homer does better, and so does Kahlil Gibran (Amazon 2016). Rumi has, however, definitely made the breakthrough into general American culture. El-Zein ascribes this to Schimmel, Chittick, and—especially—Barks (El-Zein 2000, 73-74), all of whom are among the sources that Shafak acknowledges. El-Zein also explains it in terms of commonalities between the Rumi phenomenon and the New Age, and in terms of the attractiveness to contemporary Americans of what she calls the

6. The claim derives from a 1994 article in *Publisher's Weekly* (El-Zein 2000, 72).



“New Sufism,” defined as a “whole program of spirituality” based around “four points: love; the Sufi universe; illusion versus reality; silence and emptying the self.” “The basic Islamic component in Rumi’s work,” she concludes, “has been diluted in the soup of the ‘New Sufism’ to the extent that Islam appears in it as mainly folkloric” (El-Zein 2000, 74-76).

Certainly, the Islam of *The Forty Rules of Love* sometimes appears folkloric, as is perhaps inevitable with any portrayal of the thirteenth century by a writer who has been influenced by magic realism, and love is central. What El-Zein calls “the Sufi universe,” understood as constantly whirling, is not important for Shafak, but the other elements—illusion versus reality, silence, and emptying the self—can all be found in *The Forty Rules of Love*. But “the basic Islamic component in Rumi” is also present, despite dilution, rather as a basic Islamic component remains present in the Muslim Brothers, despite dilution in the soup of mass politics. “I am interested in what Sufism means for us in the modern world,” Shafak told an interviewer. “I wanted to bring out how Rumi’s philosophy appeals to us today” (Munro 2010). Rumi is her starting point, and Rumi is one of the key figures in Sufi Islam. Despite Furlanetto and El-Zein, then, *The Forty Rules of Love* can be classed as eclectic, not as self-Orientalizing or as diluting Islam to vanishing point.

### The Arab reception of *The Forty Rules of Love*

When the first Arabic translation of *The Forty Rules of Love* appeared in 2012,<sup>7</sup> the book was generally read in the Arab world as Sufi and Islamic rather than as eclectic. English-language reviews warned that Shafak’s thirteenth-century Middle East felt suspiciously modern (Goldberg 2010) and that auras belong to the New Age rather than Islam (Strauss 2010), and one dismissed the book as “a weak attempt at wrapping Paulo Coelho in a shroud of Arab mysticism” (Sufi 2013), but no Arabic-language review remarked on this, though one did warn that there was rather more to Sufism than the book suggested (Ahmad Muhammad Yahya 2015). This was despite the fact that while the translator, Khālid al-Jibīlī, did omit the final note in which Shafak lists her Western sources (Schimmel, Idries Shah, Barks, Chittick, the Helminskis), he otherwise made no attempt to con-

7. There is also a 2015 translation. The status of these two translations is unclear, but the 2015 translation may be the official one, as the Lebanese publisher, Dār al-adāb, is a major and established one, while the 2012 translation was printed in Baghdad by a publisher with no website, a Saudi telephone number, a London forwarding address, and an expired UK company registration (DueDil 2016).

ceal the book's eclecticism. He noted that *The Forty Rules of Love* was originally written in English (Al-Jibīli 2012, 2), and left Shafak's auras, translating "aura" as *hāla* (Shafak 2012, 50).<sup>8</sup> One of the few occasions when he departed from the original was when he had no alternative, with the two different translations of Quran 4:34. He solved the problem that in Arabic there is only one version of the Quran by using the actual text of the Quran to render the literal English translation, and then using an Arabic version of the alternative modernist translation as the basis of what he described as Shams's "exegesis" (*tafsīr*) (Shafak 2012, 287).

The general failure to see *The Forty Rules of Love* as eclectic has a number of possible explanations. While neither the name Elif nor the name Shafak are found in Arabic, both names derive from Arabic, and so do not look unfamiliar.<sup>9</sup> Readers of the book in Arabic translation are, by definition, less hybrid than Shafak herself, as they have chosen to read in Arabic a book that they could have read in English, and so may be assumed to be less attuned to eclecticism. English-language reviewers of a book about Sufism are likely to have been chosen because they have some knowledge of Sufism, and so of Western Sufism, while Arabic-language reviewers have no reason to have specialist knowledge, as Sufism is seen as part of the general culture.

