

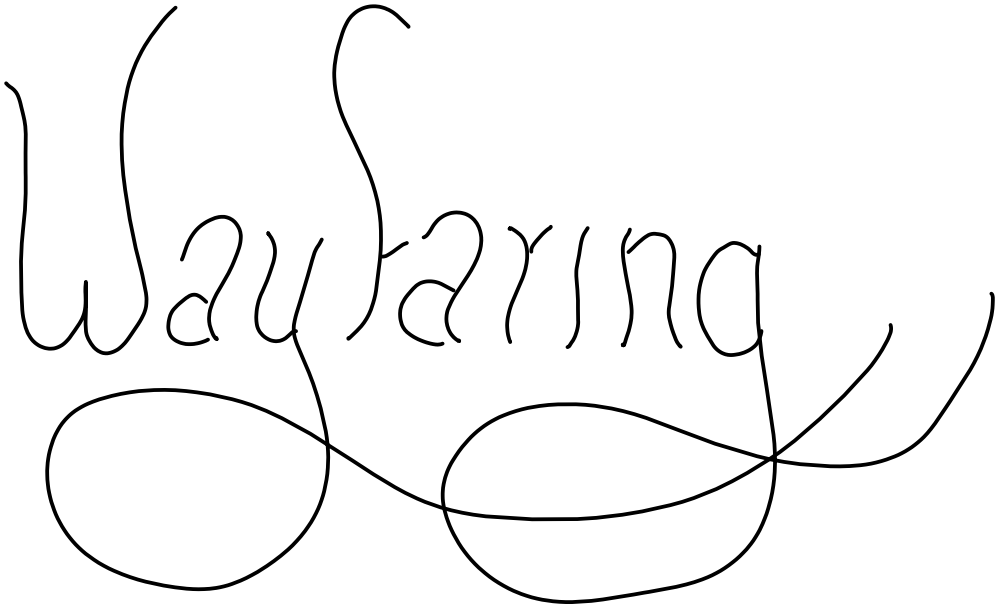
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Way faring a Muslim journey of becoming

Hoosen, Leyya

2019
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A Muslim Journey of Becoming

Leyya Hoosen

University of the Witwatersrand

Dr. Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon

838140

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This paper has been bound in the fabric of my musallah (prayer mat) and contains a thesis from which my year of fieldwork has taught me that for the Sufi, the religious and spiritual does not reside in physical spaces or institutions, but within yourself and where you lay your musallah. Considering themselves spiritual travellers in this life, they are oriented towards mobility, connections, development of the self and ensoulment.

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Acknowledgements

To all my teachers, in your varied roles in my life, thank you for being here.

To the Mellon Mays, Social Sciences Research Council, and AfroAsia communities, thank you for the shared meals, conversations, and inspiration. I never leave your company unchanged.

Matthew, you have pushed me to find my voice and there are no words with which to thank you for this.

Azghar, for the steps we have walked, and the steps we are yet to walk.

Asma, your laughter rings through the lives you touch.

Nana, we walked this journey together, and as always, you provide me the gentle strength I need at critical points. Dada and Simine, you are missed in body, but ever-present in spirit. *As-salaamu 'alaykum*.

Papa, your bravery to create your own path has enabled me to seek my own.

Mum, here is our paper.

Prologue: A Beckoning

As-salaamu ʻalaykum (peace be upon you)

> *The focus of this project seeks to understand the ways in which dhikr (meditation) practices and pedagogy in a Sufi community in Johannesburg, South Africa, lead to spiritual development and transformation. Within the Sufi community, the conceptual and lived framework of wayfaring is a key theme. I have engaged this framework through the dhikr (meditative) practices of a Sufi youth group based in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. The activities of the group revolve around dhikr, practices of 'remembering', that are acts of past, present, and future-making, involved in spiritual transformation. Drawing on experiences from the year I spent (in 2018) attending the dhikrs, I focus on wayfaring as a constant state of dhikr, and a means through which Muslims are reshaping and negotiating notions of personhood and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa.*

Much has been written by and about the Sufi community globally. Sufism, the mystical sect of Islam, has long been surrounded by contention, because of its more mystical and spiritual interpretations. Werbner and Basu frame Sufism as a "living, embodied, postcolonial reality"[1]. They emphasise the advantages in research centred on Sufism, specifically research focused on "Sufi cosmologies, ethical ideas, bodily ritual practices, and organisational forms, which have been lost in earlier historical

[1] Pnina Werbner, and H. Basu. "Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality, and Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults", (Psychology Press: 1998), 3.

and anthropological studies."[2] However, while emphasising the need for research to be done in this field, they also refer to Sufi communities as "focused regional cults"[3]. Their definition of the Sufi communities being framed as cultish raises problematic connotations. This research paper has sought to engage with the Sufi community it is based on in a way that resonates with the way in which Sufis self-identify. Hence, the framework of wayfaring is prominent throughout the paper as both lived experience and conceptual framework. In South Africa particularly, research into the Sufi community has only recently begun with a handful of scholars[4], many of whom are still engaged in the research process, leaving a tangible gap in the academic literature.

Sufis have engaged in knowledge practices centred on concepts of wayfaring for just over fourteen centuries[5]. Equipped with an understanding that there are no separate domains of sacred and secular in Islam[6], that everything occupies the realm of the sacred, Sufis learn to practice mindfulness and awareness of this sacredness at all times. Consequently, there is a large emphasis placed on the role of the teacher who must not only pass on the knowledge they possess, but they must ensure that those

[2] Werbner and Basu, "Embodying Charisma", 4.
[3] Ibid., 3.
[4] I have learnt of these research projects through discussions with Asma, the teacher of the group, who mentioned that there has recently been an increase in academic interest in the group. Particularly manifesting in two or three PhD projects centred around the Shaykh of the group. These are all in the process of being written, are unpublished, and I have not had access to them.
[5] Kabir Helminski, "The Knowing Heart: A Sufi Path of Transformation", (Shambhala Publications, 2000).

[6] Farid Esack, "On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today", (Oneworld Publications, 2013).

that they are passing it on to are *living that knowledge*[7]. In this way, people become the knowledge that they learn, and by actualising through seeking more knowledge, they are understood to become more human[8].

In speaking to Asma, the teacher of the group that I was a part of over the course of the year, she explained that "consciousness is a line that extends, most of which is within time and space. Few people know that [you can] pierce through and get to the end of the spectrum. What we're doing is going on that other side, although probably just standing on the other side of that door, if even that."

This emphasis the unity of all and the transcendental experience, stitches Sufi knowledge practices together in such a way that many dichotomies of mind/body, subjective/objective, inner/outer, are reconfigured[9]. Through being in the presence of a more actualised human being and receiving guidance from such a teacher (who can be of any age or gender, provided they have the required knowledge and have been granted permission to teach from a Shaykh, or master), one learns how to navigate these apparent dichotomies and come to appreciate the unity and sacredness of all[10]. Thus, the teacher comes to symbolise both guide and north star.

[7] Zachary Valentine Wright, "Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse", (Brill, 2015).

[8] Wright, "Living Knowledge".
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

I am particularly interested in this conception of journeying, of *wayfaring*, that Sufis see as the means towards actualisation. Since knowledge is seen to be not merely embodied by humans, but as *being* human[11], the teacher/student relationship becomes an interesting site of living knowledge[12] production. Thus, the very immersion of oneself in the presence of a learned person is thought to be an important aspect of learning because if the learned person *is* the knowledge that they learn, then through building a relationship with such a person, a process of knowledge production is initiated and sustained.

I consider how, through a regimen of learning to discipline and transcend one's body, striving to manifest praised attributes in one's habits, and understanding and – ultimately – surrendering one's consciousness to Thee Consciousness (God), while maintaining an intensely active and playful presence in the world and one's personal affairs, the Sufi learns the skills of wayfaring in this life.

There is a belief that God taught Adam the names of all things. Sufi thought, as Asma explains, says that "what God taught Adam was all the attributes [of God], which are all the strands of Allah, the names. So, in everybody's soul is encoded the knowledge… When I listen to Shaykh [her spiritual master], it's always things that I knew deep in my heart, and somebody is just saying it and confirming it… That feeling can only happen if the knowledge was already there, but you didn't know

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

you had the knowledge… We do have all the answers we seek. They used to say that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a walking Qur'an, but what does that mean? It means he was the example of what all of us have. So, we all have the answers within our heart, accessing it is the other story. The heart is the encaser of the soul."

In this conversation, Asma highlights the importance of a spiritual guide or master in the journey of awakening to spiritual knowledge. Secondly, she emphasised what Asad[13] mentions fleetingly, and which I seek to develop in this paper – the concept of ensoulment. When discussing spiritual knowledge, which is inherently concerned with the transcendental, a framework is needed within which to work. While embodiment is useful as it does away with the dichotomies of mind/body and subjective/objective, it is still limited to earthly experiences that are filtered through the body and does not account for the transcendental. Ensouled knowledge, however, allows for an encompassing of the transcendental in the range of human experience and reality.

In order to engage these themes around wayfaring, I have spent a year (2018) attending the dhikrs and social gatherings of a Sufi youth group establishing itself in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. My own positionality in the group, as both researcher and participant, has led me to adopt a meshwork methodology toward engaging this project. My fieldwork was guided with the intent toward 'immersion'

[13] Talal Asad, "Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity", (Stanford University Press, 2003).

– an approach that Selim draws from Kersenboom that refers to as 'participant participation'[14], which emphasises practice. During the year of fieldwork, I adopted the practices of dhikr and wayfaring into my lived experience. Additionally, I conducted life-histories of three practitioners, with numerous unstructured and semi-structured interviews with Asma, the teacher of the group, who clarified and helped me further understand themes I noticed as they emerged in my experiences. Within the written process and subsequent paper, I have incorporated relevant Sufi publications and poetic autoethnographic narratives which guided the discussion of themes found in the paper.

The paper itself is written as a meditation, a process of unfolding and journeying. This has been done to allow a deeper engagement with the Sufi concept of wayfaring, because the structure of the paper and its contents jointly explore notions of travel, dislocation, and the processual. Composed of seven chapters, each beginning with 'departures' rather than introductions, and ending with 'crossings' rather than conclusions. This framing indicates both acts of travel and journeying, as well as academic and thematic points of departures and crossings. There are seven 'rest' (poetic autoethnographic) sections, the paper emphasises the inter-connected nature of the lived experiences, content, and framing structure that engages wayfaring in Sufi thought and practice. The circular character of departures, chapters (journeys), crossings (bridges between chapters), rests, and departures again is resonant of the notion of the constant travelling and journeying (of the inner

[14] Nasima Selim, "Doing Body, Doing Mind, Doing Self", (Lap Lambert Academic Publications, 2001).

self and person) that is associated with wayfaring. The seven chapters and rests, the seven circulations, have been chosen to reflect the seven *maqams*, or spiritual stations[15], that a Sufi can travel through in this life.

The first chapter outlines the creative approach towards the written product of the year-long research project and how this paper is an experiment in new anthropological forms of writing the transcendental. The second chapter discusses the setting, members of the group, and methodological orientations. Chapter three provides a brief contextualisation of Islam and Sufism in Johannesburg, as well as a conceptual framing of key terms such as dhikr and wayfaring. The fourth chapter considers approaches towards transnationalism and the potential that wayfaring can add to these discussions. Chapter five explores the state and sociality of being both attached and detaching, and how friendships are made amongst travellers. Lastly, chapters six and seven consider how the Sufi pedagogy of spiritual wayfaring creates a dynamic learning-environment wherein the body, and the spaces it occupies, shapes and is shaped by the interpretation of texts, which ultimately provide an understanding towards knowledge that is ensouled. I will discuss how this approach towards the textual and the body in pedagogy is resonant with critical approaches towards pedagogy.

[15] Fadhlalla Haeri, "The Four Journeys", (Zahra Publications, 2014).

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim…

(In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate)

Chapter One

The Wayfarer

(Creative Approaches to Anthropology and Form)

Departures

When I first sat down to write this meditation, I struggled for months on how to begin, where to begin, and how to capture and translate the experiences I had had during my year within the Sufi community. Throughout my journey I've learnt many things. I still fall into the trappings of seeing the world as black and white, avoiding the grey areas. As I saw it, I faced two problems:

1) I didn't know how to reconcile in one paper what I saw as the two worlds of academia and Sufism.
2) Having initially adopted the practices of wayfaring into my own life as a part of the research approach, they had become a part of my life, along with the friends made in the dhikrs. I felt loyal towards them and didn't want to offer up to the secular academy what I saw as an autopsy of these spiritual experiences.

Reading over Okri's "A way of being free", I landed upon two things: inspiration for a way in to my writing; and the third problem I was facing. The former came through a reflection on the structure of his volume. Okri's piece has one long essay, broken into three parts, that are interspersed among the other essays in the volume. The long essay, centred on storytelling, ties the volume together and keeps the reader reflecting upon it even when reading the other essays. He guides the reader towards what to look out for and where to place their attention to achieve a particular experience of his volume. My thoughts immediately turned to the guided meditations I had been attending and how I could convey the very experience and form of them through the structure of my paper. It was through this initial inspiration from Okri that I landed on compiling my paper as a meditation itself – with the 'taking flight' dhikr experience in the poetic autoethnographic rest sections, and the 'grounding' dhikr experience in the theory-based chapters.

This idea would, as it developed over the next few months, lead to solving my first problem – I would come to realise that it wasn't about reconciling inherently different worlds, but rather putting them into productive conversation with one another. Of course, in the moment that I first identified the inspiration for what form this paper would take on, I had only rough sketches on bits of paper floating about my room. I still had to solve my third problem. Okri introduces his volume by saying that "all [he] wanted to do was to remind [himself] at all times to just sing [his] song. To sing it through all the difficulties and silences. [He] hope[s] that those

who read these essays might also enjoy mental strolling, might also want to sing their unique songs through the ambiguous times in which we breathe and dream."[16]

And here was my problem. I had no voice.

As a student of colour and a Muslim, I feel the need to represent my experiences and my religion in a favourable light. Especially since there is not much research done on the topic and from the angle I have chosen, I felt added pressure to not just explain, but defend, everything I wrote. I didn't even realise that this was motivating me until Dr. Wilhelm-Solomon, my supervisor, gently pointed it out well into the writing process – that I could share what I had experienced while with the community and still engage it critically as a scholar.

