



Naqshbandi Sufism in Southern Chile: A Case Study

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2020/v12i430200

Editor(s):

(1) Dr. David A. Kinnunen, California State University Fresno, USA.

Reviewers:

(1) Diogo Jacintho Barbosa, Gama e Souza University, Brazil.

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(3) B. Gomathi, Shiksha 'O' Anusandhan Deemed to be University, India.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/63796>

Original Research Article

Received 10 October 2020
Accepted 15 December 2020
Published 05 January 2021

ABSTRACT

The present article presents the motivations and perceptions of Chilean *Naqshbandi Haqqani* Sufis. The research sought a deeper understanding of the experience of these practices in contemporary Chile, studying a specific case and some of its effects on the social integration of the participants. Perceptions of the intercultural contact involved were recorded and analyzed, with phenomena such as prejudices and discrimination, considering the country's mainly Christian context. The most important themes analyzed in the results were the centrality of the concept of "search" and the weight of the figure of the master as motivating factors

Keywords: Oriental; Chile; Naqshbandi Sufism; Islam; religious experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Religions, the Orient and Chile; A General Consideration of How They Interrelate

The focus of the present study assumes that religion and its associated practices, strongly moulded by the cultures where they are carried

on, continue to define central aspects of subjects' lives [1-3]. This runs counter to the view of some specialists regarding the secular and secularizing trends of recent decades, following a particular interpretation of Weber's view of an inevitable process of secularization, rationalization and the concomitant "elimination of magic from the world" [4] also known as "disenchantment of the world" [5]. However this view has increasingly been

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questioned by a new interpretation of the data, which indicates rather a decrease in the institutionalized forms of religiosity and an increase in individual spirituality [6,7]. Most importantly, it seems that the “secularization” discussion, with its proponents and critics is far from a settled matter, which must be analysed with “more logical rigor and conceptual precision” [5], exceeding the reach of this study. In this context, it must be considered that the religious plane in today’s societies has been subjected to changes of a very different velocity and nature from those of previous centuries, and Chile is no exception.

The study addresses precisely this point of friction, in an environment of scarce, vague information, which is moreover constantly changing. The multitude of religious currents to be found in Chile today is partly a response to the phenomenon of increasing connectivity and globalization which has swept the world in recent years. As Mallimaci and Giménez [8] state, religious changes in the southern cone of America in the 21st century are “marked by the double dynamic of the disappearance of the catholic monopoly and the pluralization of the field of religion”.

Although the phenomenon known as “religious nomadism” or “religious circulation” (Mallimaci and Giménez [8]; see also Schenerock [9]) is not very marked in the case of Chile [10], it exists and is related to the coexistence of a range of options for religious participation, crossed by numerous segmented practices “which seek meanings with a religious or more broadly spiritual format, without necessarily stabilizing the adherence of the faithful in an institutional framework” [8]. Moreover, we must consider the complexity of cases in which there has been a religious conversion, with its concomitant changes in worldview and affiliation. Being usually an individual process, it happens “within a context of institutional procedures and social relationships” [11] that must be addressed if a deeper understanding of the phenomenon is to be attained. In this sense, it is interesting to consider Schenerock’s [9] work on Tzotzil Muslim women in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas (Mexico), whose conversion was related to various contextual political and economic elements, together with the importance of religion for this indigenous group.

Thus the growth in the number of evangelical Christians in the country has been studied in greater depth, on account of the scope of this

expansion as well as its speed and implications [12,13]. However, despite the existence of some informal works which explore the characteristics of ‘Oriental’ religious beliefs in Chile and their contact with branches of Christianity [14], it would appear that there is no trend towards research into these and other religions in the country, probably due to their low presence according to the two latest censuses.

Thus, the original general objective of this research was to attain, through the study of specific cases in the Araucanía Region, a deeper and more detailed understanding of the religious and cultural practices belonging or derived from Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, and some of its concomitant effects on the social integration of the individuals involved, in current Chile. However, it should be made clear that the present work represents one selected case- a Naqshbandi Sufi community close to the southern town of Villarrica (39°16’43” S; 72°13’33” W)- in the framework of the original broader study, where more time could be spent and proper ethnographic work was developed.

Consequently, the problem addressed is related more specifically to the lack of information at a national level on the everyday experiences and the elements present in the motivation of individuals in their religious choices, focusing specifically on religious and cultural practices belonging to the *Naqshbandi Haqqani* Sufi branch of Islam.

1.2 “Oriental” Religions and the Local Context

At this point it is necessary to explain the usage of the concept ‘Oriental’ in the broader study, due to the various connotations of the term and subsequent deconstructive discussions about it, developed by authors who are part of the postmodern current as Edward Said, widely known for his book *Orientalism* (1978). ‘Orientalism’ has been defined in Edward Said’s text in various ways, even admitting contradictions between them [15]. One of the most functional among those is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” [16]. However, despite the range of controversial meanings that the term ‘Oriental’ carries, it is used in the context of this work due to the recognizable cultural and symbolic load it has in our country, and particularly by the associations that the word ‘Oriental’ and ‘East’ have in the local ‘alternative’ religious landscape.

Some of the works which report on the 'religious topography' of the southern cone of Latin America [8], specifically Argentina [7] or Chile [13] tend to follow more general approaches, giving a broad quantitative view of the phenomena without focusing on more detailed aspects of the experiences of the subjects in question. In fact, the category 'Other religion', used in the censuses of 1992 and 2002 in Chile,¹ obscured the specific area of 'Oriental' beliefs which interests us in the present study. Furthermore, the results of the Chilean Bicentenary survey in 2009 do not analyze in detail the population who changed their religious option – i.e. "religious nomads" – from catholic to another non-evangelical religion, although these constitute 13% of those who stated that they had changed their religious orientation.

Here we should clarify aspects of the definition of 'religion' used in the present work, given the many meanings attributed to the word, and particularly the controversies which arise in debates as to whether certain spiritual paths constitute 'sects' – in a pejorative sense – or cults, which can be addressed in a fragmentary manner [17], or can be understood as religions (see also Lambek [18]). According to Rodríguez [19], who covers a variety of points of view in this respect, a series of parameters should be included in the definition, as is fitting for a complex phenomenon, but its functions and consequences must include at least: maintenance of a moral community, a guiding framework, a group and/or individual identity, a universe which is meaningful from the human perspective, and confidence in external help and salvation.