Beyond this, the failure to spot the eclecticism of *The Forty Rules of Love* can be understood as a form of Islamization or localization. As Jeffrey Kenney has noted in his study of contemporary Egyptian self-help literature, Muslim Arab readers are interested in much the same ideas as readers anywhere, but prefer them to be presented within an Islamic framework. In Dietrich Jung's terms, global social imaginaries contribute to the reinterpretation of Islamic traditions (Jung 2016, 23). In the Arabic self-help literature found in Egypt, the "life stories of the Prophet Muhammad, Abraham Lincoln and Helen Keller mix easily in an effort to provide readers with inner peace" (Kenney 2015, 671). This self-help literature, he finds, "does not simply draw on Islamic tradition for legitimacy; it entangles the tradition in new discourses and practices that facilitate the emergence of different understandings of what it means to be Muslim" (Kenney 2015, 665). The global, then, is localized, and in this case, Islamized. This is much what Haenni & Voix and Philippon also found. Haenni & Voix report that Driss Badidi of the

8. This word, like the English "halo," derives from the Greek *halōs*, a disk (Oxford English Dictionary 2016).

9. Elif is the Turkish form of *alif*, and Shafak is simply *shafaq*, a little-used word for dusk. *Shafak* is transliterated into Arabic as *shāfāq*, however, not *shafaq*. The related term *shafīq* is often used as a name.

Moroccan Zen Association explicitly tried to distance Zen from Buddhism and find the points that it had in common with Islam (Haenni & Voix 2007, 244), and conclude that “esoteric-mystical religiosity” of Western origin has been localized and Islamized through Sufism, even if some individuals have abandoned practices such as yoga as un-Islamic (Haenni & Voix 2007, 254-55). Similarly, Philippon reports that the Lahori Sufi Order International has added to its meetings Islamic elements not found in the West: the *salāh* (canonical prayers) and litanies of praise to Muinuddin Chishti (Philippon 2014, para. 27-28). These meetings were thus partly (re-)Islamized.

A similar reception is found in the circles around “Yogi Ali,” Ali El Alfy (b. 1985), in Cairo. It is Yogi Ali who noted that he did not know many people who had not read *The Forty Rules of Love*. Yogi Ali, like Shafak, has a cosmopolitan background. A Bahraini citizen of Egyptian origin, Yogi Ali went to McGill University in Canada and encountered spirituality in contemporary, global forms. He first became interested in yoga in Montreal, and spent some time at an ashram in Rishikesh, a city in the foothills of the Himalayas that attracts many Western students of yoga. He became interested in Sufism only after moving to Cairo, where he had relations, and where he was introduced to the Egyptian branch of the Haqqaniyya. Yogi Ali now combines yoga and Sufism, teaching yoga and attending the meetings of the Haqqaniyya. At a personal level he says he is interested in the fit between the two systems, just as Driss Badidi was, especially in the correspondence between the Divine Names as known in Islam and the chakras as known in yoga (interview, Cairo, June 4, 2016). He holds sessions of “Sufi Yoga,” which combine the repetition of the names of God from the Sufi *dhikr* with breathing exercises from the Yoga *pranayama* (Ali 2016), just as one of the informants of Haenni & Voix combined *dhikr* with Hindu mantras (Haenni & Voix 2007, 252).

A second way in which *The Forty Rules of Love* is localized is that it is applied to contemporary Arab political conditions, just as Philippon’s informant Naqvi applied the Sufi Order International to contemporary Pakistani political conditions. Zāhi Wahbi, reviewing *The Forty Rules of Love* in the respected pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Hayat*, read the book as a contrast to the sectarian hatred and conflict that was ravaging the Arab world, and welcomed its message that love could lead to tolerance and ac-

ceptance of others, away from “formalistic ritual religiosity” with its temptations of *takfīr* and intolerance, towards “deep spiritual faith” (Wahbi 2014). A similar view was taken by Hāla Mustafā in *Al-Ahrām*, Egypt’s leading (state-run) newspaper, who also placed Shafak’s Sufis in opposition to intolerance, noted that Shams had been killed by “extremists” (*mutatarifīn*) “such as we are seeing at the present time,” quoted several of Shafak’s rules with approval, and ended by asking rhetorically why, if Islam had such a “rich heritage,” people followed instead the succession that led from Ibn Taymiyyah through Sayyid Qutb to the Islamic State (Hāla Mustafā 2016). Daria Sharaf al-Dīn, writing in another respected Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Masri al-yawm*, welcomed the book for its literary qualities and its transformational potential, its ability to show readers their hidden strengths, to lead to contemplation and calm, to sorrow and joy at the same time, and also to “tolerance and acceptance of the other” (Daria Sharaf al-Dīn 2015).