This feedback gave me pause. Once stated, it seemed the most obvious fact. Yet, I didn't know how to put aside the knowledge that I was writing about Islam as a Muslim in an Islamophobic world, and additionally, I was writing about Sufism, in a predominantly anti-Sufi and anti-Shia country[17]. Okri's approach to his volume as a song "through all the difficulties and silences"[18] resonated with me. In a sense, I adopted a refusal methodology[19], refusing to allow my paper to be made into a 'critique of'. Here was the solution to my second problem. I didn't want my paper to

[16] Ben Okri, "A Way of Being Free", (Head of Zeus, 2014), xii.
[17] There is significant tension between the Sunni and Shia populations in South Africa, and the misguided belief that to be Sufi is to be Shia (although many Sufis locally are Shia, many are also Sunni, while some do not belong to either and identify only as Muslim) brings the Sufi community into these tensions.
[18] Okri, *A Way*, xii.
[19] Eve Tuck, and K. W. Yang, "R-Words: Refusing Research", (Sage Publications, 2014).

be that of an angry academic, I had already been there and found that it maintains fortresses. And of course, fortresses are needed when entering battles, but I was not. I wanted my paper to be a meditation, a way to share and put different worlds into conversation in a productive manner. And it was at this point that I started to find my voice.

Awakening

The structure of the paper as a meditation provides a playground within which I can move between the poetic and theoretical analyses easily. The chapters serve to 'ground' the paper in substantial discussion, while the rest sections allow for an unrooting by transcending the theory and providing an aspect of the transcendental. I wrote the rest sections as a series of letters, or one-sided conversations. The sender and receiver are not always clear, some are written from me to myself, and at other times these roles are left unfilled. I am reminded of my father's words, that "the destination is the journey." The sender/receiver is not important, it is what is being conveyed between the two that is. Malcomess and Kreutzfeldt, in explaining the method behind *Not No Place*[20], say of the project that it "could easily continue. This sense of duration and a shifting relationship to the spaces of the city, as well as the changes in these spaces themselves, are evident in the book's shifting tone."[21]

[20] Bettina Malcomess, and D. Kreutzfeldt, "Not No Place: Johannesburg, Fragments of Spaces and Times", (Fanele, 2013).
[21] Malcomess and Kreutzfeldt, "Not No Place", 10.

My own project, similarly concerned with a sense of continuation, of becoming, has sought to engage the content even through the structuring of the paper. My approach toward the writing of the rest sections was fluid and dynamic. I would engage in a private dhikr before sitting down to write. Sometimes, I would write a section a day. At other times, there were periods of weeks between the writing of the sections. I allowed myself, as per Sufi thought, to awaken to the different stages and reflections when I was ready to receive the knowledge. It was frustrating, sitting in front of a blank page for days on end, always very much aware of the deadline for submission.

After a few rest sections had been written, I found that my approach even towards the writing of the chapters began to change. I began to treat the knowledge differently. I moved away from a focus towards the writing desk, and started writing in different locations, in different libraries on campus, inside and outside, alone and surrounded by others. I began speaking about my project with family and friends.

I started experimenting. I would go periods where I would work alone at my desk, focused on the task. And then I would immerse myself into the currents of life – spending more time amongst people, working while sharing spaces with the family instead of seeking solitude. Overall, I found that my moments of inspiration came when I was in those periods of immersion. The link that Sufi thought draws between

knowledge, the body, and the people and places that the body frequents became clearer to me. As I began favouring the immersive approach towards writing, I also noticed that the places and people I frequented began to change. I favoured the places and people where conversation flowed. I started meeting new people and reconnecting with old friends, learning about their journeys and sharing my own. In this way, the format of the paper reflects the format of my own experiences during this research process.

Speech

Since the focus of my research has been specifically on the meditation practices of the Sufis and the ways in which knowledge is treated in these spaces, through the conceptual and lived framework of wayfaring, I have chosen to mirror this dynamic process of becoming, of an unfolding, in the form of my paper.

I am reminded of Clifford, who says that ethnography "is actively situated *between* powerful systems of meaning."[22] Finding myself at a space in-between the Sufi and the academic, I struggled to find a way to write the fieldwork. Nyamnjoh, writing on the importance of fiction in anthropology accounts, says that in "conventional scholarly writing…, the standard expectations of what constitutes a scholarly text do little justice to the multi-layered, multivocal and multifocal dimensions of everyday

[22] James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths", 2.

negotiation and navigation of myriad identity margins."[23] He goes on to say that "as researchers and scholars, we, wittingly or not, are itinerant evangelists or salespersons for certain forms of rationality even when we preach cultural relativism."[24] For Nyamnjoh, a methodology that seeks to combine fiction and ethnography allows for a more nuanced account. Similarly, Clifford explains that "the predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant-observation, data collection, and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside – looking at, objectifying, or, somewhat closer, 'reading', a given reality."[25]

These concerns, raised in relation to anthropology and ethnography, remind me of a warning that Asma imparted to me when I approached her to gain permission for my research. She told me not to allow the "academic gaze" to prevent me from learning. The concerns raised by Clifford and Nyamnjoh are what I consider to be the "academic gaze" that Asma was referring to. In order to reconsider, to re-enter, the research process without the subjective/objective dichotomy leading my interaction, I settled on a structure of expression that would allow nuance.

In between the chapters, there are 'rest' sections. These are poetic sections that reflect on and sit in conversation with the adjoining chapters. They also serve as my personal reflections on my journeying with the group over the past year. The rest

[23] Francis Nyamnjoh, "Fiction and Reality of Mobility in Africa", 653.
[24] Nyamnjoh, "Fiction and Reality", 657.
[25] Clifford, "Introduction", 11.

sections were an organic form of reflection that I gravitated toward after spending a few months with the group. Sufi poetry is viewed as "instrumental: Sufis produce Sufi poetry in order to achieve spiritual goals… Prime goals are affective catharsis (for self), and spiritual guidance (for others)."[26] While I don't claim to be providing spiritual guidance, it is the former goal of affective catharsis that drew me in to the practice of writing about my meditative – and following lived – experiences in a poetic manner.

Sufi poetry is "a social practice"[27] that links members within a network. Thus, by incorporating the seven rest sections alongside the seven chapters, a connection is made between different schools of thought, each inviting – and being invited by – the other in a constant dialogue. An interesting tension is presented between the two: the chapters are presented in the traditionally anthropological style of writing which seeks to transmit knowledge to the reader; while the rest sections, engaging Sufi themes regarding wayfaring and knowledge production, seek to "*activate*"[28] knowledge in the reader. In this way, the themes I discuss in the paper about embodied and ensouled understandings of knowledge, are directly reflected in the very form of the paper itself. Furthermore, the dual role of poetry in the paper as both hybridising and social, acts as a bridge between communities and brings forth nuanced readings.

[26] Michael Frishkopf, "Authorship in Sufi Poetry", (Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, 2003), 91.
[27] Frishkopf, "Authorship", 91.
[28] Ibid., 97.

When writing the rest sections, I incorporated the dhikr practices that I learnt into the writing process. I would sit in a shorter, private dhikr and enter the meditative space before writing these sections. The overall form of the paper was produced from these sittings, when the unfolding theme of letters, starting and ending with "Dear Seeker", emerged. Each of the rests addresses a different state of spirituality that I drew from conversations, my own experiences, and from the Sufi literature[29] that I engaged with. There are seven rest sections and seven chapters. This is in alignment with the number of spiritual *maqams*, or states, that Sufis define the spiritual journey comprising of. In this way there's a multi-layered mirroring between the material, experiential, and textual that is produced.

It is important to note here that the role of the Sufi literature was not only to inform the rest sections but was an active part of studying in the community and I worked through the Sufi literature alongside the academic literature. However, the style of Sufi written texts is such that they require the mentorship and guidance of a teacher to decode the multiple levels of meaning in them. While I do discuss this relationship with and role of the written text in Sufi pedagogy (chapters 6 and 7), I do not go into a close reading of the texts themselves as this falls outside of the scope of this project. Studying Sufi accounts alongside academic accounts has had a powerful impact on my approach towards this project and I believe that where the reader may find a lack of engagement with sufficient Sufi or academic literature cited within the paper, it speaks more to my own inability to put these texts into

[29] Fadhlalla Haeri, "The Thoughtful Guide to Sufism", (O Books, 1990); Fadhlalla Haeri, "Beams of Illumination from the Divine Revelation", (Lulu Press, 2014); to name a couple.

conversation with one another, rather than a lack of engagement or reading around this literature.

Thus, while the structure of the paper has allowed play, the content has proved difficult. The ability to suspend what I believe, to set aside the loyalties I felt, remained a difficult undertaking and one which I think is a maturing process to explore without judgements. Although I tried to remain at a reflexive distance, this was achieved to varying degrees in the different sections of the paper. While this may not be ideal in terms of presenting a unitary, cohesive argument, it does allow (even if through my own inability to remain distant from the material) for nuance and a multiplicity of meaning and identifications. As Clifford so aptly expressed:

> "Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually – as objects, theatres, texts – it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture). The writer's 'voice' pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced."[30]

Crossings

The structure of the paper eased these concerns because it allowed me to write processually to share the process of learning/becoming as a process in itself. Shaykh

[30] Clifford, "Introduction", 12.

Kabir, speaking of Sufism, says that it is an "understanding of Islam as a spiritual training system, [it] is an expression of the *Creative Power* at the heart of life."[31] He explains that "if the human being is the most evolved carrier of the Creative Spirit… then our humanity is the degree to which this physical and spiritual vehicle, and particularly our nervous system, can reflect or manifest Spirit."[32]

This emphasis on the creative is reflected in Arabic texts that often refer to "Islamic knowledge specialisation (normally ulum) as 'artistic disciplines' (fanun)."[33] This implies that those who are engaged in learning Islamic knowledge are part of an artistic community. To be able to compose my paper as a meditation, creatively engaging the experiences and knowledge I have learnt while with the Sufi community, allows me to present a project that I hope can serve as a type of bridge between different communities.

Ghodsee outlines a number of ways to inject the narrative into ethnography. However, throughout her paper she asserts that this practice "may not work for dissertation writers"[34], affirming that "dissertations are credentialising exercises, and the best dissertation is a done dissertation."[35] She concludes, acknowledging that, "of course, some might argue that these rhetorical opportunities exist only for the

[31] Kabir Helminski, 'Living Presence (Revised): The Sufi Path to Mindfulness and the Essential Self", (Penguin, 2017), xii [own italics].
[32] Helminski, "Living Presence", 8.
[33] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 8.
[34] Kristine Ghodsee, "From Notes to Narrative: Writing Ethnographies that Everyone can Read", (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 28.
[35] Ghodsee, "From Notes", 54.

tenured elite. Junior scholars need to strut their theoretical stuff in their first articles and books. Academia possesses a guild mentality. New members gain admittance by paying due homage to the ideas and publications of their scholarly elders."[36]

Despite this attitude toward the standard style of a dissertation, echoed in my own journey by others around me (excluding a supportive department), I have chosen to embrace an experimental approach toward my research. I have been blessed by a supportive supervisor who has offered guidance throughout this process in finding and developing my own style of writing, while still maintaining scholarly rigour. Being able to do this, with the assistance of such a mentor, at this stage in my academic journey, has allowed me to develop a writing style that is authentic to my positionality and the experiences that I have had 'in the field'. Writing as a scholar of colour, being able to experiment with my approach has been doubly important for me because it has allowed me to inject myself into my research and grapple with its nuances, without having to wait for a more stable, later, stage in my academic career. Incorporating the creative and experimental into my dissertation process has taught me the importance of engaging the sensitivities around representation and power dynamics that come with being a social sciences researcher.

[36] Ibid, 57.

Rest

Dear Seeker

Every meditation begins with silence…

This meditation has begun long before we are seated side by side, long before I have welcomed you into the space, long before you even opened your eyes this morning perhaps holding the intention for our dhikr in your mind's eye. The meditation, when adopted fully, has no 'beginning' or 'ending'. Rather, it simply Is within The Eternal.

This is what dhikr, meditation and remembrance in the service of Allah, is about. A journey of acknowledging, of knowing, of being constantly aware, of the ever-present Allah in all that we do and in all that we are. Such a state cannot be attained without a sincere heart, and a humbled nafs (self). With consistent attention to disciplining one's Being (heart, nafs and body), the Eternal can be tasted in this life.

And indeed, it is with a taste of the Eternal, the One, that we find ourselves seated here. During my first dhikr, a guided meditation amongst four women, my attention was drawn to an exceptional Hunger within me. With a focus on healing, the dhikr sought to awaken us to the All-Encompassing presence of Allah, a presence that was in us and in our lives. Pain and Anger wept their control from my body.

An hour later we were encouraged to open our eyes when we were ready. Reluctant at first, I struggled to will myself to open my eyes. I did not want to leave that presence. Those around me were patient, and in time my eyes shyly made their appearance. We slowly shifted in our bodies, getting reacquainted with them, and then made our way downstairs to the dining room. Tea, and our reflections upon the session, were served.

It has not been, nor will it be, easy. One cannot enter the inferno of Knowing, without expecting to not only be burned, but to be utterly dissolved and remade. But I urge you, fellow Seeker, to stride heart-first into the flames and be stripped bare. What lies beyond, I assure you, is the sweetest soil for our souls to take root in.

I invite you to join me, each on their own journey, but united in our striving along the Path.

Chapter Two

Mapping

(Orientations)

"Your sickness is from you, but you do not perceive it and your remedy is within you, but you do not sense it. You presume you are a small entity, but within you is enfolded the entire Universe. You are indeed the evident book, by whose alphabet's the hidden becomes manifest. Therefore, you have no need to look beyond yourself. What you seek is within you, if only you reflect." – Imam Ali (A.S.)

Departures

The focus of my study is on a Sufi group that gathers at the home of its teacher, in a Northern suburb of Johannesburg. Many Sufi gatherings happen at each other's homes because hospitality and courteous intimacy are considered an important aspect of knowledge production; and they do not actively claim public spaces as Sufism is not widely accepted in South Africa and doing so would invite unnecessary tension. The area is significant because suburban areas are not usually associated with Islam in anthropological engagements with religion in

Johannesburg. Typically, Islam in Johannesburg is associated with the Fordsburg area[37].

I have chosen to focus my inquiry on this group mainly because it represents a space where the project of Muslim youth identity re-formation is being actively cultivated. During a time where stereotypes regarding Muslims are rife, this group engaging in dhikr, in practices of 'remembering', are tapping into a transnational[38] Muslim identity and are actively engaging what it means to be Muslim and a minority in South Africa. The group, comprised mostly of women and youth, are taught by Asma. Asma is the type of person whose company you leave feeling lighter and at ease. A quick wit, strong *oudh* (perfume), and open arms welcome you into her presence. Having built herself in a successful corporate career, she found herself "falling into the corporate trap". She consequently left her job to start her own business and bring a balance into her life through following the Sufi path. After studying for many years with her Shaykh (master), she began the Sufi youth group which will be the focus of this research project and which is based at Asma's home. The diversity in age, ethnicity, and gender are notable because such diversity is not typical of most formal Islamic institutions in South Africa[39].