Returning to the religious situation in Chile, apart from the evident presence of centres and practisers of 'Oriental' religious and cultural creeds in the capital city of Santiago, the country presents a few locations which concentrate a remarkable multiplicity of religious currents, despite their low proportion of the population. Thus in the Araucanía Region we find various centres of religious and cultural practices of 'Oriental' origin, such as centres for Tibetan Buddhism; centres and institutions adhering to the *Bahá'í* faith; Muslim communities; followers of *Krishna*; centres for meditation based on the teachings of *Osho*, etc. Some of these centres

and communities are found close to or even embedded in Mapuche² communities, adding an interesting factor in terms of the intercultural contact implied, including the possibility of people joining the movements in question.

Thus to carry out a more fruitful analysis of the experience of these religious beliefs of the 'Oriental' tradition, the possible case studies were limited and the Muslim case was selected. An in-depth field study approach with an anthropological slant was used, as recommended in this academic tradition [20,21]. The basic precepts of religious anthropology were also followed – as per Evans-Pritchard – which seeks to concentrate on sociological facts, considered to be scientific and not metaphysical or ontological [22]. From this perspective, it is also assumed that the term religion covers "all those phenomena which are sacred or supra-empirical in character" [17].

2. METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

The research on which the present text is based was oriented by three questions. Firstly: What are the motivations which lead Chileans to adopt religious and cultural practices traditionally associated with the geographical and socio-cultural areas of the Middle and Far East? Secondly: What are the perceptions of these individuals of such religious and cultural practices, considering that they are embedded in a mainly Christian socio-cultural space? And finally: How do they appreciate – if indeed they identify them – cognitive changes which are central in their discourse, derived from their religious and cultural choices?

The research therefore sought firstly to collect and analyze perceptions, motivations and accounts of experiences from participants respecting their religious practices, embedded in a mainly Christian socio-cultural medium. Secondly, the perceptions and opinions expressed by the participants, with specific reference to intercultural contact and its complexities in their experience of the religious-cultural practices under consideration, were recorded and analyzed qualitatively, together with the cognitive changes recognized in their discourse. All of these were arranged according

¹ According to the national census of 2012, Chile had a population of 3288 Muslims (<http://www.iniciativaicaista.cl/blog/230-el-censo-2017-y-la-duda-religiosa.html>).

² The Mapuche are Chile and Argentina's largest group of Indigenous people; their ancestral territory spans between the Choapa River (31°S) and the island of Chiloé (42°S) in Chile, and from the city of Mendoza (32°S) south to the Río Negro Province (40°S) in Argentina.

to themes, with categories emerging from the material, following a “grounded theory” approach [23].

The data collection method most used during the various phases of the study was that of ethnographic field notes based on participant observation [24-26]. The operational advantages of this were evident from the beginning of the study, strongly influenced by the fact that it was an anthropological research. The ease with which information could be unobtrusively recorded as it emerged, in addition to its simplicity – requiring no more apparatus than a small note book and a pencil – made this the most suitable instrument for the changing scenarios found during the research: rural spaces, cafés, offices, meeting centres, the street, etc.

A double approach was made to the selected cases, meaning that data were collected by interviews and by regular participant observation. The fact that only the *Naqshbandi* group presented stable functioning over time, centred on a concrete physical space, led to the selection of this case to enter into greater depth in the study, beyond the interviews, turning it into a “case study” [27]. In this way, close contact was maintained on a weekly basis, in which the researcher could travel to the site almost every Thursday to participate in the regular ceremonies, as well as activities related with country life as they occurred (e.g. helping to look after the chickens and lambs, helping to feed them, etc.).

2.1 Sufism and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Tariqa

According to Hourani [28], the desire for purity of intentions has given rise to ascetic practices in Islam from earliest times, probably under the influence of the Christian monks of the east. Implicit in this was the idea that a relationship could exist between God and man which was not one of command and obedience, but in which man obeyed God's will out of love for Him and the desire to come closer to Him, and that this would allow him to become conscious of a broad response of God's love for humanity. Such ideas, and the practices to which they gave rise, continued to develop over the centuries. Thus the idea gradually came into being of a path by which the true believer could come closer to God, working out techniques to eliminate distractions and cravings from prayer and life,

and those who accepted these ideas and tried to put them into practice came to be generally known as Sufis [29].

In the late 10th and 11th centuries a new development began to take shape. The followers of the same master began to identify themselves as one spiritual family, walking the same *tariqa*, a concept taken from the Arabic *tariq*, meaning ‘path’ [28]; in this case, it means the individual method, manner or system followed by each master to reach the Ultimate Truth [30]. Some of these families continued over long periods, claiming a lineage going back to one of the great masters of spiritual life, who gave his name to the *tariqa*, and through him to the Prophet through *Ali*, or else through *Abu Bakr* (the first caliph). Some of these ‘paths’ or orders spread out to cover a large part of the Islamic world, in the mouths of disciples whom a master had authorized to teach in his manner [28].

Sufism takes, as has already been noted, broad and varied forms; there is no single type of Sufism, nor a single *tariqa*, far less is it restricted to a geographical area. The *Naqshbandi tariqa* has its origins in Central Asia, going back to the figure of their founder, *Baha ad-Din Naqshband*. He incorporated older Central Asian traditions into Islamic practices and conceptions coming from the Arabian Peninsula and surrounding areas, dying in 1389 in Bukhara, Uzbekistan [31].

Baha ad-Din Naqshb and thus formed a *tariqa* which presented no spectacular ritual or miraculous acts to the outside world, being guided rather by the motto: ‘The hand at work, the heart with the (divine) friend.’ It is one of its central precepts that the believer must remain ‘in permanent prayer’, even when he is engaged in his daily tasks, and more, that he should consciously practice *khalwat dar anjuman*, ‘solitude in the crowd’, implying that he is always with God [32]. The latter is related with another important idea frequently proposed by *Naqshbandis*, of being in the temporal world (*dunya*), without being a part of it.

It is also important here to clarify what is assumed in the present study as mysticism, since a large part of the Naqshbandi practices and beliefs falls under this definition. As Happold [33] says, mysticism is understood as a particular and distinctive form of spirituality, which is assumed alternately as a form of knowledge, a type of experience and a state of consciousness. Thus the central characteristic of the mystic

experience is not determined by the level of consciousness at which it occurs, but by the quality of the experience at that level, a phenomenon which has been consistently viewed with suspicion by the Salafi branch of Islam, and particularly since the rise of Wahabbism [29]. As Halgar (1976) explains, the view of Sufism within the Arab world “as a harmful and repugnant excrescence on the body of Islam, first expounded by the Wahhabis and the Salafiya, continues to exercise its influence” (124). This view is, although, contested by some authors like Mun'im Sirry [34], who asserts that this antagonism has been somewhat exaggerated and that influences among currents were common two centuries ago.