That these reviewers applied *The Forty Rules of Love* to contemporary Arab political conditions is not surprising. Arab readers are currently much concerned by these divisions, as is suggested by the books bought by those who bought *The Forty Rules of Love* on Nīl wa firāt, an Arabic version of Amazon that, like Amazon, lists other books bought by people who have bought a particular title. Customers who bought the Arabic translation of *The Forty Rules of Love* also bought three other books by Shafak, as one might expect, two classic works, a translation of Haruki Murakami, and four contemporary Arabic novels.<sup>10</sup> The four contemporary novels all address political issues. One (Saadawi 2013) deals in magic realist fashion with the consequences of terrorism in Baghdad. The other three are historical novels dealing with various aspects of sectarianism.<sup>11</sup>

These divisions are not exactly the divisions that primarily concerned Shafak, who is not an Arab. Her concerns are with divisions in the West, globally, and in Turkey. She spoke in a TED talk about the way in which we all tend to surround ourselves with people like us, producing “communities of the likeminded” and thus mutual incomprehension between rich and poor, East and West, believers and agnostics (Shafak 2010b). These are the divisions that she has herself encountered. Divisions between rich and poor concern some Londoners, divisions between East and West concern those like Shafak who think globally, and di-

10. The three books by Shafak were *The Architect’s Apprentice*, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, and *Honour*. The translation was of *Kafka on the Shore*. The two classic works were Al-Wardi 1959 and Ṭantāwī 1959 (Nīl wa firāt 2016).

11. Zaydān 2008 is set among Christian and Neoplatonic religious controversies in fifth-century Egypt and Syria, and was widely seen as a parable on contemporary religious disputes. Ashour 1998 is set in the period following the Christian conquest of Granada in 1492, and so deals with sectarian persecution and possible responses to it. Finally, Khawla Hamdi 2012 chronicles the close and supra-sectarian relationship between a poor Muslim widow and her child and a rich Jewish family (Nīl wa firāt 2016).

visions between believers and agnostics concern those who know Turkey. Arabs are concerned with different divisions.

The authors of Arabic reviews of *The Forty Rules of Love*, however, did not read the book only in terms of divisions, intolerance, and tolerance, however. Those quoted above also praised it for its “deep spiritual faith” (as opposed to “formalistic ritual religiosity”), liked Shafak’s rules, and valued its transformational potential and its ability to lead readers to contemplation and calm. These are much the qualities that seem to have appealed to the 100,000 followers of the book’s main page on Facebook.<sup>12</sup> This serves mostly to distribute memes, short inspirational texts, sometimes worked into image files showing hearts, roses and the like, mostly from *The Forty Rules of Love*. Usually one of the rules is worked into an image file as a meme. It also sometimes distributes artistic photographs, mostly of whirling dervishes against sunsets.<sup>13</sup>

Although Facebook does not show who is following book pages, it does show some of those who share a post, if their security settings allow this, and this gives an indication of who is following a book page closely, which allows an analysis of class and gender. A posting of Rule 2 in July 2015 on the main book page, for example, was shared 460 times, 150 times by people with security setting that allowed this researcher to see who they were. A random sample of 50 of these 150 shares showed a group that seemed to be generally in their 20s and 30s, mostly female (68 percent) and mostly Egyptian (60 percent). Other nationalities were Syrian (10 percent), Tunisian (three), Saudi (two) and Yemeni (one). Some were internationals. 20 percent of the Egyptian females were past or present expatriates, in the UAE, UK, US, or Mexico, and both the Saudis had an American connection—one had studied there and one was living there. Both were also female. When an educational institution was given, this was generally a university, Alexandria and Damascus being the most popular. The typical Facebook share of this rule 2 meme, then, was by a somewhat globalized female Egyptian university graduate in her late 20s.

A similar profile is found off line. In 2016 Yogi Ali hosted a discussion of *The Forty Rules of Love* held by Monir El Shazly, an Egyptian Holistic Life Coach who grew up in Saudi Arabia and studied at the University of Wales in Cardiff (El Shazly 2016). El Shazly’s background, then, mirrors Yogi Ali’s, and also

12. A secondary book page, also named after *The Forty Rules of Love*, has even more followers—1.7 million—but its primary focus is not on *The Forty Rules of Love*.

13. This page has been inactive since July 2015, probably because its administrator shifted her focus to Instagram. The administrator is not identified, but many of the posts were of texts created by future\_is\_best, who is still active on Instagram, but does not focus on *The Forty Rules of Love*. The administrator’s sex is unknown, but her images strongly suggest a female.

Shafak's. The discussion was based around readings of the rules, made available in a list in Arabic and English in advance (Facebook 2016a), and was attended by twenty-two people, of whom only three were male. Most were Egyptian but there were also two Syrians, a Pakistani, and a Bulgarian, the latter two presumably Arabic speaking, as the discussions were held in Arabic. Once again, all appeared to be university graduates (Facebook 2016b).