[37] Zaheera Jinnah, and P. Rugunanan. "Remaking Religion, Rethinking Space: How South Asian and Somali Migrants Are Transforming Ethnically Bound Notions of Hinduism and Islam in Mayfair and Fordsburg", (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[38] Nasima Selim, "Healing the City: Sufi Prayers in Berlin's Towers", (Medizinethnologie, 2015).
[39] I draw this reference from a conversation with the teacher of the group who was sharing the insights of the Shaykh after his travels across the country, having visited and engaged many of the Islamic institutions.

It has taken many months of study and engagement to be allowed and accepted into the group in the intimate capacity that I am. Permission has been granted to me by the Shaykh of the Sufi community locally to engage this research in 2018. Shaykh, an elder born in Karbala, Iraq, educated in Europe, having worked in the USA among other countries, is now based in Pretoria, SA. A Shaykh of many Sufi orders, he places an emphasis on making Islam accessible to the youth.

I have been involved with the group for a year. I learnt about the group through Asma, who is also my aunt, and was asked if I would like to join the sessions. For the purposes of my research, I have been engaging the dhikr sessions, the meditations that the group partakes in. I have been considering the pedagogical processes involved in dhikr and learning the acts of dhikr, to discuss the importance of engaging multiple forms of knowledge production.

In gaining permission, I was cautioned by Asma to not allow the "academic gaze" to prevent me from learning. She was worried that applying a research lens to the dhikrs would detach me from the activities of the group, because I would be entering the space as a spectator and observer, rather than a participant. Asma seemed sceptical that that an academic research project and a project of spiritual[40]

[40] Sufis tend to refer to their practices as 'spiritual' ones. In speaking of Islam, they refer to it as a 'way of life' or as 'the path' that they are following. They often reject a sectarian approach towards Islam, and consciously set themselves apart from institutionalised forms of Islam. These are, of course, indicative of political dimensions of Islam and Sufism. Within South Africa, and as seen in Johannesburg, Sufism is not widely accepted, with most Muslims being Sunni. Within this paper, I have not emphasised these tensions as they fall outside of the scope of my masters' enquiry. I have not sought to dismiss these, but rather to place the emphasis on other aspects. As the reader navigates the paper, I have referred to the Sufi practices largely as

development could be undertaken simultaneously. Initially, I turned to immersion as a research technique. I read up as much as I could around wayfaring in Sufism, and participated in all the dhikrs and projects that Asma was working on. During this phase of immersion, I embraced the dhikrs and practices of wayfaring into my lived experience by engaging in dhikrs on my own and reading the literature. It was both difficult and rewarding to actively change and re-forge my habits and their orientation towards wayfaring.

I believed that I had found a balance, and Asma's cautionary words were briefly forgotten. When I entered the writing phase of the project, however, her words resurfaced. I struggled to find a way to translate the experiences over the past months into a paper. I began writing the paper as a conversation, a meditation in itself. When I wrote the 'rest sections', I held a private dhikr before approaching the writing. While this gave me a way into the writing process, I continued to struggle writing from an academically oriented perspective after having been so immersed in a wayfaring orientation. The different belief systems, between the secular academic perspective and the Sufi perspective which incorporates the religious and spiritual into their ways of being, were difficult to put into conversation without privileging one over the other.

spiritual ones, in keeping with their own framing, and refer to the 'religious' when speaking about more institutionalised forms of Islam, again, in keeping with how Sufis themselves speak about these topics. Although these threads are there, to be noticed and considered through the paper, I noticed during my fieldwork that these political dimensions did not take up a large focus of the participants talk and practice, which in itself is telling that they had enough freedom and mobility to keep at a distance from political concerns.

Her cautioning really highlights for me the necessity of a research approach that allows me to work with my teachers – academic and Sufi – rather than working with one set and on another. Through engaging my research as a decolonial project in both knowing and writing, I hope to forge a type of bridge between these two scholarly communities.

Beyond Phenomenology

Jackson outlines the phenomenological method as one which aims at "deconstructing the ideological trappings [human experience] take[s] on when they are theorised."[41] He goes on to explain that the phenomenological method is one that "involv[es] 'putting in brackets' or 'setting aside' questions concerning the rational, ontological, or objective status of ideas and beliefs in order to fully describe and do justice to ways in which people actually live, experience, and use them – the ways in which they appear to consciousness."[42] While a phenomenological approach allows a useful framework for considering the embodied experience, it still inherently privileges a worldview which maintains dichotomies of rational and irrational (through its limitation of accounting for the transcendental), etc. which enforces the relationship in research of 'studying down'.

[41] Michael Jackson, "Things as They are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology", (Georgetown University Press, 1996), 2.
[42] Jackson, "Things as They are", 10.

Ahmed explains that "phenomenology makes orientation central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed towards objects and hence is always worldly, situated and embodied."[43] This raises the question of how to engage a community that uses the habitual disciplining of bodies and consciousness' to orient themselves toward the other-worldly/beyond-worldly and treats knowledge as ensouled, thereby extending the embodied experience to include the transcendental? Ahmed[44], discussing Heidegger, refers to a scenario in which Heidegger speaks of his children who are playing in the garden outside of his study area. Ahmed says that "in a way, the children who are yonder point to what is made available through *memory* or even *habitual knowledge*: they are sensed as being there, behind him, even if they are not seen by him at this moment in time."[45]

I would like to extend Ahmed's discussion and consider what it would mean if we were to swop out the children in the scenario for God. Similarly, though not seen, the presence of God would be sensed just as viscerally. Through regular dhikrs[46] (meditations aimed at 'remembering' God and the original self that came from God) and disciplining themselves through what Ahmed calls habitual knowledge – and what Wright[47] calls living knowledge – the members of the Sufi youth group come to

[43] Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology", 544.
[44] Ahmed, "Orientations".
[45] Ibid., 546 [own italics].
[46] I have used the terms 'dhikr' and 'meditation' as synonyms in this paper. It is important to note that within the dhikr group I attended, these words were used synonymously. Approaching the dhikr as both spiritual practice and mindfulness practice (meditation), encouraged participants to focus both their hearts and minds during the sessions. Both words became infused with the purpose of the sessions: to focus one's entire self on the remembrance and awareness of Allah.
[47] Wright, "Living Knowledge".

live with the awareness of God in a manner that is not just embodied, but ensouled[48].

Thus, while I will be considering aspects of the phenomenological framework, I am wary of an over-reliance on this perspective, because phenomenology remains inherently limited when addressing the transcendental experience. Finnstrom, engaging with the Acholi people of Northern Uganda, speaks of cultural ancestors. He explains cultural orientations as "a means by which people engage and try to comprehend the lived surroundings of unrest and war, and by which they continuously struggle to build hope for the future."[49] Finnstrom does not frame this approach as "religious fatalism but lived realism."[50] Elaborating, he says that to "comprehend what is going on, people engage their cosmology. But cosmology is not only something from the past. It is in constant flux and a process of social contest and human creativity."[51] Acholi thought inherently incorporates the transcendental into daily life and how it is lived and experienced. Accounting for the soul and its state, amidst a cosmological order, pushes understandings of knowledge past being embodied and into the realm of the ensouled.

[48] Asad, "Formations".
[49] Finnstrom, "Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda", (Duke University Press, 2008), 243.
[50] Finnstrom, "Living with Bad Surroundings", 27.
[51] Ibid., 198.

Specifically, in relation to the study of Sufism, I find Selim's[52] discussion of Vipassana meditation an important text in considering ways of being and phenomenological accounts as ways to engage different knowledge systems. Selim's intervention to overcome the subject-object duality inherent in participant-observation was to follow Kersenboom's[53] 'participant participation'. This approach emphasises practice. Similarly, when I engaged the dhikrs, I adopted the practices into my lived experience. This blending of the boundaries between research method and my own lived experience is resonant of Spry's discussion of an "enfleshed methodology"[54].

Spry states that "theory and the body are always and already integrated."[55] In response to this realisation, she "began writing and performing autoethnography, concentrating on the body as the site from which the story is generated, thus beginning the methodological praxis of reintegrating [her] body and mind into [her] scholarship."[56] Asma's words of caution echo through Spry's own, that "when the body is erased in the process(ing) of scholarship, knowledge situated within the body is unavailable. Enfleshed knowledge is restricted by linguistic patterns of positivistic dualism – mind/body, objective/subjective – that fix the body as an entity incapable of literacy."[57]

[52] Selim, "Healing the City".
[53] Selim, "Doing Body"; See also Kersenboom, "The Faculty of the Voice" (http://www.parampara.nl/faculty/text.htm).
[54] Spry, "Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis", (Qualitative Inquiry, 2001), 726.
[55] Spry, "Performing Autoethnography", 718.
[56] Ibid., 708.
[57] Ibid., 724.

I find Spry's notion of being 'enfleshed', reminiscent of Asad's[58] discussion about 'ensoulment' and the relevance of such an approach toward scholarship, especially in understanding that of the Islamic tradition. Since the focus of wayfaring and dhikr is toward a becoming inclusive of the totality of one's bodily presence (self and soul), a research project that is considering this must necessarily provide for a totality of experience. Consequently, I have theorised initially using the body as the site from which knowledge is generated[59], and as I progressed through my study, I adapted this to viewing not just the body, but the bodily presence (which is inclusive of transcendental experience as within that of human experience) as the site at which knowledge is sensed and awakened to.

A Meshwork Methodology

In order to re-enter the research approach in a manner that would put two scholarly communities into conversation around themes and orientations regarding wayfaring and travel, I have been guided by a meshwork methodology as my framework for engagement of both the Sufi and the academic 'field site'. By supplementing a phenomenological approach with an autoethnographic approach, I have recorded my own experience of engaging these two communities and knowledge systems (academic and Sufi). As Wall[60] discusses, the phenomenological and

[58] Asad, "Formations".
[59] Spry, "Performing Autoethnography".
[60] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography", (International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 2006).

autoethnographic traditions have had a long history of overlap between them. I find it fitting that I apply such an amalgamated approach to my own study, because the combination of the two allows a more nuanced understanding of the orientation towards wayfaring.

In approaching the autoethnographic, Anderson[61] outlines the characteristics of analytic autoethnography. I find this analytic approach towards autoethnography limiting because it reinforces the mind/body, objective/subjective dichotomies of western knowledge systems. The emphasis on rigorous study in autoethnographic research has ensured that while I have spent much time 'in the field', I have also allotted time for taking notes and reflection. Additionally, I have engaged in many conversations with others in the space regarding how they are viewing the space and what opinions they are holding. In this way, I have covered the concerns Anderson[62] raises that autoethnography is not rigorous enough. By having my paper draw upon lived experience, as well as experimenting with the way in which we consume and interact with the textual, I seek to consider how one's relationship with the textual meditates our lived experience and vice versa.

Berger[63], meanwhile, argues in favour of a narrative approach towards autoethnography, specifically when discussing spirituality and religion. I have found this to be an apt research method for my project because it allows an

[61] Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography", (Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 2006).
[62] Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography".
[63] Leigh Berger, "Inside Out: Narrative Autoethnography as a Path toward Rapport", (Qualitative Inquiry, 2001).

engagement that is inherently open to multiple ways of knowing and does not place one form of knowing over another.

Consequently, in engaging the field, I have conducted an exploratory-focused ethnography over the course of 2018, which consisted of informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with three members of varying experience levels regarding their experiences of dhikr and what wayfaring means to them. Asma is the teacher of the group and the most experienced practitioner. She is also a family member of mine. While this close relationship may appear to compromise my role as researcher, close relationships between Sufi students and their teacher are considered essential to Sufi pedagogy and thus such a relationship is a norm amongst Sufis. This entanglement of relationships – spiritual relations, familial relations, and field relations – proved to be enabling for my research as there were already established relationships, so when I asked questions and probed further, there was already a willingness to have the conversation. It did become difficult when I needed to 'step back' as it were and consider the spaces and people more analytically. However, upon reflection, I found it more difficult to apply a critical lens to my own involvement than I did towards my aunt. Although it was not possible to take an entirely critical stance towards my family, my aunt did encourage me to follow my own lines of thought towards the practice, and the dhikrs themselves promoted various interpretations. Naeem has been a practicing member for just over two years. Sofia, a beginner joined the group for a few months to seek inner peace and a sense of control during a difficult period in her life.

In addition to this, I have attended the gatherings of the group as they have occurred over the course of the year. I have engaged a phenomenological approach toward dhikr, by allowing my inquiry to span across my own everyday practices and lived experiences, and engaging others on how dhikr and the concept of wayfaring feeds into their own everyday practices and lived experiences. I have reviewed and incorporated relevant Sufi publications and poetic autoethnographic narratives from a diary I have kept regarding my own experiences of dhikr and adopting the habits of wayfaring. Sufis treat knowledge as dynamic, as something that works on you just as you work at it. To better engage Sufi thought, I have opted to steer away from traditional techniques of coding[64] as a way to frame the research process and emerging themes. Rather, I have immersed myself into Sufi pedagogy and used the dhikr sessions themselves as moments of reflection, remembrance, and sense-making.

I have documented my own and others' experiences of dhikr through an autoethnographic approach and considering the life-histories of particularly three key participants. Since my study is about tracking experiences of transformation and development, it has been important to cover the process that occurs in-depth with the participants. Having three core participants who have been willing to discuss this at length has been valuable in considering the nuances of such experiences and how they occur over time. I have gained signed consent forms from all core and occasional members who have been willing to be participants in the study and have

[64] Robert M. Emerson, R. I. Fretz, and L. L. Shaw, "Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes", (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

kept these in a private folder in my possession to protect anonymity of the participants.

By approaching the research process as an integrated meshwork of approaches, I seek to expand my act of theorising to inherently include not just the textual, but the lived experience, environment and persons with which I come into contact. All of these aspects consequently become data points and the textual is just one data point amongst others that act and impact the theorising. This meshwork methodology thus seeks to incorporate into the act of research and theorising, Ingold's provocation, when he says that,

> "For there to be rhythm, movement must be *felt*… By way of perception, the practitioner's rhythmic gestures are attuned to the multiple rhythms of the environment. Thus any task, itself a movement, unfolds within the 'network of movements' in which the existence of every living being, animal or human, is suspended."[65]

[65] Tim Ingold, "Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description", (Taylor and Francis, 2011), 60.