Thus, concurring with Maanán [30], the Sufi path seems to be one of the most intense expressions of spirituality in Islam, attracting the attention of researchers as well as a broader, more heterogeneous public. This attraction would result from “the profundity of its ideology, the charm of its literature and the spectacular attractiveness of some of its practices and manifestations” (9).

2.2 The local *Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Community*

The lifestyle of the *Naqshbandi Haqqani (Rabbaniya)*³ Sufi community studied in this research differs from the normal urban lifestyle, being based on their beliefs of the coming of the *Mahdi* (‘the guided one’, the redeeming figure of Islam) and the return of *Isa* (Jesus Christ) at the end of days. The stability of the community, as mentioned above, made it possible to use a more classic anthropological approach, with regular weekly visits which began in the month of *Ramadan* in 2010 and finished –in formal terms– in September 2011, with occasional missed weeks due to the demands of work or journeys by the participants.

The most important change for the Caliborohue⁴ Sufi community involved the move of the family of *Ali* – founder member of the community there

– to the north, with the mission of constructing a centre for spiritual studies close to Santiago. As they had been the pivotal family of the community's activity in practical terms, this created unease in the other families who remained, and the need to reorganize their work and the roles assigned to the different members of the community.

The *Naqshbandi* Sufi community in Caliborohue define themselves as followers of *Shaykh Mohammed Nazim Adil al-qubrusi al-haqqani al-rabbani* (Sha'ban 23, 1340 AH – Rajab 8, 1435 AH; 21/4/1922-7/5/2014), who was the leader of the *Naqshbandi Haqqani* order, based in Lefke, Cyprus. This master – disciple of *Shaykh Abdullah al-Fa'iz ad-Dagestani*, from Dagestan in the Caucasus – has been distinguished for his intense activity on the international stage, which gradually diminished due to his advanced age [35].

Prior to the changes described above, (at least during the research period) the Sufi community in the study consisted of three families living in a stable group on the site, in separate houses, carrying out productive activities including raising lambs, goats and chickens, weaving, growing vegetables for their own consumption, and non-industrial soap production. The families shared some of these tasks, while others were carried out in a more specialized manner.

The pivotal or central family contained the two senior members of the community, who had established contact with the order abroad, when doing post-graduate courses. This family consisted of the parents, three daughters and a baby boy, with another baby expected. *Ali*, the father, actively supported by his wife, was the guide for the group's organization and religious practices, given his level of knowledge and the time he had been committed to the *tariqa*. Based on his frequent, fluid contact with the authorities in Michigan and Lefke, he served as the principal interlocutor with them, although all the members had access to sources of information and messages from the *shaykhs* through web sites set up for that purpose.

The next most senior family consisted of the parents, two small children and another expected. They moved to the community after participating in the order for a time when they lived in Santiago; they then chose this rural life in order to increase their commitment to the message of *Shaykh Nazim*.

³ In a *sohbet* or address given at the end of 2010, *Shaykh Nazim* stated that the labels differentiating believers should be abandoned, and that all those who are close to God, whether Jewish, Muslim or Christian, or of any other religion, should be called *Rabbani*, or *Servant of the Lord*, in contrast to the servants of *Shaitan* (*Satan*). This term is used here to reflect this transition, although the name *Naqshbandi Sufi* continues to be used in the text for practical reasons.

⁴ The original names of participants and of the community location have been changed.

The third family consisted of the youngest couple who had no children; they also opted to live in the country after spending a season as members of the *tariqa*, while participating in activities in Santiago. Finally there were two other young women, and a couple with a daughter a few weeks old, who were active members but did not live at the site. A Sufi from further south also attended from time to time, occasionally with his wife and young child; they also moved north after *Shaykh Hisham's* visit.

The regular meeting of the group members is the *dhikr*, held communally every Thursday in Caliborohue if there are no circumstances to prevent it. At the same time, friends and relations are welcome at the ceremonies, which are preceded by a meal when various matters are discussed in a relaxed atmosphere and information considered important for the community is shared. There are therefore quite frequently other Sufis present (and even Muslims who are not members of the *tariqa*) from other cities in the north, who make use of the *dargah*, a construction built for retreats, based on inns known as *kanqahs*, where pilgrims were lodged and meetings and ritual practices held [36].

3. RESULTS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The research results will be discussed by analysis with reference to the categories created based on the opening questions which serve as the research axis. As part of the replies to these questions, certain 'nuclear concepts' which emerged from analysis of the interviews and field notes will be used. It is these which finally condense a large part of the information intended to answer the research questions.

In the case of the *Naqshbandi* Sufis, their desire for a simpler life, connected to nature, emerged from the observations and conversations, although they do not appear to limit themselves necessarily to this ambit; rather, they relate this desire to the rural space, and some members who already lived in the area contacted the group and subsequently entered the *tariqa*. Finally, the last citation also connects with the first concept, which emerged strongly from the identification of the motivations underlying the participants' choices, detailed below.

3.1 The Concept of 'Search' and Its Implications

One of the central aspects observed in the accounts of the key informants is that the choice of these spiritual paths arises from autonomous, personal, intimate search processes, unconnected, as might be expected, with the traditional cultural background of the subjects. In other words, a large part of the initiative and approach occurs on the part of the interested person, who has had to seek information and approach the group in which he/she is interested.

The 'nuclear concept' which emerged most strongly was that of a 'search', particularly an autonomous search, although this subsequently implies joining a group. Value therefore appears to be attached to the attitude of 'searching' by the members as one which tends to reinforce a receptive attitude by the group, instead of a more proselytizing approach. It is evident that this search must be for something, and here it partially overlaps with other concepts and categories. However the fact that it is also seen as an end in itself has led us to discuss it in more detail.

In the case of the participants, it is interesting to note that some views exist which stress once again the concept of 'search', while others generate a clear contrast to this concept. As an example of the former, one of the participants, *Taqiyy*, stated that his first contact with the Sufis occurred in an exhibition related to his work, when his first impression was that they were 'the strangest people in the world', influenced by his own dual life at that time, as a successful businessman on the one hand but on the other engaged in a 'desperate search'. He found no answers in the Catholic world, despite the fact that it was his family background; he even said that he envied 'friends who were very Catholic. I thought, if only I could just follow Jesus and go on... but no, there was something which just didn't make sense, it just never made sense to me.' That was how, through his persevering search in which all doors seemed to close, he found Sufism and 'it was the other way round, everything opened'.

