



## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **TRANSNATIONAL SUFISM IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES**

International Conference

**Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

Organisers:

**Francesco Piraino (Fondazione Cini)**

**Mark Sedgwick (Aarhus University)**

The Fondazione Giorgio Cini invites submissions for its international conference “Transnational Sufism in Contemporary Societies,” to be held on San Giorgio Island, Venice, on the 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sufism was subject to a double attack, from state institutions and from Islamic reformists. Western social scientists meanwhile diagnosed the crisis of Sufism in contemporary society in response to modernization, an analysis aligned with the mainstream sociological theories of the period. The current research literature, however, finds that, rather than a crisis, it was a matter of transformation, a renewal. New Sufi orders have been born while others have found new energies. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century Sufism has spread transnationally and in Western societies, thanks to charismatic Sufi Masters and to the encounter with Western esotericism and New Age culture. In a parallel process, there has been a return to Sufi spirituality in Muslim-majority countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Egypt, in Indonesia, in Algeria, and in Morocco.

The revitalisation of Sufism in contemporary societies, in the Muslim world, in the West, and transregionally, marks a renewed interest in spirituality in multiple social, cultural and ethnic contexts.

There are different possible explanations of this renewal, which change according to geographical and historical contexts. On the other hand, there is a common issue among these new Sufism(s) which is the continuous negotiation of religious boundaries. In fact, contemporary Sufism is a place in which ethnic, national and sometimes even religious boundaries are blurred, due in part to the pre-eminence of religious experience over identitarian boundaries. In one Sufi order we may find several different ethnic groups, and even different religious backgrounds: Sufism is attractive for many converts to Islam. The creation of new Sufi movements in new cultural and religious contexts involves negotiation and revising theological and ritual boundaries.

In contemporary transnational Sufism we can find the very old Sufi characteristics about mystical experience, charismatic leaders (living saints), and new trends - discourses about globalisation and individualization. In order to understand this mixing of old and new characteristics, we cannot take for granted our social sciences' categories of spirituality, mysticism, esotericism, sect, cult and New Age.

(1) What are the **politics of contemporary transnational Sufism**? How are they situated in theological and political debates, especially those regarding Islamic Reformism and Islamism, and those regarding Tradition and Modernity? What is their relation with state power? How is the image of Sufism used? What is the role of new social media, and of new forms such as rap or pop culture?

(2) How are **boundaries and identities reconfigured** in contemporary transnational Sufism? What are the boundaries between "us" and "them" in the new Sufism? What are the boundaries of holiness? Who is the other? What are the practical and theological forms of Sufi Universalism(s)? What is happening with gender? What influence does Sufism have beyond Sufi orders?

(3) This conference aims to develop theoretical reflections, based on empirical research, on several crucial **categories**: tariqa, mysticism, esotericism, sect, cult, New Age. How are these now changing? Among other question, we ask whether Sufism can exist without a Sufi order?

**Topics might include, but are not limited to:**

- Sufi Politics, Islamic Reformism and Islamism

- Sufi Politics between Tradition and Modernity
- State Promotion of Sufi Politics
- State Promotion of Sufi Heritage
- Traditional Sufi Culture in New Social Media
- New Sufi expressions: Rap and Pop Culture
- New and Old Theological Trends in Contemporary Sufism
- Sufism and Gender
- Where is the infidel? Sufism and the Otherness in Transnational Sufism
- Sufi-ish but not Sufi? The Influence of Sufism beyond Sufi Orders
- Mysticism, Esotericism, Spirituality New Age: What is Sufism?
- Sufism Between Islamic Spirituality and Religious Movement

### **Abstracts and texts**

Paper proposals of 300 to 500 words, accompanied by a CV, should be submitted (in either English or French) to both: Francesco Piraino ([sufismconference2017@cini.it](mailto:sufismconference2017@cini.it)) and Mark Sedgwick ([mjrs@cas.au.dk](mailto:mjrs@cas.au.dk)). Proposals should specify clearly which of the questions asked in this Call will be addressed. It is envisaged that each paper will focus primarily on one question, not on all of the questions asked. Proposals should also ensure that there is appropriate historical depth, where possible connecting old with new trends.

Upon acceptance, participants will be invited to send a text (either in French or English) before the conference. This text will be sent to all the participants, who will discuss all the presentations (there will be no parallel sessions). A few months after the conference we will ask participants to send us a final text in English. From these texts, an edited book will be published, comprising the papers presented at the conference.

We welcome submissions from doctoral students, early career researchers and established academics.

### **Timetable**

1. The call for papers is open – 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2017.

2. Abstracts (300-500 words maximum) and CVs to be received by 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017.
3. Notifications of acceptance will be given by 15<sup>th</sup> April 2017.
4. Papers in French or in English (between 6000 and 7000 words - including references), to be received by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.
5. Conference will be held the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2017.
6. Final papers in English to be received by 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018.
7. Publication of the book in late 2018, early 2019.

### **Economics**

The Cini Foundation will take care of flight tickets, accommodation on San Giorgio Island, coffee breaks and lunches for all the participants. In return, we kindly ask participants to donate to the Cini Foundation Library *Civiltà e Spiritualità Compare* one book related to religious studies they authored or in which they have participated.

**For further information**, please contact: [sufismconference2017@cini.it](mailto:sufismconference2017@cini.it)