Brief History of Asma's Group

The Sufi youth group that I am engaging is situated within a broader Sufi community that is based in Pretoria, under the Shaykh[66]. The Johannesburg branch began when Asma[67], one of the long-term students of Shaykh, was encouraged to start her own group, having reached the position of being able to teach. Asma, recognising the need for a space where young Muslims can openly discuss where they are on their journeys and grow amongst peers, decided to start a youth group with this intention. It began in October 2017.

Initially, the core group comprised of all women. Soares and Osella' comment on the recent trend in anthropology focusing on Muslim women as political actors, is that "Muslim women – their bodies, desires, and public and private lives – have been the object, at least since colonial times, of scrutiny, debate and intervention."[68] Although I draw attention here, and in a few other moments in the paper, to the role of the women in the dhikr spaces, gender is not primarily thematised in the following discussions. It is significant that women often occupy positions of teaching and authority in the dhikrs that I attended, but I have intentionally interwoven these notes within the thematised discussions in order to show the women in the space

[66] I am deliberately leaving Shaykh's name anonymous. While those who know Shaykh and the community may be able to recognise Shaykh, for the purposes of my research I will refrain from using real names and will be using pseudonyms where necessary.
[67] As stated above, this is a pseudonym chosen for the purposes of protecting anonymity.
[68] Benjamin Soares, and F. Osella, "Islam, Politics, Anthropology", (Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 2009).

without overly objectifying their bodies. I do recognise that while this hasn't been a central discussion in this paper, further work could engage this more.

Due to external demands needing to be met, two of the women were unable to attend as frequently and the group began to extend the invite to others. With the guidance of Shaykh, Naeem, a student of his that had just begun his studies, was encouraged to join. At this stage, the core group initially consisted of Asma, Naeem and me. We focused on concentrating our intentions for the group and allowing the alchemy of the gathering do its work. A few months later, Sofia, joined the group through hearing about it from me. Other than the four of us who would meet regularly, there were others who attended where they could. Zain, Nasima, and Hasan all attended as often as possible but due to external demands, their attendance was more infrequent. In addition to these occasional members, there were many others who attended for a few sessions and then stopped attending or made the intention to come back but did so infrequently.

Participation in the group, while voluntary, is still in a sense screened. The *niyyah* (intention) of the group is to create a space where like-minded Seekers can gather and learn together. The *niyyah*, in the Islamic tradition, represents more than a focus or goal, referring to the orientation of the soul. To solidify a *niyyah* is to orient your whole being towards it. Sufi thought considers the *niyyah* as a sort of soul-frequency that resonates with likewise frequencies in the universe. Asma explained this when

commenting on those who frequented the dhikrs and those who did not. “I’ve put out a very specific *niyyah* to guide Seekers with a deep desire to learn, anyone who does not have this desire will not stay here till they have reached that point. That’s why some people, while interested, do not return frequently – because they are not hungry for knowledge yet.”

Seekers are those who are committed to living in the way of Allah. It is believed that we are all ultimately striving toward spiritual transformation, whether consciously or not, and the Seekers would be those who are consciously disciplining themselves in this manner to attain spiritual transformation. Although the group’s core numbers may seem small, it is highly unusual to have so many Sufi students all within the same general area. Often, it is a community that must physically travel significant distances for a gathering. It is important to note, however, that this group is a further springboard for others. About four months into the group’s beginnings, Naeem started his own group which was held with a different intention – while this group was mainly focused upon the Muhammadi way, his would be more inclusive of a variety of different methods to achieving spiritual transformation. About 7 months into the group, Hasan, too, started a group with the intention that the spiritual transformation be guided by Sufi poetry which is ultimately inspired by the Divine.

All these overlapping and blooming groups are all being held for the youth, being started in response to requests, from their peers or those studying with/under them,

for these groups to be started. The focus of the groups toward the youth are reflected in the Shaykh's focus on teaching youth. He believes that in the modern age there is a need to make Islam accessible to the youth in a manner that accounts for the world they are living in. Sadouni explains that the "'return of religion' in urban research is mainly a result of the 'rediscovery' of Islam among a generation of young Muslims who have been born and educated in Europe."[69] In an inverted relationship, Shaykh, having been educated in Europe, is encouraging a similar revivalist movement to the local youth.

Format of the Meditations

The formal sitting of the meditations begins either on your way to the gathering, or ideally from the moment you wake up. You are encouraged to maintain an inward and outward silence, focusing your thoughts and clarifying your *niyyah*. When you arrive at the gathering, at Asma's house, you enter the home and walk toward the meditation area that is set up in a corner of the house. Carpets have been laid out and pillows arranged in a circle. Asma will balance the energies of the group and often place people in a manner to do this, particularly as it is a mixed group of men and women, the women are often placed next to Asma and the men face the women. This is not intended to enforce gender separation, but rather to allow for everyone to maintain a level of courtesy and balance toward each other. Having the masculine

[69] Samadia Sadouni, "Somalis in Johannesburg: Muslim Transformations of the City", (Topographies of faith: Religion in urban spaces, 2013), 99.

and feminine balanced outwardly allows for a balancing of the masculine and feminine within the individual.

While we wait for everyone to arrive, you can talk if you want to but not excessively and not about 'worldly matters' (anything that is not oriented toward spiritual development). This is meant to aid in helping each other remain focused on the meditation and purpose for our gathering.

There are two main formats of dhikr that the group engages. Firstly, there is the dhikr that is focused on transcendence, and secondly, there is the dhikr that is focused on 'grounding'. The former was used mainly at the beginning sessions of the group, and the latter is used more often as the group members became settled with each other and went further into their studies. It is considered in bad taste to only seek transcendence and neglect the realities and demands of the present.

The format of the transcending dhikrs are hour-long meditations that are partially guided, but mostly silent. We sit with our eyes closed, legs crossed on top of the pillows. Asma will use a combination of visualisations to focus us and still our minds. The meditation is focused on feeling at one with all of creation and feeling the presence of Allah in all that we are. It is spoken about as taking flight, because you are encouraged to sense unity, not individuality.

The format of the grounding dhikr is between one to two hours. We begin with a ten-minute silent meditation. Then we choose a *surah*, section, of the Qur'an and discuss our reflections upon it and the interpretations that come out of it. We end with another ten-minute silent meditation. Initially, the focus of the discussions were from an intellectual standpoint, but sensing that it was only encouraging intellectual arrogance, the focus was shifted toward interpreting the verses from one's heart and then only occasionally reflecting secondarily from the intellect. This shift happened naturally as the group's responses were observed by Asma. The members are all more highly qualified than I and are very learned scholars, yet it was a difficult shift to have to speak from one's heart and we all struggled in learning knowledge from an 'ensouled'[70] and 'enfleshed'[71] perspective. This shift, important in the pedagogical process of the Islamic Sufi tradition to watch in a setting with members who are also engaged in western pedagogical institutions provided tensions between dichotomised (mind/body) ways of learning and an ensouled method of learning. Although it was, and continues to be a difficult exercise, it has received a unanimous vote of confidence from all members who perceived this shift as greatly rewarding and very helpful in engaging the material in a way that made it deeply personal without losing the theoretical and ideological weight.

[70] Asad, "Formations of the Secular".
[71] Spry, "Performing Autoethnography".

Crossings

When I was first invited by Asma to attend the dhikrs, she told me that the knowledge I learn from them is wholly up to me. "If you enter here with scepticism, all your doubts will be confirmed. If you enter with an open mind and sincere heart with a desire to learn, then the world will open up for you." Frager[72], in outlining the Sufi approach to spiritual psychology, explains that "spiritual psychology must proceed from a set of basic assumptions that are fundamentally different from those of traditional Western psychology… 1. Human experience includes both the sacred and the secular… 2. The soul or deep self is an inner mystery with each of us, and also is part of the very essence of what it is to be human… 3. There are various possible states of human consciousness… [4.] self-transformation is an integral part of healthy adult development, fundamental in the integration of the soul with the personality."[73]

Entering the dhikr space with an acceptance of these assumptions radically alters the significance of the role of dhikr in a person's life. Acceptance, in Islam, is an important act of faith. 'Islam' is often translated as 'submission'[74]. However, as Ramadan points out, the "principal meaning of 'submission' is forfeiture, by the believer, of her or his will, liberty and autonomy… [implying] an amputation of a

[72] Haeri, Fadhlalla, and R. Frager, "The Journey of the Self: An Islamic View to Understanding the Self and its Unific Nature", (Element Book, 1989).
[73] Frager, "The Journey", x.
[74] Tariq Ramadan, "Islam: The Essentials", (Penguin UK, 2017).

believer's humanity, and of her or his stature and faculties as a free being."[75] Ramadan goes on to show that the "Arabic root of the word 'Islam' is '*sa-la-ma*', which means 'peace'… or making a 'gift of oneself'."[76] Consequently, the act of acceptance, of faith, is "to assume fully both that humanity and its limitations, to use liberty with responsibility, and to direct one's will towards the attainment of good."[77]

Through engaging a meshwork methodology, with the intent of being an enfleshed participant, my own understanding and insights were dynamic and fluid, and those around me willingly helped me in my research aims, seeing the intellectual research project as contributing to my spiritual journey.

[75] Ramadan, "Islam", 51.
[76] Ibid., 51.
[77] Ibid., 52.

Rest

Dear teacher

Learn. Learn to bring bodies and spaces into the music you are dancing to. Weave them together in ways such that the spinning captures the Light in all and shines forth for all to see.

Let your students be your guide – each one contains in them the pattern in which they wish to be spun. Seek the pattern and bring it forth.

Continuously read the textures, gestures, vibrations and movements. Write yourself into the moment so that those around you can learn to be authors themselves.

Above all,

Dear teacher, be taught.

Chapter Three

Pathfinding

(A Conceptual Framing)

Departures

Islam has an established history in South Africa[78]. While Muslims are a minority group in the country, there is a strong sense of being Muslim that is fostered in part by the residential concentration that specifically Indian and Cape Malay Muslims experience[79]. Although a lot has been written about, and primarily by, the Sufi community globally[80], in South Africa (and in Johannesburg particularly), publicly accessible research about the Sufi community has only recently began with a handful of scholars. In South Africa, much of the discourse centres on Islam in Cape Town[81], with the focus in Johannesburg being on the Fordsburg area[82].

[78] Gabeba Baderoon, "Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid", (Wits University Press, 2006); Susana M. Lliteras, "A Path to Integration: Senegalese Tijanis in Cape Town", (African Studies, 2009).
[79] Lliteras, "A Path to Integration".

[80] Baḥr Al-'Ulūm, Muḥammad Mahdī Ibn Murtaḍá, Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī Muḥammad Ḥusayn, and Tawus Raja, "Treatise on Spiritual Journeying and Wayfaring", (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2013); Idries, Shah, "The Way of the Sufi", (London: ISF Publishing, 2015).
[81] Baderoon, "Regarding Muslims".
[82] Jinnah and Rugunanan, "Remaking Religion".

The existing academic literature around Islam in South Africa has focused on the experience of primarily African migrants into the country and the ways in which religion has been instrumental in aspects of identity-making and belonging. Hansen[83] focuses on the religious imaginations of African migrants into South Africa. This discussion raises the tension between mainstream forms of Islam that are practiced and the minority forms which bear the brunt of a cultural elitism[84] that seeks to portray the minority groups as practising a lesser form of Islam that is limited to the realm of mysticism and superstition[85]. However, where Hansen claims that religious practices produce a sense of belonging to the broader society, I want to discuss how, for the Sufi Muslim in South Africa, this is often not the case. Paradoxically, the deeper one progresses in one's study, the more likely it is that while one does not see oneself as apart from broader society, the sense of belonging to it is never a consideration. Rather, a strengthening of a Muslim subjectivity is developed.

Lliteras[86] discusses Senegalese migrants and the ways in which they create belonging by remaining true to the religious practices of their home country. These individuals explain that their spiritual affiliation becomes more than just an affiliation, but rather "a way of life."[87] This is pertinent because it is resonant with the way in which locally-based Muslims experience Islam, that it reaches beyond a

[83] Thomas B. Hansen, C. Jeannerat, and S. Sadouni, "Introduction: Portable Spirits and Itinerant People: Religion and Migration in South Africa in a Comparative Perspective, (African Studies 68, 2009).
[84] Hansen, et al., "Introduction: Portable Spirits".
[85] Ibid.
[86] Lliteras, "A Path to Integration".
[87] Ibid., 224.

sacred and secular division, and becomes a primary identity marker in all spheres of activity. This type of subjectivity is explored by Jeannerat[88], when she discusses how mission Christians in South Africa did not take religion to be separate from the realms of the political, economic or social. Consequently, engaging in political community gatherings was an expression of one's religious being. Where Jeannerat[89] focuses on the political sphere and how this is inseparable from the religious being, I will be focusing on the ways in which Sufi gatherings are spaces that are not simply expressions of religious practice, but are complex sites of social and economic expressions which are all considered to be inherently spiritual.

Furthermore, while all the above-mentioned scholars focus on the experience of primarily migrants, the group that I am engaging has a mixed local and migrant membership and express their experiences of wayfaring and meditation as a way of finding spiritual transformation and knowledge where they have not found it through mainstream institutional forms of religious practice. The members who join the group are actively involved in the process, or journey, of attaining spiritual transformation and frame their studies within this space as the motivation for their returning participation.

As I began reading for this project, I was immediately struck by the difficulty in reconciling the texts written by the Sufi community and the texts written by the

[88] Caroline Jeannerat, "How the Political Constitutes Faith", (UJ Sociology, Anthropology and Development Studies, 2010).
[89] Jeannerat, "How the Political".

academic community around concepts of wayfaring and the cosmologies associated with such an understanding. There are few anthropological accounts regarding the Sufi community, and none addressing the Sufi community in South Africa, let alone any done in Johannesburg. Much of the academic literature focuses on an approach of looking at Sufism as a resurgence movement[90], with de-institutionalised youth groups setting their own syllabi to make Islam accessible in the modern age.

I want to consider the ways in which Sufis are linking themselves to a transnational community of Muslims[91], of wayfarers, regardless of ethnic or national identities. As shown above, it is often the case that research focused on Islam or Sufism in South Africa tends towards historical accounts of the sect and on experiences of migrants engaging the religion as a tool for belonging. Furthermore, by engaging the research using the concept of wayfaring that is a key conceptual framework for the Sufi community, I have entered the research space and let the research be guided by issues facing the community itself.