The second participant cited, *Hassan*, recognizes the presence of the concept of a search in general terms, however he does not consider it to be a specific motivating factor in his case, although he believes that the question of how one comes to commit oneself to Islam 'cuts right

across a Muslim's life', and that one way or another it will always emerge:

(...) I think it is basically an invitation, it is not something you deserve, even by searching (...) there are people who search a lot and do not find this, they find something else (...) We have seen it, they are almost there, they even say 'Hey, this is what I want', but it is a step which does not necessarily depend on a conscious decision (...) I like to think of it as an invitation, a call rather than something you find or deserve; it isn't something you find, it is more like luck, or what we call a blessing, something which comes... like the touch of a magic wand.

It is of interest to note the factor of 'higher will' or divine intervention in this case, which is consistent with the Muslim cosmos view and the absolute preponderance of God's will over any event in the subjects' lives. However, *Hassan* described the notion of a 'search' in a deeper, more personal way, saying that he came to the *tariqa* because a friend invited him to a talk in which the central theme was not Sufism or Islam, but about the 'ego' and working on personal development through that respect. At that moment he felt that he was hearing an unknown point of view, which forced him to look at himself as a stranger. Without calling this Islam or a 'spiritual path', he found it interesting and decided to fast for *Ramadan* as a way of working on his 'ego' and his own will. This is what finally led him to feel that he was opening 'a door which was very different' from his normal life. At the end of *Ramadan*, he says that he thought 'you can close the chapter and leave it as an experience, but during *Ramadan* I knew that I was being offered a new way of life. I found it very attractive and I ended up here in Villarrica.'

Finally, he tells how he accompanied his friend to the feast marking the end of *Ramadan* (*Eid al fitr*) in the Caliborohue community, where, although he arrived without knowing much about it, he took part and ended up becoming a Muslim by reciting the *shahada* (Islamic creed). The impression given is that up until that moment, *Hassan* was not acting in full consciousness, but that he voluntarily opted to live the experience unquestioningly, connecting with the emotions which it aroused. In the end this proved consistent with some of the basic principles of Sufi practice, concentrating on mystical aspects.

Finally, the account of *Taqiyy* highlights another, ambiguous perspective on the value of the concept of 'search'. Recalling the visit of *Shaykh Hisham* in February 2011 and some of his talks, he quoted one of them as follows 'I want to say something to the seekers, we get too many seekers. We are the "finders", that is what Sufis are'. Here we can appreciate that however much the process of seeking is recognized and valued, what is important is to find a path which offers clear answers and ways of proceeding to the questions of life.

3.2 Identification with the 'Community'

Another central aspect present both in the discourse of the interviewees and in the field observations is that opting for the Sufi path seems to be strongly based on the offer of an all-encompassing lifestyle, stressing the importance of the community, which differs from the projects offered by the traditional religious paths of Chilean society today. Thus, although members have separate houses and different independent activities, they practice – up to a point – a community lifestyle. In this respect, *Taqiyy* recounts that direct contact with the members, and the chance to share with them in the fields, convinced him immediately that this was what he was looking for:

(...) It was a sort of brotherhood arrangement, a sort of meeting, of getting together with a few Sufi brothers, going to their place, I spent two days with them, one day, and by the evening I already felt part of it, it is inexplicable but I felt absolutely part of it (...) This happened to me here in Caliborohue (...) I talked to *Ali* at the fair, I told him about near death experiences, and other things, and then he said certain things to me which fitted in with everything... and then I went to the Sufi centre (...) But the first day I spent with them, it was all very quick, I never questioned what I was doing, and then it was more bit by bit as you might say, I had the chance to go and see *Mawlana*⁵ at once... on the fortieth day after entering the order I went to *Mawlana*, it was all very quick.

However, other Sufis stress their more gradual incorporation into this lifestyle, displaying some

⁵ *Mawlana* in Arabic means 'our lord' or 'our master', and is frequently used by the Naqshbandi Haqqani to refer to *Shaykh Nazim*.

degree of mistrust of 'communitarianism' in the context of Islam. Thus another participant, explaining his slower, more gradual approach to the *tariqa*, says "for me the community, the fact that it is a community is still very important for me, to embrace Islam, to accept that Christ could not be the son of God but that he was a prophet... for me these are very profound changes in my perception of the world, of my world."

So the regular functioning of *Naqshbandi* practices, the presence of the "brothers", is very important for the support and assistance between members. This could be seen in the various tasks in the fields where they helped one another and in the importance given to the shared community meal before each *dhikr*. The researcher also formed part of this dynamic of 'contributing and sharing' through the open invitation to cooperate with what he could. At the same time, the quality and power of the *dhikr* were also influenced by the presence of more or fewer participants. This could be seen most dramatically during the visit of *Shaykh Hisham*, when many more members of the *tariqa* congregated, as well as people from outside who were interested, in every activity that was organized.

This factor of the community spirit is therefore a powerful attraction for those who form part of the *tariqa* but do not live in the Caliborohue community, some of whom said that they enjoyed the social contact experienced in the community: 'you feel the good vibrations... the positive vibrations between the people.'

3.3 Healing and Therapeutic Aspects

As has already been mentioned, another factor appears in the interviews as a basis for opting for these alternative paths, an element of 'therapy' or 'healing', which involves both physical and metaphysical aspects. Discourse about healing is also present among the *Naqshbandi*, in a more metaphorical expression. *Shaykh Nazim* himself referred to his house in Lefke as a 'mental house', to which people arrive seeking help for a variety of personal problems. To some degree, the Caliborohue community offers a similar space, but through work in the fields and the routine of daily and weekly prayer, including the *dhikr* on Thursdays. This could be seen by sharing spaces and conversations with people who were experiencing major conflicts in their lives and came there to spend *Ramadan* or for

personal retreats, and was mentioned openly by *Basilah*, one of the participants interviewed:

(...) I was spending my summer holiday in Villarrica, (...) deciding whether to separate from my husband, and I needed to go somewhere to think. I remembered the soap bar, and I went to the internet and looked for Sufis-Villarrica. Caliborohue appeared, so I sent a mail, and in the end I went... *Ali* said 'Yes, you can stay here' and I ended up staying without knowing what Sufis are, I just knew that they 'spin'... I went to the Sufi centre for a week (...), I thought I was going to something much more like a centre (...) much more programmed, like spiritual retreats: you get up at five for meditation... that sort of thing, much more structured. And I arrived and the first thing I asked was 'Well, what do I do, then?' and *Ali* started laughing and said, 'Well, (...) if you want to help in the fields there are sheep, there is wool to wash.' It was very funny realizing that I had come to take part in a way of life, not to a centre with programmed activities aimed to convince (...)