These demographics are very similar to those noted by Haenni & Voix in Casablanca, and by Philippon in Lahore. Haenni & Voix found their eclectic Sufism primarily among Casablanca's "cosmopolitan middle class" (Haenni & Voix 2007, 243), and though they do not discuss gender, many of their informants were female. Philippon also writes of the "cosmopolitan middle class," and although she does not discuss gender explicitly, she notes that it is not accidental that the two leaders of the Lahori Sufi Order International are female (Philippon 2014).

## Individualization

What this article has not so far found is the individualization that Haenni & Voix and Philippon identified, which Jung has called "the liberal imaginary of the emancipation of a reflexive, rational, self-interested, and expressive individual" (2016, 19). Haenni & Voix contrast the interest of Casablanca's eclectic Sufis in "self-realization, internal equilibrium and spiritual peace" with the collectivist concerns of the socialism and nationalism of earlier decades and with political Islam. They also find a "vision of the sacred... in defiance of any religious authority" (Haenni & Voix 2007, 244-45). Philippon likewise notes the individualistic values of her eclectic Sufis, "hostile to reactionary, politicized and normative versions of Islam" (Philippon 2014, para. 2). While it is true that Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love*, and some of its Arab reviewers are all hostile to religious authority, especially in reactionary and politicized form, hostility to particular versions of religious authority are not the same as individualism.

Individualism is, most importantly, the contrary of collectivism. Collectivism is understood by Dietrich Jung and Kirstine Sinclair (2015), following Andreas Reckwitz (2006), as characteristic of the second of three stages of modernity, the "mass so-

ciety of the 20th century” that succeeded the “restricted liberal society of the 19th century.” In the Arab world, they argue, this mass society (“the peer group-oriented type of modern subjectivity”) is reflected in the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, and this seems at present to be being succeeded by a third stage of modernity, or postmodernity, which is “managed on the individual instead of the collective level” and “based on the religious and moral development of individuals” (Jung & Sinclair 2015, 29, 33, 35). In these terms, eclectic Sufism fits neatly with the third or postmodern stage, and the socialism, nationalism and political Islam that Haenni & Voix contrast it with fit neatly with the collectivism of the second stage of mass society. It is not so much that postmodernity or eclectic Sufism are individualistic, then, as that they are not collectivist. And collectivism is characteristic of one particular stage of modernity, mass society, not of all human history before postmodernity. This makes sense, as Sufism has always been more focused on the individual than the collective, and there have always been tensions between Sufis and religious authority.

## Conclusion

The traumatic aftermath of the Arab Spring of 2011 has spurred a search for alternative ways of approaching Islam. This helps explain the phenomenal popularity of Elif Shafak’s *The Forty Rules of Love*. Shafak is herself a hybrid, empowered by globalization, a Turk who lives mostly in London and writes in English, drawing on classic Persian sources (in English translation), on American poets like Coleman Barks, on Western Sufis like the Helminskis, and also on Spinoza. Her book is eclectic, both in its plot and in its message. As well as incorporating auras and feminist readings of the Quran, it blurs the line between human and divine love, and expresses positions that are characteristic of Western Sufism, such as the idea that Sufism is the essence of all religions and that the sharia is a means to an end that may perhaps be dispensed with. Something of Spinoza lies behind the book’s hostility to the ulema.

The reception of the book’s Arabic translation, however, has localized and Islamized it, as the Casablanca study of Haenni & Voix and the Lahore study of Philippon would have predicted.

Islamization is one form of localization, and application to current Arab problems of sectarianism and conflict is another form of localization. What the article did not find, however, was individualization comparable to that found by Haenni & Voix and Philippon. To the extent that eclectic Sufism is individualistic, this is because collectivism is characteristic of a different stage of modernity.

Globalization is inevitable given that there are global people, whose reading and experience is aligned with global trends. Localization is also inevitable, given that local conditions differ from place to place, and that not everyone is equally globalized and hybrid. Muslims in the Arab world thus build a distinctively Arab and Muslim post-modern subjectivity, drawing on and joining in global trends, but also adapting them to Islam and to Arab conditions.

## Abstract på dansk

Eklektisk sufisme, som kan fortolkes som et udtryk for moderne subjektivitetskonstruktion, kan observeres i Marokko og Pakistan. Denne artikel beskriver og diskuterer fænomener fra andre egne med udgangspunkt i den arabiske oversættelse af Elif Shafaks roman *The Forty Rules of Love*. Artiklen argumenterer for at den lokalt forankrede eklektiske sufisme, man finder i den arabiske verden såvel som i Marokko og Pakistan, bygger på en genfortolkning af islamiske traditioner, som inkorporerer globalt relevante sociale forestillinger. Samtidig rejses spørgsmål om forbindelsen mellem den eklektiske sufisme og individualismen og muligheden for lokal forankring på et yderligere niveau, nemlig samtidige politiske forhold og problemstillinger knyttet til sekularisme.

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