Sufism and 'Living Knowledge Production'

Shaykh Kabir explains Sufism as "the inner, essential understanding of Islam as a spiritual training system, [as] an expression of the Creative Power at the heart of

[90] Abdulkader, Tayob, "Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement", (Juta and Company Ltd, 1995); Mervyn Hiskett, "The Development of Islam in West Africa", (1984).
[91] Esack, "On Being a Muslim"; Selim, "Healing the City".

life."[92] This understanding of Sufism as both a spiritual training ground and a space of creativity speaks to the rigour that is expected of students, but also speaks to the constant emphasis and reminder that these pursuits are all to be taken on in the name of creativity and manifesting a greater Creative Power (Allah). In Wright's discussion of living knowledge, he explains that "learning Islam [is] meant as a transformative process, one that change[s] an ordinary human being into a luminous physical presence."[93] The transformation that Wright speaks about is one which Sufis consider to be a process during which guidance from a more learned scholar is necessary and that without that interaction there are certain knowledges which cannot be accessed. Wright emphasises that Sufi's "transmit such knowledge through highly personalised teacher-student relationships whereby initiates come to actualise or personify a particular Muslim subjectivity."[94]

Living knowledge in conceptions of the body and of knowledge transmission is especially emphasised when we consider that "human beings… are ultimately the knowledge they come to possess or actualise in the lives they live."[95] Upon this basis, knowledge transmission is only possible through relationships[96] – the human being can only actualise through others[97], and it is through others that the human being will strengthen her bodily presence. Now, I seek to put into dialogue some thoughts regarding wayfaring that the Sufi and academic communities have spoken about.

[92] Helminski, "Living Presence".
[93] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 1.
[94] Ibid., 3.
[95] Ibid., 20.
[96] Helminski, "Living Presence".
[97] Wright, "Living Knowledge".

The Sufi concept of living knowledge is complemented by Ingold's concept of living systems[98]. Ingold explains that "living systems are characterised by a coupling of perception and action that arises within processes of ontogenetic development… [It is] the proposition that *skilled practice involves developmentally embodied responsiveness*."[99] Ingold goes on to invoke the concept of animacy. He explains that animacy "is not a property of persons imaginatively projected onto the things with which they perceive themselves to be surrounded. Rather… it is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, *continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence*."[100]

Ingold condenses his thoughts in his theorising of alongly-integrated knowledge[101]. He begins by "acknowledging that the living body, as it breathes, is necessarily swept up in the currents of the medium, … the wind is not so much embodied as the body is *enwinded*… we should say of the body, as it sings, hums, whistles, or speaks, that it is *ensounded*."[102] He goes on to say that "how people actually come to know… is by *going around* in an environment. The knowledge they acquire… is integrated not *up* the levels of a classification but *along* paths of movement, and people grow into it by following trails through a meshwork. [He] call[s] this trail-following

[98] Ingold, "Being Alive".
[99] Ibid., 64-65 [original italics].
[100] Ibid., 68 [own italics].
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 139 [original italics].

wayfaring, and conclude[s] that it is through wayfaring… that knowledge is carried on.[103]

He elaborates upon this framework by explaining that "[he] use[s] the term *wayfaring* to describe the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement. It is as wayfarers, then, that human beings inhabit the earth… But by the same token, human existence is not fundamentally place-*bound*… but place-*binding*. It unfolds not in places but along paths."[104] "A complex-process metaphor,"[105] he says, "would lead us to prioritise the practice of knowing over the property of knowledge. Rather than supposing that people apply their knowledge in practice, we would be more inclined to say that they know *by way of* their practice."[106]

There are ontological resonances between Ingold's framework of alongly-integrated knowledge and the Islamic tradition's conceptual framework of ensoulment and wayfaring. Bahr al-Ulum explains that "among the other stations to be achieved in this journey is the universal encompassment (*al-ihatah al-kulliyyah*) of the divine realms, to the extent allowed by one's contingent potentiality… Thus, a person at this station would be present everywhere and together with everyone – except for any limitations due to the management of the body."[107]

[103] Ibid., 143 [original italics].
[104] Ibid., 148 [original italics].
[105] Ibid., 159.
[106] Ibid., 159 [original italics].
[107] Bahr al-Ulum, "Treatise", 20.

Although there is a lot of de-coding that is necessary to fully understand the text, this concept of being everywhere and being everyone is resonant of Ingold's webs that bind every place and person. He goes on to explain that "what is meant by travelling… is to actualise one's potentialities and reach the level of complete sincerity in-act."[108] This is resonant with Ingold's understanding that we focus on the practices of knowledge rather than the properties of knowledge. Where Ingold bounds his theory to the material world, Bahr al-Ulum expands his theorising to encompass the transcendental as well.

Wayfaring as Habit

In Islam, there is a deep sense of intimacy with all of life[109]. When considering Islamic cosmology, it is important to remember that there is no separation between sacred and secular realms[110]. Sufism, in particular, holds that all is considered sacred[111]. From the family structure, that functions as both protector and judiciary[112], to an ingrained understanding that we are all travellers from this world into the next, and as such must respect that everyone is journeying, and that we may not always walk the same path. This cosmological positioning – of a soul in all of existence – requires a conditioning of the consciousness toward a constant

[108] Bahr al-Ulum, "Treatise", 33.
[109] Helminski, "Living Presence"; Wright, "Living Knowledge".
[110] Asad, "Formations".
[111] Helminski, "Living Presence".
[112] Asad, "Formations".

awareness. Within Islam, this process of conditioning is an important aspect toward actualisation and, particularly in Sufism, requires the presence of a mentor.

Since habits are corporeal in nature, they require instruction[113]. For this reason, the role of the teacher becomes a very important source of guidance and learning. "The inability to 'enter into communion with God' not only becomes a function of untaught bodies but it shifts the direction in which the authority for conduct can be sought. And authority itself comes to be understood not as an ideologically justified coercion but as a predisposition of the embodied self."[114] The Sufi teacher acts as both guide, through fulfilling the role of a teacher to the student, and north star, being a contemporary manifestation of Islamic learning that the student aspires towards attaining, in the process of acquiring knowledge and journeying through life. Although the teacher is certainly more knowledgeable than the student, "what distinguishes them… is not a greater accumulation of mental content… but a greater sensitivity to cues in the environment and a greater capacity to respond to these cues with judgement and precision. The difference, if you will, is not one of how *much* you know but of how *well* you know."[115]

Since all is considered sacred, the habits that one forms during life are not only a testament to one's character, but also a testament to one's knowledge, one's

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 252.
[115] Ingold, "Being Alive", 161.

scholarship[116]. As Shaykh Kabir explains, "realisation, in its fullest meaning, is not merely knowing something, but making it real in oneself."[117] Forming habits in accordance with one's learning is important because "ideas must become values, not mere steps in a logical process."[118] I am interested in considering what the concept of presence but not permanence means, and how it affects the ways in which one 'travels'. As well as a consideration of the habits, movements and manifestations of the body and oneself through one's body in this world. "For persons are not beings that move, they *are* their movements. It is in their very patterns of activity that their presence lies."[119]

The Bodily Presence

To understand movement of the body, one must understand what the body is. Asad speaks of the body, that is "taught over time to listen, to recite, to move, to be still, to be silent, engaged with the acoustics of words, with their sound, feel, and look."[120] The Islamic tradition "requires us to attend not merely to the idea of embodiment (that human action and experience are sited in a material body) but also to the idea of *ensoulment* – the idea that the living human body is an integrated totality having developable capacities for activity and experience unique to it, the capacities for

[116] Wright, "Living Knowledge".
[117] Helminski, "Living Presence".
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ingold, "Being Alive", 168.
[120] Asad, "Formations", 37.

sensing, imagining, and doing that are culturally mediated."[121] Within Islam, the human being thus consists of several aspects/presences: "interior or secret (sirr), spirit (ruh), intellect ('aql), heart (qalb), and body (jasad) or sometimes embodied self (nafs al-badan)."[122] The actualised bodily presence is able to experience and communicate spiritual realities. Thus, the bodily presence, the site of learning, is not merely the physical body, but refers to all these presences holistically being disciplined and strengthened[123].

It is telling that religious identity in Islam is gained through one's personal relationships, through one's "bodily presence"[124]. The concept of a bodily presence refers to that "which transcends the corporeal form but remains linked to it… The bodily presence is thus not bound by explicit physicality. Nor does it exist in opposition to the body."[125] This concept is particularly useful in considering Muslim, and specifically Sufi, subjectivities. As Asad outlines, "no religious duty can be entirely abstracted from social relations."[126] By cultivating habits as the product of one's religious scholarship, one moves beyond the realm of memory and enters the realm of *truly knowing*. This process of inscribing habits, and thus knowledge, into the body means that the student doesn't just embody the knowledge being learnt but becomes it. The teacher then represents not just an instructor, but a living

[121] Ibid., 89.
[122] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 18.
[123] Cheikh Anta, Babou, "Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913", (Ohio University Press, 2007); Wright, *Living Knowledge*.
[124] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 10.
[125] Ibid., 17.
[126] Talal, "Formations", 243.

personification of the Qur'an and the sunnah[127]. This is significant, because the student can learn from just being in the presence of such a teacher[128].

This idea of the bodily presence is reflected in Ingold's discussion about "*alongly* integrated"[129] knowledge where he explains wayfaring thus:

> "The knowledge [people] acquire, I argue, is integrated not *up* the levels of a classification, but *along* paths of movement, and people grow into it by following trails through a meshwork. I call this trail-following *wayfaring*, and can conclude that it is through wayfaring and not transmission that knowledge is carried on… It is as wayfarers, then, that human beings inhabit the earth… The wayfarer is continually on the move. More strictly, he *is* his movement… movement is itself the inhabitant's way of knowing… The task of the wayfarer, however, is not to act out a script received from predecessors but literally to negotiate a path through the world."[130]

Ingold discusses the concept of wayfaring as a conceptual amalgamation of animism and his own concept of "alongly integrated knowledge"[131]. Ingold provides an interesting discussion regarding wayfaring as a lived metaphor and the significance of such a perspective. However, his framework is limited because it does not account for the transcendental experience, and he provides an amalgamation of theories

[127] Wright, "Living Knowledge".
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ingold, "Being Alive", 160.
[130] Ibid., 143-162.
[131] Ibid., 160.

while the Shaykhs speak to a unified theory of oneness. For this reason, I will be supplementing this reading of wayfaring, although traditionally 'anthropological', with texts written by the community that I am in conversation with. By seeking to understand the community and its' practices through its own lenses, I am hoping to gain a deeper understanding of what exactly it means to be a Sufi wayfarer. As Ingold himself said, "to ground knowing in being, in the world rather than the armchair, means that any study *of* human beings must also be a study *with* them."[132]

Dhikr: 'Remembering'

Dhikr, in Selim's framing, is "a specific form of Sufi prayer, done aloud or in silence, alone or in the presence of others… Dhikr literally means remembering. In Sufi lore, it is the remembering of Allah through repetition of *wazifa,* the evocation of the 99 'beautiful names' (*Asma ul Husna*). Each of these divine names refers to a certain attribute or quality and a Sufi Murid [student] must incorporate these attributes in everyday life by remembering them, reciting them aloud or in silence."[133]

Through various meditative practices all aimed at attaining a constant state of dhikr, Sufi's transcend the physical boundaries of their bodies and 'travel' to a different state of being at one and unbounded. The body is seen as a temporary gift from God, to be respected and lived in, but not to be bounded or enclosed by. Within the

[132] Ibid., 239.
[133] Selim, "Healing the City".

community that I am focusing on, dhikr through guided meditations are an important aspect of seeking knowledge. I want to consider the way in which travel in relation to the body is understood - the ways in which the body itself is considered both a place of belonging and a temporary shelter.

Dhikr as a practice of 'remembering' is not rooted in the past, it is a state of awareness that is inclusive of past, present, and future-making through its emphasis on the formation of lifelong habits of dhikr (remembrance). Thus, in an interesting relationship dhikr becomes a key component of wayfaring, because the wayfarer cannot find their path without being simultaneously in the past, present and future.

Through the pedagogical style of living knowledge transmission through the Murad/Murid relationship, working to inscribe habits into one's bodily presence such that one becomes the knowledge that one learns, navigating life as a wayfarer seeking paths toward enlightenment and knowledge, and preserving a state of dhikr (remembrance), a Sufi Murid learns how to manifest the concept of wayfaring in this life and maintain a constant connection to Allah.

Second Wind

It is through those leading the dhikrs, that the other bodies in attendance become ensounded in dhikr, in remembrance of Allah. The crafting of one's voice in dhikr spaces is encouraged initially through reciting along with Asma – and other skilled meditators when they join – and through the verbal reflection sessions thereafter. In the 'grounding' sessions, this process is further encouraged as those attending share thoughts from their heart within the meditation itself. As meditators get more experienced, they begin to add to the harmonies of breathing during dhikr sessions.

The more experienced practitioners are considered to have 'weightier' presences and act as anchors to the meditation, while the less experienced have 'flighty' presences and require the moorings of those more experienced. Within the youth group, this ensures that there is always at least one elder present in the dhikr. Asma would often invite other skilled practitioner's to join the youth group's dhikrs.

In speaking to Asma, she said that her Shaykh intentionally tries to foster a sense of community, specifically for the younger generation, many of whom join feeling tetherless and without a sense of community. Asma, Naeem, and Sofia all expressed feeling as I they had found like-minded and like-hearted people through the gatherings and took value from this.

Through these gatherings we see a community establishing itself in the suburbs of Johannesburg, outside of mainstream Islam. Following Sufi thought and pedagogy, they are framing their lived experiences as Muslims according to a sense of wayfaring, of travel that both allows for a sense of belonging, and an experience that is deeply rooted in the currents of the country, because it is responding to a local need voiced by the youth for alternative interpretations of Islam that account for the modern context (discussed further in the following chapter).

Crossings

By exploring the practice and pedagogy involved in Sufi dhikrs, I explore how the concept of wayfaring becomes a lived framework in the process of spiritual development. Through the role of the teacher as both guide and north star, students experience, what I argue, is ensouled knowledge which inherently accounts for the transcendental in human experience and reality.

In the following chapters, I will show how dhikrs are sites of habituating the body and bodily presence toward a spiritual orientation. From locating the notion of 'home' as beyond earthly sites (chapter four), to a sociality in the community built around understandings of travel and movement (chapter five), to interpretations of texts, the body, and space (chapters six and seven) as all within the framework of

wayfaring. Through this, I will discuss how a process of ensoulment becomes integral to the lived experience of wayfaring and spiritual becoming.

Rest

Dear infatuated lover

I could tell you to stop a minute and breathe deeply to steady yourself, but what would be the point? You would only soar higher amongst the clouds. I could tell you to be more measured, more sensible, but what would be the sense in that? You would only laugh absentmindedly and tell me about how just one gaze from your Beloved has left you yearning for the ocean as a droplet in a lake is ever bound to do.