It is interesting that this participant said that she felt attracted by Sufism precisely because of its openness and lack of aggressive proselytizing in this case – a situation of serious vulnerability – which contrasted with her experience in a Catholic school, where she describes her experience of retreats as 'hyper-programmed sessions of prayer, prayer, prayer and talks and brain-washing; I came out like this, with my nerves on edge'. In contrast, she describes her surprise at meeting 'very religious people, who left the door open if you wanted to take part', and it is precisely to this openness that she attributes her motivation to take part spontaneously in their activities, even though at first she did not understand their forms. However she only joined the *tariqa* later, as a result of other circumstances and after having to overcome a certain resistance, as is described in other sections of this work.

3.4 The Guidance of the 'Master'

Another factor in the attraction exercised by these spiritual paths is the alternative form of living a spiritual life in terms of how it is organized. The important point here is the relationship established not with an institution, or hierarchies coordinated from an organizational viewpoint, but directly with a master. Devotion to the figure of the 'master' is central for Sufis and

Shaykh Nazim is explicitly described by his disciples as a 'living saint'. It is believed that they need to accept the teaching and guidance of someone who has gone further along the path of spiritual life – the *shaykh* or *murshid*. According to Maanán [30] "The basic meaning of the Arab word *sháyk*h is old man. It is a title of respect given to elders, especially when the speaker accepts their authority. By extension, the name is given to anyone who teaches the wisdom of Islam." It is in this context that very familiar Sufi saying has arisen: 'He who has no *shaykh*, *Shaitan* (Satan) is his *shaykh*'. Therefore, it is assumed that the disciple must follow his master implicitly, being as passive – in the sense of absolute surrender – as a corpse in the hands of the washer of the dead.

Indeed, one of the participants said that he was unsure whether he had embraced Islam, but that his decision had really been to follow *Mawlana Basilah* corroborated this:

(...) but I realized that I had not joined for Islam, I joined for *Mawlana*, for a master, an old man who affects you, even physically, when you see him, and I decided to follow him, as I suppose people do when they follow gurus. Someone who is there for me when I am frightened and need help. The figure that I had never found... in Christianity it was like the figure of Christ, but for me Christ was the son of God, a very distant figure, and I never felt comfortable with a priest or a pope, and there were priests going in and out of my house all day long... so *Mawlana* became this familiar figure, and to go and see someone who is a living saint (...) you could go into his house and stay there, you could talk to him, it was very strange.

This was consistent, in general terms, with what the researcher shared whenever he spent time with the different members of the *tariqa*, and was amply corroborated during the visit of *Shaykh Hisham*, when it was possible to compare their discourses and attitudes with those of the *tariqa* from Santiago and the surrounding area. The references to *Mawlana*, his instructions, reflections and influence, were a recurrent theme always present when different matters were being discussed, from everyday affairs to the most ritual, spiritual matters. Given the fundamental role of the master – expressed in all the different varieties of Sufism – in the possibilities offered to believers for growth and

release, it may be said that the charisma of *Shaykh Nazim* is, without doubt, the most important factor in the decision to join the *Naqshbandi Haqqani tariqa* in the cases observed.

3.5 Perceptions of the Surrounding Medium and Contrasts with It

An important point of this study was the perception of the participants of possible discriminatory situations resulting from their being embedded in a mainly Christian medium. In this respect there have been no accounts of important cases of discrimination by the surrounding medium (except as described in the case of the protests against the activities of *Shaykh Hisham*, associated principally with foreigners).

However, Sufi participants mention moments of friction and critical comments from others triggered by certain changes in their habits such as the prohibition of alcohol and other addictive substances, which seem to alter socializing patterns assumed as normal by members of Chilean society, whose own assumptions are inflexible:

Basilah: (...) well if friends come to the house - two came south, they came all the way to see me, and of course here *Taqiyy* told them, well here we don't drink...they don't smoke anyway, but really it was like 'Hey, let's have a glass of wine'. But no, in this house, no... So they both looked at me with an expression on their faces...

Taqiyy: It is not only that, but it is the veiled comments, it may be something very simple, but you don't forget it: 'Ah! Well you *have* changed!' which really means: 'What's the matter with you?'

The question about the perception of discrimination by outsiders against their religious and spiritual choices was perceived as directed to explicit manifestations and conspicuous elements in their lifestyle, such as dressing according to the *sunna* or Islamic tradition, keeping their heads covered and, in the case of the men, wearing long beards. Here a diversity of opinions emerged; for some people it was not a problem, and in general terms it was not a subject much mentioned in conversation – nor heard by the researcher in shared spaces outside the community. Indeed, *Hassan* commented that in the local context they were

sometimes treated as special because it was thought that they might be tourists.⁶ However, in other cases *sunna* aspects were mentioned as a source of mild conflict or discrimination by others.

Thus *Hassan* talked about the subject from the point of view of impressions shared by the community, with respect to the stereotypes associated with the Muslim population and Islamic terrorism, something which has remained a potent backdrop for the members of the *tariqa* with whom the researcher had contact:

(...) something that happened a lot and may still happen is that you are walking along, and because the figure of *Osama bin Laden* was engraved on the minds of everyone in the world that day, if you wear a head-covering and a beard you are *Osama bin Laden*, (...) it appeals to people's humour, like 'Hey, Osama!' You see? And at first you turned round, like this (...) as if to say, I'm not angry, don't worry... but then you didn't bother any more. You know, I just don't hear it now... in other words, it is so normal that if I go past a building site or something, and someone shouts something, I don't even notice.

Again, *sunna* dress seems to be a double-edged weapon in the eyes of the Sufis themselves, since on the one hand it is assumed as a protection factor, but on the other it generates distancing because of the 'exoticizing' effect on subjects who are regular Chileans, but who in the first instance are not treated as such. As *Hassan* says: "(...) *sunna* dress, you know, the beard, the trousers and so on, gives you a totally foreign, exotic appearance. So people treat you differently, they don't treat you like a Chilean, they treat you with a lot of respect and this also creates a distancing effect." This, in the participant's opinion, would be much more marked in the local context because of its small scale; he says that in Santiago his appearance does not cause surprise.