Worry not, sweetened one, I will not tell you these things. Dance in this feeling, lay in its embrace, become intimately acquainted. It is only natural for the bee to be attracted to nectar. Enter Love, and become it. Carry it with you, unknowingly leaving traces of it wherever you go, whomever you meet.

Intoxicated friend, do not sober yourself. Not when it comes to matters of the heart. In this, be drunk in its influence, be careless in your generosity, be utterly offensive in your expression of it. Leave no soul longing. Be tender. Be gentle. Be Love.

It is not necessary for the lover to speak of their Beloved. It is known to all from the lightness of their presence, and the smile of their bodies. Without a word being spoken, without even a gesture performed, it is clear as Life within an expecting mother, that the lover has been awakened. And it is for this reason that I cannot tell you to steady yourself, I cannot tell you to be sensible, because doing so would be asking you to snuff out the very core of your being, it would be asking you to dampen embers that were created to glow infinitely.

No, dear one, let neither me nor anyone else stop you as you blaze across the earth. Let neither me nor anyone else quiet the intensity of your hearth.

I will ask only this. Protect that heart. Protect the heart that knows it beats only for the Beloved. Protect it from those who seek to reduce it to ash. Some, long grown cold, will feel the scalding bite as such warmth passes it by. Do not be disheartened, it is to their own hearts that they must turn, and even then, you will provide them that motivation simply by living in your own.

Journey forth, enamoured soul, and share the Light of your Beloved with all.

Chapter Four

Wayfaring

(Approaches to Mobility and Transnationalism)

Departures

Wayfaring shifts the focus away from the where, towards the how and why – asking how a person has moved, and what the passage of distance has meant. This perspective requires rethinking dominant themes in relation to religion and mobility, notably that of transnationalism and the idea of a spiritual home. For instance, Masade problematises the notion of 'home' as he shows that historically the concept of home in the social sciences has been associated with a fixed, and often stationary place[134]. Consequently, he says, "movement and travel only served to root the traveller deeper in their concept of home."[135] In his chapter, he discusses an alternative theorising of home as something that "can now be taken along with the traveller… [it] is no longer a place but an experience, a journey."[136] Such a notion contrasts to, for instance, religious notion of an established spiritual home.

[134] Iyonawan Masade, "Where is Home? Transnational Migration and Identity amongst Nigerians in Cape Town", (HSRC Press, 2007).
[135] Masade, "Where is Home", 94.
[136] Ibid., 96.

Wilhelm-Solomon, Nunez, Kankonde and Malcomess[137] for instance explain that "transnational forms of worship become re-territorialised in the space of the city. Without any direct Jewish lineage, [a Johannesburg-based] group adopts Jewish idioms of worship and views Israel as a spiritual home."[138] However, the Sufi's in the youth group do not consider any earthly site as home. Although there are certain places that are important in Islam as sites of pilgrimage (Mecca/Medina during hajj and umrah, for example) and historicity, these are not considered to be home. Muslims are considered to be 'travellers' in this life, which is particularly emphasised in Sufim, and home is reached in the next life[139]. By not emphasising the role of the home in the experience of a person, destinations become, as Selim indicates, less important than where "bodies and their practices went"[140].

Masade further explains that transnationalism implies that for migrants, "their capital base is built up in one state while they source capital mainly from another; secondly, they maintain heavy commercial traffic flowing both ways; and thirdly, their social and at times political networks and activities transcend national boundaries."[141]

[137] Wilhelm-Solomon, Nunez, Kankonde and Malcomess, "Routes and Rites to the City: Introduction"; see also Sjødin Bjørn "A Man Spoke in Joubert Park: The Establishment of a Transnational Religious Movement in South Africa", In Routes and Rites to the City, pp. 215-237, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[138] Ibid., 18.
[139] Bahr al-ulum, "Treatise".
[140] Selim, "Doing Body", 33.
[141] Masade, "Where is Home", 107.

Within the Sufi youth group, there are certainly members who can be considered transnational in this sense. Particularly, as I will show, the Shaykh of the community who gained his wealth in the USA, travelled extensively in his spiritual teaching, and is now based in South Africa. These movements of his impact the community in Johannesburg, as I will show through a brief comparison to the youth structures in

Berlin of Muslim youth, that Bendixsen discusses. However, as Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon show, these movements across national borders are not the only processes of (re)territorialisation that occur[142]. Transnationalism's focus on national boundaries and immigrant experiences does not fully capture the processes of (re)territorialisation that occurs even in the static space of the dhikr itself.

Neither East nor West

Religion, in Johannesburg, remains "a source of identity and meaning, as well as of group affiliation and group membership."[143] Historically, the privatisation of community space has been "the political and cultural alchemies that have enabled the Islamisation of community territories with the construction of mosques, madresas (Islamic schools) and Islamic organisations."[144] While Sadouni shows that the "support given to Somali Muslim co-religionists in the name of Islam supercedes

[142] Bettina Malcomess and M. Wilhelm-Solomon, "Valleys of Salt in the House of God: Religious Re-Territorialisation and Urban Space", In Routes and Rites to the City, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[143] Sadouni, "Somalis in Johannesburg", 46.
[144] Ibid., 47.

ethnic, migrant and national identities,"[145] she also acknowledges that "historically grounded ethnic identifications and boundaries continue to divide the Muslim population in South Africa."[146]

The Sufi community, of which Asma's group is a part of, is engaging in a form of Islamisation that is notably different from the historical methods of mainstream Islam in Johannesburg. The one community centre and mosque that they occupy in Pretoria, serves as the only formal institution that they gather at. Territorialisation, for them, occurs primarily through a network of homes which spans across Pretoria and Johannesburg. Gatherings happen at the Shaykh's home and the homes of his students. This aversion to institutionalisation sets them apart from mainstream Islamic communities in Johannesburg that place great significance on having a public sacred space, a mosque, in the community.

Furthermore, those attending the Sufi group primarily identify as Muslim above other sectarian identifications, and often draw a distinction between 'their' Islam and "the Hanafi madhhab [school of Islamic jurisprudence] to which most South African Indian Muslims adhere."[147] The practitioners that attend the youth group, through distinguishing their faith as set apart from the dominant Hanafi faith practiced, are actively seeking a way to renegotiate what it means to be Muslim in South Africa. As Bendixsen says, "without centralising institutions defining the authoritative

[145] Ibid., 53.
[146] Ibid., 53.
[147] Ibid., 48.

doctrines, Muslims continue to act within an increasingly pluralistic, modern society in ways that are multiple, varied, and sometimes inconsistent… Simultaneously, religious 'faith communities' continue to play an important role as spaces where religious knowledge, values and norms are not only mediated, but also negotiated."[148]

Within the Sufi youth group, where a multiplicity of nationalities (South African, British, Iraqi, Palestinian) gather, it is useful to think with Bendixsen who discusses an Islamic youth group in Berlin. While the group Bendixsen follows is an institutionalised organisation, in a way that the group I have focused on is not, the other factors that he points towards as being defining factors of "a generational shift in the practice of Islam in Europe, due to its approach to Islam and its teaching methods"[149] strikes a likeness. Just as Bendixsen notes that the youth group is focused on manifesting one's religion in a local non-majority Muslim country while still maintaining an active presence in the local context, being independent of mosques in the area and setting its own curriculum by and for the youth, the group that I attend reflects these factors as well. Thus, I suggest that the established trend that Bendixsen observes in the Muslim youth in Europe, can be extended to include the South African context. The dhikr group is mostly Indian, but also consists of Black and White Muslims and non-Muslims who attend (some of whom convert to Islam, while others infuse the sense of spirituality into the religion they follow).

[148] Ibid., 99 [original italics].
[149] Synnove Bendixsen, "Connecting the Local, National and Transnational Powers of a Religious Youth Organisation in Berlin", (Topographies of Faith: Religion in urban spaces, 2013), 101.

While I do not thematise the racial and ethnic in my discussion, I want to note the significance of the diversity of the group alongside its location in the Northern suburbs which is not usually associated with Islam in Johannesburg, as previously mentioned.

The trend that Bendixsen points towards in the Muslim youth in Europe is reflected amongst the western educated Muslim youth in Johannesburg. This connection seems to be enabled by, and reflected in, the Shaykh of the community. The Shaykh was born in Karbala, Iraq. A descendant of five generations of well- known and respected spiritual leaders, he received a firm grounding in spiritual knowledge, before being educated in the UK. Having built his wealth in the oil industry, he turned to an increased focus on spiritual teaching, a career that has spanned 30 years, with students and communities throughout the world. Recognised as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, he speaks to a unifying perspective of spirituality that interweaves Eastern and Western perspectives of spirituality.

Speaking to Asma, she shared that there came a time in the Shaykh's life where "he got signals that people were becoming too dependent on him and that he was aiming too much for the 'community', which he was warned about by his guru. So, he just up and left one day, left everything. He went traveling around to different shrines looking for signs. And then he randomly visited Cape Town and went to visit a shrine near the 12 apostles. While there, he got a vision about coming to a

land where the Muslims have little possibility of being in power, somewhere not in the East, not in the West… and stay there.

And so, South Africa is really [that place] – it's highly unlikely [Muslims] will ever be in power, and its neither east nor west. And then he uprooted the entire family and came here. 20 odd years ago… And then slowly – reluctantly – he responded to a lot of gatherings. He didn't start a community here, the community started around him… About 15 years ago, lots of shaykhs came to the country, the people were very keen on him in PTA, and [they] said [he should] build a mosque, [to] have a place where people can come… So he used to do the jummah talks there every month or so. And so that's when his profile started being built in Gauteng. He was still staying in Mpumalanga. The people again came to him asked him if we can have an annual conference, and this conference has been going on for the last 15/16 years now. So, all his ex-students come from America, UK, Iraq, Australia, Sweden (because he had a community in Sweden and in Uruguay)."

Countries and/or cities are often spoken about in gatherings in relation to the 'spirituality of the space'. Certain areas are notable for having the graves of saints, for Islamic historical sites, or for having a larger population of Sufis, like-minded Muslims, or prominent Shaykhs and scholars. Hasan, who is studying under a Shaykh based in the US, attends local gatherings where he can, and plans trips to go to the US when possible, often with years passing between visits. Hasan, mild-

mannered, has a deep love and knowledge of Rumi's poetry and has his own group where he uses the poetry as a way in to the dhikr. Once, in conversation, Hasan mentioned that "those whose Shaykhs are locally based are so lucky". Adding, a moment later, that within the distance between him and his Shaykh must lie a lesson for him. In this way, distance is not conceived as a border or barrier, but rather as access to a lesson or knowledge about oneself.

While distance is often perceived in this way, it can serve to alienate the travellers from the broader local Muslim community. Through having travelled to other countries and seen other ways of being and of being Muslim, those that return home from travel question many of the traditional and cultural ways of doing Muslimhood. Consequently, they experience a sort of isolation (self-imposed or externally imposed) because they no longer behave 'as a Muslim should' as per the local context. Naeem, having backpacked for over a year, initially felt that upon returning he couldn't tolerate many of the Muslims he encountered because they were "narrow-minded". The struggle to find like-minded Muslims upon returning, seems to run through many accounts of those who have travelled and adds to the reason that they value the Sufi gatherings.

Bendixsen speaks of transnationalism as "meant to capture the processes through which immigrants (re)produce social fields across geographical, cultural and

political borders."[150] As the Sufi youth group is part of a broader global community that seeks to transcend earthly identifications, such as nationality, it is counter-productive to then primarily use these terms to think with as they are inherently bounded and binding. Wilhelm-Solomon et al.[151] frame their focus in "Routes and Rites to the City" as one concerned with "the diversity of processes of emplacement, rather than with a taxonomic categorisation of migrants… [A]n analysis of mobility hence provides a broader and more encompassing lens than an analysis of 'migration' and also allows the focus to encompass broader assemblages of people, spaces and things."[152]

Passages

Selim, speaking of Vipassana, explains that "Vipassana is a travelling technique and [she] consider[s] its sites as "moving target[s]" (Kirmayer 2006: 138) in our "runaway world" (Giddens 2000: 13)… it matter[s] more where bodies and their practices went, not where they came from. If there was a culture involved, it was the transnational body culture of vipassana, shared by its inhabitants – the multivocal, multipraxial practitioners of multiple origins."[153]

[150] Ibid., 107.
[151] Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon, "Introduction".
[152] Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon, "Introduction", 11.
[153] Selim, "Doing Body, 33 [original italics].

Similarly, in wayfaring, there is both inner travel (amongst the self and soul) and outer travel (amongst the body and physical spaces), and both are considered a part of spiritual journeying[154] . Outer travelling is largely dependent on certain spaces that are sought out or avoided because they promote or hinder the manifestation of one's spiritual journey. Certain sites are avoided or entered wearily, such as parties, or gatherings where spirituality is not a part of the intention for gathering or a primary intention for those gathering. It is not advised to entirely avoid these spaces because extremism is limiting and impractical, but rather, that if one is to enter these spaces, it is encouraged to do so with like-minded company or else with a strong intention. Dhikrs are sought out because they reorient the wayfarer on their spiritual path.

Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon explain that "territory can be not only be a closed, transitory and demarcated space but also a form of passage."[155] Such passages are opened up in the city as the Sufis, mostly middle to upper class citizens, drive to the dhikr in their own cars across the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. These passages are significant acts of territorialisation for the Sufis. Not occupying any mosques or public spaces, these journeys become the only visible movements of Sufism across the city. These passages are further entrenched when they leave the dhikr. Having attended the dhikr, a space in which copious amounts of incense is burned, they leave Asma's home smelling strongly of the scents that were burned.

[154] Bahr al-Ulum, "Treatise"; Kristine Krause, and R. van Dijk, "Hodological Care among Ghanaian Pentecostals: De-Diasporisation and Belonging in Transnational Religious Networks", (Diaspora, 2016).
[155] Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon, "Valleys of Salt", 35.

These scenes infuse the air around them as they enter their cars and the subsequent spaces that they travel to. After every dhikr that I left, I would always enter my next physical destination smelling strongly of the incense. Once, when I had to attend another social gathering after the dhikr, Asma gave me a few drops of her favourite oudh (a strongly scented perfume) to help me transport and maintain the mood and knowledge I had learnt in that dhikr session into my other activities. Thus, as Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon indicate, "religious diversity in the city is a diversity and densification of processes of territorialisation, and not only a diversity of ethnic, racial or national groups."[156] Sofia, who grew up in Johannesburg all her life and attended madressa till she was 14, said that she never felt like the spiritual knowledge she learnt at madressa accounted for 'real life', and the changes to the ways of living that have come with modernity. In a separate conversation about the state of women in Islam, she said that while it made sense for men to be the 'protectors' of women to the large extent that they were in past times, in today's context where there are so many more women being the head of the household, the madressas and Islamic institutions need to revise their narrowly defined view of the role of women in Islam. Joining the youth group, for her, was not only access to a space that was led by a knowledgeable woman, but also access to a perspective of Islam that accounted for the present concerns she was facing as a woman trying to negotiate her spirituality and sexuality in the city.

[156] Ibid., 59.

Van Dijk et al. discuss how "people move within social networks, how forms of mobility go hand in hand with a mobility of social forms, how people become mobile as the result of religious conviction."[157] Sofia's story emphasises how the passages that are created through religious sites and exchange of knowledge, act as catalysts for different ways of being in the urban context. In Sofia's case, the religious, initially closing certain routes in the city for her, re-opened them and expanded her presence in the city when she joined the Sufi youth group. This is resonant of Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon who speak to the "multiple movements and enclosures through which religion produces and permeates urban space."[158]

Mobile Homes

Van Dijk considers the question of "What is made present when an imagined 'home' is absent?"[159] He explains that in Pentecostalism, "practices create belonging, not to a home, but to connections, paths and trajectories."[160] Within the Sufi group, this is seen in the routes that are travelled to arrive at the dhikrs. Asma stresses the punctuality of the dhikrs and starts at the time she intended without waiting for all to arrive. In one case, a member was about fifteen minutes away and she advised them to miss the dhikr and attend the next one as she could not wait, and it would

[157] Mirjam de Bruijn, R. van Dijk, and D. Foeken, "Mobile Africa: An Introduction", 3 [own italics].
[158] Malmcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon, "Valleys of Salt", 2.
[159] Van Dijk, "Hodological Care".
[160] Ibid., 98.

be disrespectful to join while the dhikr was in session. When I asked her about this, she explained that she didn't really mind waiting but that it would have been disrespectful to the others who had made it on time, and furthermore, that making it on time for a dhikr showed a commitment to the spiritual path and that people will only make this effort when they are committed to their spiritual journey above all else.

This highlights Van Dijk's notion that the "Holy Spirit produces connections not to special places (a locality, a building, a shrine) but to a model, a template of authority. This is above all a spiritual authority… connection must be shown by commitment to leadership, exchange and reciprocity."[161] This attitude "begin[s] to mark an absence – the absence of a need to be diasporic or to be attached to any specific place that might be called 'home'."[162] Asma, in emphasising the punctuality of the dhikrs,

asserted this attitude within the group. By shifting attention away from a fixed home, the Sufis turn to inner reflection and remembrance through the dhikrs as sites of emplacement. Consequently, the meditation practices themselves become processes of territorialisation[163] even in the static and sedentary spaces of the dhikrs.

[161] Ibid., 110.
[162] Ibid., 111.
[163] Malcomess and Wilhelm-Solomon adopt and adapt Deleuze and Gautarri's idea of territorialisation (drawn from *One Thousand Plateaus*) to consider how, despite symbolically violent types of coercion on migrant, queer and feminine bodies by the state, city government, and capital, temporary occupation and forms of self-styling allow for spiritual passage and worship in the city.

Crossings

The shift away from a focus on borders towards a consideration of movements and mobilities is useful when thinking about wayfaring, because it aligns with wayfaring as a dynamic and processual framework – one which emphasises fluidity, rather than fixity, and allows questions to be asked around the meaning that the passage of distance holds.

A focus on passages within Johannesburg complements the processual framework of wayfaring and how it is manifested in people and their movements. Burchardt and Becci say that "the visibility or invisibility of religious sites, as well as their size, becomes a pivotal issue when the urban context is marked by struggles over the scarcity of space."[164] In the case of the Sufi youth group, their passages across Johannesburg indicate both visibility as they are physically traveling along routes not normally associated with Islam in Johannesburg and are thus expanding the mapping of the religion and its influences in the city, while at the same time remaining partly invisible as they travel in their own cars across and thus are marked as almost self-contained. They effect destinations (through carrying the scents of the dhikrs to their physical destinations when they exit their cars) but remain strangely ambivalent in the passages between.

[164] Becci and Burchardt, "Topographies of Faith: Religion in Urban Spaces", (Brill, 2013).

In the space of Asma's house (as will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters), there is a densification of processes of territorialisation as they control the space through the manipulation and framing of the environment and the bodies in the spaces towards spiritual transcendence and affirming networks of connections.

Rest

Dear weary traveller

You pass so many on this journey… so many versions of yourself. This path is made of mirrors, to find it you must wipe away the dirt and grime. But before you can even start to follow it, you are immediately faced with your own reflection staring back at you.

I can see your feet are calloused from treading upon the glass,

I can see your eyes are searching for others beyond their own reflections,

I can see your body is calling upon all its reserves to push further,

I can see you, weary traveller, I can see you even if you cannot yet see me.

Keep walking. At your pace, in your time, keep walking. Keep polishing that glass to find the Path, keep confronting your reflection in its infinite varieties, keep following the Way.

I know that you are wearied, but this is not your home. Resting places lie upon the path, yes, but these are not your Home.

Keep

taking

those

steps,

dear one,

your Beloved

awaits

your

return

at

day's

end…

Chapter Five

Unrooting

(A Travelling Sociality)

Departures

Unrooting. Verb. To tear up by the roots (eradicate). To become uprooted.[165]

'Unrooting' refers to a process of becoming. It is a state of semi-rootedness, of being both rooted and uprooted. This sense of unrooting is resonant of the wayfarers who speak of situating a self that is seeking to dissolve all roots/attachments to this world, while also being intimately aware that they will never in this life reach the state of being uprooted. They are not seeking uprootedness, they are seeking a state of awareness of their rootedness. Being aware that they are rooted to this world through their bodies and must for this reason actively participate in the world they are a part of, while never losing sight of their dual existence – that their souls are not rooted to this world and their ultimate resting place is not in this world.

[165] Merriam-Webster Inc., "Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary".

What does it mean to be unrooting, yet rooted through the materiality of the body to this world? How does a sociality emerge amongst such movements of unrooting? What does a sociality of wayfarers, of travellers and 'unrooters', look like?

Stumbling into Biographies: A Shy Dinner for Four

Having fetched Sofia, we are on our way to meet Naeem and Zain. This is our first social gathering in over six months of meditating together. The first time we will really be talking to each other outside of the dhikr space and the focused topics of conversation.

We arrive slightly early and take a seat, waiting for the men. We are at an Italian restaurant not far from Asma's home. It has been selected for its location (Asma said she may join, though she didn't make it). Naeem walks in not long afterward. He carries with him the heavy comforting smell of incense, wearing loose-fitting pants and a T-shirt. He always enters a room smile-first. We greet each other and get seated. Naeem, in his easy manner, kicks off his shoes and sits cross-legged on his seat. The waitress appears, and he strikes up a conversation, laughing gently at the surprise of finding him seated thus arresting her features. At the sound of his laughter, the spell is broken, and she laughs too. We ask for a few more minutes as we wait for Zain.

We sit in a comfortable silence. Zain walks in and we all stand to greet him. As we settle down, we look at each other shyly. The silence is more comfortable than words are. Naeem breaks the silence, smiling, "Well, let's exchange our boring biographies shall we?"

We laugh at ourselves and begin telling the stories of our lives. The conversation quickly becomes more personal. We have already meditated together for so long and shared intimate reflections on the state of our souls, that sharing personal details about our lives seems like casual dinner conversation. We talk for nearly an hour before we realise, we haven't yet ordered any food.

Looking through the menus, we each place our order. We continue talking as we wait for – and then promptly eat – our food. Once we have eaten, and the excited conversation settles into a calmer mood, from habit we start sharing where we are on our Journeys. As if Asma was sitting at the table with us, we each speak about what we have been struggling with or conquering. Advice and support are shared.

This interaction is resonant of Selim's discussion on the inter-corporeal friendship that is born in the silence of vipassana meditation. She speaks of "a friendship that *began* in silence was *followed up* with words"[166]. This is like the friendships that were formed in the dhikr sessions. Although it was not total silence, and not over a single

[166] Selim, "Friendship (and Healing) in the 'Intersubjectivity of Silence', 198 [original italics].

period, the initial 'taking flight' dhikr sessions were conducted in mostly silence and focused discussions. It was only during this first social gathering, months later, that we began to learn about each other's personal biographical lives.

Selim goes on to posit that "friendship is a particular 'technique of belonging' and when it begins in the 'intersubjectivity of silence', in the meditative space through the shared (and yet not shared) practice of sitting meditation, 'alone in the presence of' (silent) others – it is based on a shared focus on the self."[167] Through collectively gathering to develop our own sense of spirituality and bodily presence, we became what Asma calls "Friends of the Path". Often Asma would speak of her 'Friends', meaning those she had met and befriended in dhikr, through meeting likewise souls who were committed to their spiritual development.

Often the members in the group would speak about how their friends did not understand why they would change certain behaviours that they were previously associated with (stopping certain habits, such as smoking, drinking or partying) in favour of others (taking up dhikr, and becoming increasingly uncompromising in following their spirituality and its duties). Naeem said that initially his friends and family were shocked and confused because he "suddenly became spiritual", that they put his 'new' behaviour down to him being young and/or going through a phase. When they realised that these changes were not on a whim and were

[167] Selim, "Friendship", 201.

continuously becoming embedded in who he was and what formed his reference point, Naeem said that they talked around his "eccentricities". However, when he spoke of his Friends at the group, he expressed a sense of belonging. These changes aren't always dismissed as oddities. Sofia, facing pressure from her family that follow the Hanafi madhab, had to withdraw from the group and its activities.

There is a frankness that is characteristic of Sufi gatherings. There are no topics that are marked as taboo to be avoided. Particularly amongst one's peers and the more learned in the group, there is no perpetuation of shame or humiliation. Those moments where an individual has acted wrongly, are understood as trials that are meant to help purify a person's intentions. When there are continuous misdeeds, it is understood that the person needs help to realise the error in her/his way and correct their behaviour or else they will be continually faced with variations of the same trial until they learn their lesson. This frankness, this openness to receiving all aspects of a person allows for a space that is highly conducive to learning and – as Selim indicates – healing.

Selim explains that in recent times "the kinship or proximity-based (older and more rigid) social relations are facing tough challenges by the (more flexible and newer) connections among people who move across local, national and global 'networks of social relations'… If a certain kind of friendship happens in a new unfamiliar circumstance without reference to a shared past, [she] argue[s], it may offer better

grounds for social and emotional support. A friendship that is no longer limited to long-term associations with peer or professional groups sharing a certain cultural common-sense and neither [is it] restricted to certain geographical locations or fixed sites. A friendship that seems to be by nature mobile, shifting and therefore perhaps more accommodating and ultimately healing?"[168]

Selim's discussion on the healing potential of such friendships is resonant of the healing, support, and sense of belonging that members of the dhikr group speak about receiving from the Friends that they make in the dhikr gatherings.

By re-orienting themselves through dhikr, wayfarers detach[169] themselves from being rooted in cultural and familial traditions. Instead they seek a re-formation of their orienting 'compass' or inner self. They undergo this individual process amongst the company of other wayfarers. As they detach themselves more and more, they become, in a sense, untethered. Hovering. Neither flying nor grounded. Suspended. Rooted through the body to this world, yet not belonging to this world. As this process is occurring, they start forming intimate inter-corporeal friendships with those that they are sharing in the process with.

[168] Selim, "Friendship", 202-203.

[169] Detachment, here, does not mean a total removal of the self from these networks. Rather, it is a detaching from being *invested* in the networks while still maintaining an active presence. It is a movement away from having one's 'compass' sit in the hands of the family, or the culture, or any other external identity markers and moving towards shaping one's inner 'compass' that is based on one's spirituality.

Dhikr as Play: Ashura Day

Driving toward the gathering, I clear my mind and re-centre myself. Kreutzfeldt and Malcomess say of Johannesburg that it "is a city not of the walk, but the drive."[170] Driving through the Northern suburbs toward Asma's house, sticking to the 60mph speed limit allows for a mostly calm and scenic drive. I feel the tensions of the world slowly ease away – deadlines, traumas, joys, triumphs. All these things which my body holds in its cells are released. I allow myself to settle into a state of peaceful and calm neutrality. It is challenging at times, driving across Joburg with its notorious traffic, to remain calm. But I stubbornly concentrate my awareness on the act of driving and of clearing my mind and heart. When I get to Asma's house, I drive up the driveway and park the car. I get out, taking with me my scarf and book. As soon as Asma and I greet, the remaining tension I am holding is released.

We are meeting today for a special dhikr to reflect upon the events that took place in Karbala on Ashura day. We will be having a light lunch after the dhikr. As I enter Asma's house, I see she is as excited as I am – she has already moved the furniture and done much of the prep I was supposed to help her with. She looks at me, smiling guiltily, "I couldn't help myself, but you can help me lay the table."

[170] Malcomess and Kreutzfeldt, "Not No Place", 230.

We set about chatting and laying the table. All the dining room furniture has been pushed to the sides of the room to accommodate for the large gathering today – 12 strong! A variety of ages (24-60), genders, and ethnicities, many of those attending today are travelling from far to attend. We lay out the table and adjust a pillow here and there as we wait for everyone to arrive. The majority of those attending come as drivers in their own cars. This is at odds with Kreutzfeldt and Malcomess who say that the "majority navigate the city as passengers."[171] By navigating their way to the dhikr as drivers, and occasionally as passengers with other dhikr-goers, the practitioners are in control of the immediate environment as they make their way to the dhikr. This translates into calm and centred guests who do not have much of the 'outside world' settled on them, other than the shoes they remove at the door.

It's not too long before the first members begin to arrive. There is an excited hush as people make tea or coffee and settle down to a pillow on the floor. Incense is lit, and eyes are closed. A silent meditation is held until the last few members arrive and quietly take their place.

When the dhikr session concludes, we sit for a few minutes, reluctant to break the circle just yet. Once everyone is seated back into themselves, we start greeting and asking after each other. The food is warmed and placed on the table with a large jug of water. Everyone helps themselves and break off into smaller groups, catching up

[171] Ibid.

with old friends and meeting new members. Nasima is sitting on a couch in the lounge chatting to Naeem and Mariam, a learned woman in the community who has joined the dhikr today and whom I am meeting for the first time. I have met Nasima a handful of times in past dhikrs before this day. A soft and gentle manner clothes her. I head over and take a seat. We chat for a bit and then break into two, Naeem and Mariam, and Nasima and I catching up. As I turn to Nasima, our eyes lock and we smile at each other. For about a minute we do not talk, just sit in each other's presence. Then we begin to talk. After an hour or so, those who must leave, leave the gathering. The rest of us settle down in an informal circle and continue chatting.