Likewise, the participant explains why *sunna* dress is used and other *sunna* precepts are

followed, recognizing that "any Chilean could say to me 'Hey, what's the idea, why do you dress up? You are Chilean, the religion and the spirituality is OK (...) but why this get-up?' And it is because we think it gives us some protection, you see?" He explains that protection here should be understood in a broad sense, in terms of energy and towards negative external influences. It must be remembered that the *Naqshbandi* Sufis believe in the parallel existence of angels but also of *jinn*,⁷ against whom a series of protective measures are deployed, such as calligraphic seals on the doors and windows of houses and the use of neck amulets as "protections".⁸

In the more specifically local ambit, on the researcher's many trips to the rural sector where the group is settled, when he gave a lift to local farmers and members of the neighbouring Mapuche communities, he found that they had accepted the presence of their Muslim neighbours as natural, and knew their names and what they do. An important part of this familiarity comes from their participation in the Neighbourhood Association and in joint projects for general improvements in the area. Nevertheless, as *Hassan* says, the relationship with the community has taken time to build and they had to overcome initial resistance, tension motivated by curiosity and also in large measure by the speculations which arose, with the resulting risk of generating imagined "monsters". To illustrate the point, he explained that his neighbours thought at first that they had heavy weapons "not a shotgun, but machine guns, tanks, armoured cars, and it is funny in such a rural context".

The Sufi community addressed this situation through a conscious effort, by getting to know the local people and carefully gauged visits so as not to force relations, but allow them to develop naturally "having a cup of mate [herbal infusion often drunk socially N.T.], you know? a sopaipilla [fried pastry N.T.], something simple, chatting... and basically they understand who you are and they say, Yes, he's a Chilean, not a Pakistani actor talking like a Chilean". *Hassan* says that

⁶ It is interesting to note, once again, that at least one of them commented on the surprised and somewhat hostile attitude of some young Israeli backpackers in the nearby town of Pucón towards them (frequent destination for youngsters who have finished their military service in Israel). 'Global' issues appear to spill over into 'local' contexts, creating this new situation which some authors describe as "glocal". The frontiers of the local, everyday context prove to be porous with respect to what is happening in other parts of the world, due to the high levels of exchanges of people and information.

⁷ *Jinn* are defined as beings created of fire without smoke, an intermediate state between men and angels, but created as a race before men. They may or may not be Muslims, and in the latter case they are considered to be demons [37].

⁸ *Ta'wiz*, or Sufi amulets are simple collars to which a prayer from the Koran, or a *Naqshbandi* calligraphic seal, is attached, folded and placed in a triangular cartridge of leather or a similar material. They are used almost permanently as a protective talisman.

over time they have been able to build friendly relations and create trust with neighbours, whom they now consider to be part of their social support network. A crucial point in this process was the leadership of the founder of the Sufi community in this sector, who also acted as representative and direct contact of the group while he lived there:

(...) *Ali*, he has more..., he has this job, more day to day, because this is the second time he has been president of the Neighbourhood Association, so he is right up to date with the work that is being done, all the improvements, all the projects and this has created a lot of trust, it has opened the way to real confidence (...) His work is more involved in the fields, he does a lot of half-and-half work; he goes to a small-scale farmer and says, 'Hey, I'll put up the seed and the land'... or, 'I'll do the ploughing and you do such-and-such', and he relates to the neighbours that way and it is very positive (...) they come and do certain jobs at certain harvest times, well there is movement in both winter and summer, and I think that this has made us fit in better, more than just loud talk or pretty speeches.

Hassan also reflects on the good relations with the nearby Mapuche community, attributing part of this to the 'tribal origin of Islam, a tribal way of focusing communities', which would explain their greater ability to understand certain forms of organization and certain priorities, such as the central importance of the extended family. He likewise believes that their respect for the leader of the community derives from recognition of a way of handling power which is more familiar and comprehensible, presented in the same language.

At the same time, the Sufi community has never displayed an attitude or concrete actions of avoiding contact with the surrounding world, in 'sectarian' style. The mere fact that this study was possible demonstrates this, with considerably high levels of intrusion by the researcher, who was able to witness the openness of their spaces, meetings and exchange of ideas. It is therefore highly likely that, in the face of the same attitude of openness and connection with the surrounding medium in much of its activities, suspicion or explicit hostility by others would diminish rapidly or never arise at all.

Another important dimension of this axis is that of the reactions of the original families and close friends of the participants in the face of the decision to follow a different spiritual path to theirs. The Sufi members had various stories to tell in this respect, relating to strong prejudices against Islam, and they had to deal with quite a number of adverse reactions. One of them reported that for his family it was 'a shock', particularly because the period when he joined the *tariqa* was very close to the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. He describes how the media bombardment on the subject, lasting practically a year and highlighting the figure of *Osama bin Laden* and the coordination between the terrorist cells, had a powerful effect on his environment:

(...) my family were, well... they were horrified, horrified. Well, they tried to convince me, quite subtly, to talk, to see what it was all about, what was the matter with me. I think they accepted it more because of time than because of my word (...) It was me against CNN, against, gosh... everything, press correspondents, very shocking images, you can't compete, (...) And I understand them, and why they were not convinced by my words, so it was time, and I didn't lose a limb, nothing, so here I am unharmed. And of course they began to see that it really is the religion of peace, right? And they began to see the contradictions and... but we are talking about a long time, years.

In this situation, *Hassan* tells how he had to 'behave' and prove to his family that he was not on a negative path 'it was very important for me to do this work, and to prove (...) not to do suspicious things, like go away, I don't know, to Saudi Arabia, go and see the Islamic world, or disappear.' However, when he decided to go to Villarrica and leave university, it excited suspicions in his family, which were aggravated when his brother visited him and decided to become a Sufi also. What his father saw as an expansion of the corruption later changed, when he visited his son, saw the place and decided to take *bay'at*⁹ although without becoming an assiduous practiser; after this occurred, *Hassan* felt that his new path had been approved.

Basilah also mentions this subject, describing the initial resistance of her family to the mere fact of

⁹ *Bay'at* is the Arabic word for 'affiliation' or 'loyalty', in this case to a master and the life which he represents.

approaching the Sufi community, saying 'they were a bit afraid of these "terrorists", they didn't think it was funny that I was going off to see some Muslims' and they only accepted her going if she went with a cousin. Indeed, she explains that her father still, in some discussions, has the view that many Muslim groups are 'terrorists'. He accepts that he cannot generalize, but he has mixed feelings about them 'like ninety percent of the world. But now that he sees his daughter married to one it makes him a bit more... nervous, shall we say'. Added to this she referred to all the associations with *jihad*, and the varying interpretations of the Prophet's adherence to arms in certain circumstances. Her husband *Taqiyy*, who was already a member of the *tariqa* when they met, says that his family also expressed doubts to begin with, but with time they have accepted it because 'now they see the other side, the good side; they see the family, they see that we are happy, and they no longer question it'.

However it is interesting that the informant also includes her own resistance in the process of joining the *tariqa*, and how she, as the wife of a Muslim Sufi, displayed prejudiced and negative attitudes and behaviour towards this path, despite the fact that she had had an initial connection with it at a difficult moment in her life:

(...) after that my relationship with the Sufis suffered a gigantic change (...) I started to put up tremendous resistance. I started to get hyped up... I knew that *Taqiyy* was a Sufi, and I was very frightened that he wanted to be with me and thought that I would end up converting to Sufism, and I said things like 'Understand that I will never become a Sufi! Never, never, never! I'm never going to wear a head-covering, never in my life!' Then on Thursdays he wanted to go to the *dhikr*, and of course I said 'Go by yourself', but on the other hand I didn't like to stay home alone, so I went with him, but I was furious inside, thinking What is it all about? and that it was nothing to do with me... well I fought it for about a year and a half, making things very difficult for *Taqiyy* too (...).

This participant went more deeply into the question of her resistance, connecting it to a more general feeling in Chilean society which she says is widely shared, largely because the Muslim world is so far away; it is a little known religion, which people have heard about mainly

through the news, which concentrate mainly on the violent expressions of some Muslim groups. She says 'I think if you ask 90% of Chileans who are Catholic or Christian, or at least agnostic but closer to the Catholic church because that is what they know, about a Muslim... they will say *bin Laden!*'. This is how she expresses her doubts about her 'inner conflict' over some elements of Islam, which are hard to understand or accept because of her general socio-cultural background, and more specifically her Catholic family circle.

In the same line of argument, she explains that her parents do not know about her level of commitment to Sufism and Islam, only some of her brothers and sisters. However, in terms of resistance, she says that, much more than her family, 'in the end it was me who was so, so, so critical. And I still have so many prejudices about so many things; I have a voice inside me telling me about all the things that could be criticized (...)'.

Finally, she explains that only when she has overcome her own questioning and resistance, she will be able to openly tell her parents about her conversion and deal properly with any questions or argument which might arise as a result, stressing that "When I am ready I suppose that I will be able to, like, go out into the world as a Sufi, with a head-scarf and everything, but not yet".

3.6 Cognitive Changes

This area of the analysis was, without doubt, the most complex to treat, for various reasons. Part of this complication was due to the researcher's limitations in explaining adequately what the object of the question was, as well as the tone of technical jargon imposed by the concept 'cognitive'. As a result, rather than talking about certain concrete processes, the answers remained at a more general level, as the sort of knowledge employed to make sense of the world and major modalities of human experience [38]. The answers combined some oriented towards new 'contents' in the subjects' thinking, with others related to new forms of categorizing priorities in life.

In this context, it is interesting to note that the Sufis place more stress on changes in the priorities given to their needs, although they also reflect on other aspects. One of them explained how people arrive with certain beliefs, implying that 'while there is a process of new beliefs, there is also one of "disbelief", you abandon certain patterns and this is a radical change of focus',

noting changes in the perception of the surrounding world. On the latter, he commented that 'before long, your world turns upside-down'. In this particular case, he refers to these changes through the example of how he ceased to take direct part in discussions about society and topical events – politics, education, health – explaining that he can still express an opinion, but he is no longer very interested, since he considers that there are other, more important things to think about, which come down to his 'very personal world'.

He goes more deeply into this subject, talking about changes on a 'scale of abandonment of reality and connection', in which there is progressively less concentration on the outside world, which is seen rather as 'scenography'. However, he explains that although this spiritual path has a radical element, it is not a question of abandoning the world, and this is consistent with what other members of the *tariqa* say, when they state that one should live 'in' the *dunya* but not 'pertain to' the *dunya* and its regular patterns.

The other important aspect in common between the accounts of Sufi participants was what has been described as 'the expression of resistance to their own rationale', understood in broad terms and focused on processes of analysis and critical questioning. This is indeed a phenomenon described and analysed by Weber [39] when referring to Christianity and Islam and their opposition to intellectual pride, and the importance of plain faith in its early years and mystic variants. In other words, what could be identified in the accounts of members of the *tariqa* was a central statement – with the consequent attitudes and behaviour – on how they live their spirituality, referring to their direct, 'non-rationalized' experience. This would indeed imply keeping questioning to a minimum, concentrating on following *Shaykh Nazim's* instructions and trying to forge a profound connection with the ritual acts, particularly the *dhikr*.

Thus the participants' testimonies converge in this aspect, describing the decision to follow *Mawlana* as 'a decision of the heart, without much logical or scientific basis, I couldn't even explain it to you'. Another participant talks of his decision to follow *Shaykh Nazim* as a process which is 'basically not taken by the intelligence... it is emotional. When you say "this human being has such and such qualities (...)" so he is worthy of being followed", no, it is something completely

different'. However, it is not easy to reach this state and other members of the *tariqa* express their difficulties in this respect openly:

Look, I don't know. I had to go to Cyprus and meet *Mawlana*, look into his eyes and end up taking *bay'at*; but it has happened to me (...) I have forced myself to ignore this issue completely, because if I start to think about it, I suffer crises, major crises, with Islam and all that (...) without giving my head a look-in, because I don't want to give my head an opportunity, I have been assimilating the figure of the Prophet.

In this testimony, not 'giving my head a look-in' on Sufi practices or matters of faith in general means more than simply following instructions automatically; such a reading would imply a gross simplification of the phenomenon observed. Based on the researcher's shared experiences and participant observation on numerous occasions in rituals, conversations and discussions, it can be said that what is really meant is a conscious effort to eliminate previous categories of analysis, which were subject to different priorities. From their perspective, as occurs in the apprentice stage of any new discipline, the situation involves a feeling of trust in a person who is recognized to possess greater wisdom, whose strategies, even if not immediately comprehensible, will be effective in the long term, and it would be inappropriate for the layman to question them or to set his own.

Finally, it should be stressed that, starting from a basic act of faith – as occurs in many other religions in which the novice places basic trust in officially 'anointed' subjects, sacred objects, rituals, specific actions, etc. – the suspension of questioning and access to spiritual knowledge through direct experience and the guidance of a master, rather than analytic processes, form a cornerstone of Muslim mysticism. For this reason, the accounts and testimonies presented here must be understood with that context in mind in order to try to comprehend the real dimensions of the phenomenon.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on all of the above mentioned, it is possible to highlight a number of points and synthesize some central ideas which can be drawn out of the general orientation of the study, and the specific accounts analyzed. The general

scenario which serves as the context for the study is that of a society which, as Parker [40] says, is home to new social movements inspired in heterogeneous ideologies. These ideologies accept, live with or feed on spiritualities which may be ecological, anti-consumerist, or anti-globalization, without necessarily becoming confessional or neo-confessional movements. The most vital feature however is that they develop in a new scenario marked by interculturality. This, says the author, can be understood in the light of various historical-cultural processes, including increased migration, movements which are ethnic or based on 'alternative' social agendas, and growing religious pluralism.

The new religions and spiritual movements on offer in Chile, therefore, are part of this increase in accessibility, facilitated further by rapid changes in the technology which supports the formation of social networks, which entail the exchange of specific information on alternative forms of spirituality. In this case, we do not see the influence of active, conscious proselytizing by the *Naqshbandi* Sufis, unlike the behaviour of certain Christian denominations which visit people's homes (Jehovah's witnesses, Church of the Latter Day Saints), open preaching in public spaces (evangelical preachers), approach to passers-by to sell specialist literature (*Krishna* Consciousness) or emphasis on the missionary work of the institution/organization (Misión País, Misión Familia, and other missionary initiatives by the Apostolic Roman Catholic Church of Chile).

This fact may result from a number of factors, such as the minority position of the Sufis, meaning that they do not have access to resources to establish more 'aggressive' actions. Likewise, it cannot be discounted that this receptive approach may be part of an explicit ideology, in particular of those spiritual paths which stress the importance of the link between disciples and masters, in which the former must play an active, conscious role in the process of their spiritual illumination, and are expected to overcome obstacles and tests on the way. In this sense, as Maanán [30] asserts, Sufism is proposed essentially as something intimate and personal, despite the fact that there is a consciousness that it exercises an extraordinary influence on its surroundings, impregnating the history and everyday practice of Islam much more profoundly and extensively than is generally believed.

A change in way of life, which also figures among the motivating factors for subjects, is particularly evident in the case of Islam, at a general level. In terms of the background, it may be said that Islam defines itself as a religion which seeks directly and explicitly to intervene in all planes of the subject's life, turning certain elements of the 'private' dimension of its secular organization into a vital, public aspect, excluded from confined spaces. Evidence of this may be experienced in cities of the Muslim world, where daily routine comes to a halt every time the *muezzin* makes the call to prayer (*adhan*). In some senses, the reason for the existence of Islam seems to be to take people out of the tendency to routine and worldly inertia, to remind them that there is something else beyond this existence, and above all that there is something – or rather someone – more powerful, on whom, in the final analysis, everything depends. And this is achieved through more patent guidance in the duties related with this spiritual dimension, stressing and fostering the state of surrender and submission which is at the root of its name.

In this way it can be seen that Islam – and of course its Sufi branch – does indeed present itself as a religion which is not limited to a certain day of the week, or a specific ceremony, or to the control or influence of institutionally invested subjects (although with the figure of the 'master' and his central role, Sufism contravenes this principle up to a certain point). According to Maanán [30], in the classic organization of a group of disciples, or *murids*, around a *shaykh*, the former are not only interested in achieving high levels of spirituality, "but also make up organized, supportive groups which spread his teachings and take an active part in community life"(9). Thus the author declares that the prestige of a master and his disciples may become a determining factor in the stability or change of a society, and in addition that Sufis may make intellectual and artistic contributions which bring a more global dimension to the development of the Muslim world.

Therefore, Islam and its various Sufi *tariqat* stand as an all-encompassing project – i.e. one which influences many aspects of subjects' lives, from the most abstract to the most concrete and mundane planes – with a constant, intimate relation with God through the figure of the Prophet, and above all through the master of each *tariqa*.

When we explore aspects related to discrimination and prejudices, particular

importance is attached to the effect and influence of events associated with 'Muslim terrorism' and the coverage which these receive in the mass media. The weight of the stereotypes which have been constructed and are repeatedly presented to the general public is blended with more objective elements which form part of a different religious-cultural position to that which prevails in Chile. The result of this combination structures a large part of the background against which the Muslim option is objected by the participants' immediate and wider social circles, and against which subjects must struggle with a sort of 'price to pay' for their choice, ranging from mere 'surprise' to explicit rejection.

Regarding the area of cognitive change, despite the difficulties implied in its exploration, the most relevant change mentioned by participants was in the priorities in how they organized their lives, linked again with the all-encompassing nature of the new life plans generated. Thus, as compared to other perspectives within Islam, according to Schimmel [32], the final objective of the Sufis is not intellectual knowledge but existential experience, or as Küng [36] asserts, not a rational doctrine, but a practical guidance of the soul. Moreover, it must be stressed that similar to what happens in Schenerock's [9] study, we cannot put in a hierarchy the motives to become a *Sufi* or the importance of the conceptual categories highlighted in this research. Existential aspects, external elements and other contextual ones combine and overlap in complex ways that are very difficult to address in an isolated way, for the sake of scientificism.

Finally, greater comprehension of religious phenomena of 'Oriental' inspiration – and especially in the Araucanía Region – might open new perspectives for the analysis of other associated phenomena, such as 'esoteric tourism' and its economic implications for certain areas, or the possibilities of association between certain religious groups and particular ideological movements with shared views (e.g. ecological movements of various kinds). Thus, beyond a legitimate interest in obtaining a better understanding of the religious situation in Chile, it is also important to take into account the intensification and expansion of contacts between our continent and country, and Asian nations. This brings with it a requirement for deeper understanding of the cultures involved and, due to the importance which they have in

human societies in general, the religious and cultural traditions pervading those groups, albeit in different degrees. This is assumed to be the best way to create deep, harmonious, trusting relationships, oriented by a concrete intercultural project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile through its Vicerrectoría de Investigación (VRI) [CIEA/Nº1/2009]. The study was developed as one of the initiatives of the Centre for Asian Studies of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (Centro de Estudios Asiáticos UC), between 2010-2011.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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