The silence is punctuated by conversation which shifts from inquiries about families, work, and hobbies to focusing on where everyone is on their journey, what they're going through, and sharing what they've learned or are learning. Advice and support are exchanged as the conversation flows smoothly in and out of tears and laughter.

The atmosphere of this dhikr was very different to the others I had been attending thus far. It was the first dhikr that had been an open invite to the community of students studying with Shaykh. Although it was significantly larger than our usual core group of 4/5, it remained intimate. This is how many dhikrs with the more experienced wayfarers are held. Silence becomes an important tool in communication – those able to maintain an inner silence of meditation and an outer

silence of intentional talk are amongst those who are learning to read the textuality of the moment well. Beginning and ending interactions by gently and quietly holding the gaze indicates the strengthening of one's bodily presence.

"They read silence just as they would read speech, turning silence into a form of communication."[172] Pagis' study "challenges the common view which regards silence as an obstacle to social relations"[173]. She makes the distinction "between two approaches to the study of silence – one that construes silence as oppressive, as part of a conspiracy of silencing, versus one that sees silence as a meaningful and constitutive environment."[174] Pagis explains that "meditation is a personal and individual practice. Yet, at the same time it is also a collective practice. The fragile balance between the two is generated through the production of intersubjectivity in silence, an intersubjectivity that does not require the exact articulation of experiences."[175]

Within the gathering, silence is used to gauge the strength of one's bodily presence. Those who can maintain an inner and outer silence in the midst of the noise of the world and social sphere, are more in control of both themselves and others. This discipline is acknowledged when you hold the gaze of another Seeker. In this way,

[172] Pagis, "Producing Intersubjectivity in Silence: An Ethnographic Study of Meditation Practice, (Ethnography, 2010), 320.
[173] Pagis, "Producing Intersubjectivity", 309.
[174] Ibid., 311.
[175] Ibid., 323.

silence is a fundamental aspect of building relationships. One can recognise another Seeker from a glance and a moment of silence.

Selim and Pagis speak about how friendship is formed from an initial interaction facilitated primarily through silence. However, while they acknowledge that the 'new' friends made in silence do socialise more afterward, they don't consider the ways in which silence does or doesn't come into play in their socialising. I would like to build on their theorising, by offering an analysis of the ongoing role of silence in friendships that are born in silence.

The act of 'play' is important to Sufi's. Frequent post-dhikr gatherings, meals and activities are scheduled together in the name of play. It is believed that it is important to have a balance in life and as significant as it is to sit amongst friends in dhikr, it is equally significant to have fun with one's Friends too.

In these gatherings, which Asma would often refer to humorously as 'play dates', we would play in and with silence. Through meditating together, you become very attuned to the bodies and personalities of those that you meditate with, especially since the meditations are followed up by reflections – we learned to read each other better and better. In social situations, this ability to pick up on how others are feeling was no less tangible. Even when in a room full of people, often I would catch Asma's, or the others' eyes and share a laugh or a thought in silence. It is not

unusual, when sitting in a gathering, to see certain groups or pairs communicating in silence, using silence to facilitate their interactions.

When I began *speaking* to Nasima our initial interaction was wordless. We greeted each other, inquired after each other, and expressed our joy at meeting one another again, through our initial wordless exchange. It is like a recalibration to each other's bodily presence, becoming reacquainted and enjoying being in each other's presence again. Thereafter, we continued *speaking*, this time using words to facilitate our discussion. This type of interaction is not uncommon when amongst friends of the group and shows the ways in which friendships born in silence use silence as a tool in communication even in spaces outside the meditation.

Another such incident was when I saw Naeem at another gathering. He was attending with his mother, and I with mine. We introduced ourselves and each other to our mothers. They began talking to each other. He and I held our gaze and smiled – we didn't say a word to each other. We were both present in that moment and were able to *speak* to each other without words. By this stage we had been meditating with each other for almost a year and were well acquainted with each other's bodily presence. It was enough for us to converse in silence and leave words out of the exchange altogether.

Although it may seem strange to speak of – well – speaking, without the use of words when we live in a world so obsessed with the written word and the spoken word. Yet, when speaking in silence, there is a sense of sincerity that is felt rather than understood. You are forced to pay attention to the person you are speaking far more than just paying attention to their words. And this often tells you a lot more. Knowing that the other person is paying equally – or more – attention to you and what your body and presence is saying, can be a very disturbing experience initially. There is nowhere to hide. With time, this sense of exposure lessens and can be exceptionally rewarding. To be listened to and to listen to someone else, is a rare interaction and becomes a part of what Seekers are continually drawn to in such gatherings. In many spoken conversations that I had with other members, they all placed an emphasis on the sense of recognition that they received in the gatherings. Where they often felt misunderstood in their other social spheres, no one that I spoke to expressed feeling misunderstood in these gatherings.

Tethers

The framework of wayfaring, lived as an orientation towards movement, towards travel and unrooting, can be unsettling if not for the friendships made along the way. Sufis place an emphasis on a familial sense of love[176] between the members of

[176] Frishkopf, "Authorship".

the community. Through linking oneself to a teacher, a group and a community, you enrobe yourself in tethers that serve to centre you.

As shown in this discussion, friendships that are born within the meditative and transcendental silence of the dhikr, retain these aspects even in social situations. Being able to share one's journey and be of service to someone else's, forms an integral part of building ties. The process of unrooting, of re-evaluating cultural and familial traditions in order to hone one's own individual compass in service to the values of Sufism, is a difficult and often painful one. Asma and Naeem, having been meditating for a longer period, both spoke of the growing pains that came from re-orienting themselves towards a deeper sense of spirituality. Long-term friends, knowing them as outgoing party personalities, were unable to adjust to the spiritual personalities they became. They both, however, said that just as some people left their lives, others entered and provided support in their spiritual endeavours.

From this we can see that wayfaring, lived as an orientation towards travel, is accompanied by the ambivalence of being a constant traveller.

Crossings

Unrooting travellers. Gathering silence. Silence as medium.

It seems that movements of bodies, of affiliations, of orientations, move in currents and along paths, while gatherings are almost a cessation of ebb and flow. Rather than an orientation toward movement as directional – to and fro – the gathering of Sufis becomes a space of movement *amongst*.

Engagaing silence as a medium for both spiritual knowledge and friendship, the gatherings provide physical spaces, moorings, for wayfarers. Such a sociality, itself interpreted within a framework of travel, situates not just the meeting of members, but also the surrounds and environment as subject to a broader cosmological and alchemical understanding of movement (discussed in the following chapter).

Rest

Dear earnest scholar

There are many things that you will not come to know in this life. More so, most things you cannot know in this life.

Do you know this? Do you know that no matter how much you come to know, there is so much more you will not? Do you know that your body, your mind, cannot hold the knowledge of most things? Do you know this?

… And knowing this, what does this knowledge mean for you? What does knowing there is knowledge you cannot know – cannot hold – mean for your scholarship? What does learning first what you cannot know, mean to you?

Before you learn to Know anything, you must learn to un-know. To empty yourself of all you think you know. You must scrape away all the arrogance in your being that makes you think you Know anything. Mine yourself for Knowledge. Learn where knowledge sits in you. Learn how knowledge moves in you, animates you, emanates within you.

Qalb. Your heart is a channel for Knowledge, a tightrope between your material body and your soul… learn to dance along this line. Do not focus on the rope, nor the destination, too much. Rather, focus on refining your movements along this rope, on its textures and length, on other ropes around you with their dancers. Spin webs from these ropes, immerse yourself in the fibres.

Extend. Extend your awareness beyond your own rope, beyond the awareness of other ropes around you, beyond the awareness of others tripping or clinging or hanging about their ropes frantically reaching for others to help them create a sturdiness which cannot be… Extend… Create not illusory bridges, but webs… Extend… find other seekers, know them by their dancing upon their ropes, by their skilled web-spinning…

Be gentle with yourself, move lightly through your learning. Knowledge emerges from the alchemy of these webs, it hovers ever-present in the spaces all around, it is your medium and your materiality… it Is.

Chapter Six

Dhikr: The Alchemy of Movements

(The Textuality of Learning-Environments)

Departures

Approaching Asma's front door, there's a notice pinned up that is welcoming all Seekers upon the Path, wishing them (Divine) Love and (Divine) Light, and requesting that they enter the home with the appropriate courtesy afforded to gatherings. This notice, from a long-past gathering, stays pinned up as a constant friendly reminder to leave the *dunyah* (the world and worldly concerns) at the door and enter as a wayfarer. The division between the *dunyah* nd the transcendental dhikr spaces highlights a duality in how spaces are perceived. I am hesitant to invoke the duality of sacred/profane because the *dunyah* is not considered to be apart from the sacred.

The *dunyah*, in the Islamic tradition, is linked to embodied practices of politics and economics, and is thus by nature tied to this world which prevents transcendental experiences. Dhikr, aimed at achieving a transcendental awareness, would be limited if the mind was still tied to the *dunyah*. These two spheres work in tandem

and mediate practices of stillness/movement. When entering the *dunyah*, the Sufi will 'still' their soul as their body fulfils its duties upon the earth, while in dhikr, the body is 'stilled' to allow the soul to travel.

Gatherings are often conducted in homes, considered by those attending to be places of rest and realignment. The gatherings serve as spaces of reaffirmation of one's spiritual development, as well as promoting community building. Walking through the wooden door, and you enter an open-plan home with a guest bathroom on your left, a kitchen on your right, and a dining room/dhikr space/lounge in an inverted L ahead of you. Upstairs are the bedrooms and *namaaz* (prayer) room. As soon as you enter the home, you remove your shoes and tuck them neatly to your left upon the tiles. Ingold remarks that "humans have not so much stridden across the surfaces of the earth as picked their way with bare, sandaled, or moccasined feet."[177] It is significant that before you enter the rest of the house, you remove your shoes because it is a symbolic detachment from the world and all the places that one frequents.

Although there are dualities of the material world and the eternal world, of the masculine and the feminine, etc., these different properties do not exist in oppositional relationships to one another as Bourdieu theorises space and habitus[178].

[177] Ingold, "Being Alive", 17.
[178] Bourdieu, "The Berber House or the World Reversed", (International Social Sciences Council, 1970); Bourdieu, "Physical Space, Social Space and Habitus", (Vilhelm Aubert Memorial Lecture, 1996); Bourdieu, "The Logic of Practice", Stanford University Press, 1990.

Bourdieu explains that "one or the other of the two systems of oppositions which define the house, either in its internal organisation or in the relationship with the outside world, will take prime importance according to whether the house is considered from the male point of view or the female point of view."[179] Where Bourdieu theorises an 'oppositional' approach to spaces, Sufi thought speaks of the 'duality' of spaces. Shaykh Kabir explains that "we are integral to this reality, not just a part of it, but one with it. We are not a *part* of the whole, we *are* the whole. The human being is all of Being, the drop that contains the Ocean."[180] This theorising of space is typical of what the Islamic tradition encourages.

Sufi thought holds that there are differences – masculine and feminine, in and out, etc. – but that these function so that one may know the other. Thus, the individual must know the outside world as well as the inside, understanding that there would be no one without the other. Similarly, in terms of the masculine and feminine, the individual must come to know the masculine and feminine even within oneself.

Other than the entrance of the house, the rest of the tiled floor is covered by rugs. The designated dhikr space (which replaced Asma's study as the group grew in numbers) is in the far left corner of the home. It is free of furniture, except for a bookcase against the wall and a small ornately decorated chest containing *musallahs* (prayer mats). In the middle of the space sits a pyramid of pillows, that Asma

[179] Bourdieu, "The Berber House", 165.
[180] Helminski, "The Knowing Heart", 9 [original italics].

deconstructs into a circle during dhikrs, and reconstructs afterwards to await the next session. The carpet and pillows in this space are all deep reds and turquoise blues. There are multiple *tasbeehs* (prayer beads) hanging from the burglar bars over the window – it is believed that if the beads are prayed upon and hung up, they keep praying. These types of properties possessed by objects is resonant of Ingold's discussion of the role of materials in an environment[181]. Ingold explains that to "describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate."[182] It is to this alchemy of materials and movements that I now turn.

Making Space[183]: Turning a Home into a Dhikr

Often, I would go earlier to Asma's house before the dhikr. This would give us time to chat and for me to ask her questions. Initially, while we were talking Asma would ask me to help her with the tasks involved in making her home 'dhikr-ready'. As time progressed, this became natural and we would fall into the routine.

To make the space ready, the pillows at the centre of the dhikr space are arranged into a circle, one pillow per person being laid out. Asma decides who will sit where –

[181] Ingold, "Being Alive".
[182] Ingold, "Being Alive", 30.
[183] Wilhelm Solomon et al., "Routes and Rites to the City; Douglass W. Bailey, "The Living House: Signifying Continuity", (The Social Archaeology of Houses, 1990); Boudieu, "The Berber House"; Ajay Gandhi, "Porous Boundaries: Hindu-Muslim Demarcation and Crossings in Delhi", (Topographies of Faith, 2013); Hansen et al., "Introduction: Portable Spirits".

the constant rotation of places serves as a symbolic reminder that we are travellers in this world and that we should not get attached to it. During the period of the transcendence dhikrs, we would lay the table for tea, and set out a few snacks. During the grounding dhikrs later on, we skip this step.

The room is lightly sprayed with rose water to spiritually cleanse the space. Then we would set up incense burners throughout the house. We burn mostly sandalwood, myrrh and rose incense because these are believed to be scents that encourage spiritual focus and clarity of mind and heart. Asma sets many incense sticks burning all at once, especially as people enter her home for the dhikr, because, as she explained, it helps to shock and quieten the mind so that those entering will immediately "drop into their hearts". Others are encouraged to bring their own incense as well and burn it during the session. This is encouraged so that a co-creation of the space can be fostered by all attending.

The transcendence dhikrs are held at night, when it is dark, and the day's activities are done. This time was chosen because it is easier to still the mind and focus on the inner self at the end of the day. The grounding dhikrs are held during the mid-morning, an abundance of light and warmth filters into the dhikr space. During the transcendence dhikrs, we were more practiced at stilling our minds and so the next stage in our learning was to preserve this state and extend its influence into the rest of our lived experience. While the transcendence dhikrs were held during the week,

the grounding dhikrs were necessarily moved to Saturday mornings to accommodate the worldly responsibilities of work.

Light blankets are set to one side of the dhikr space in case anyone wants to cover themselves. Often, those attending (men and women) bring a large scarf with them and use it to cover their heads and bodies. This is done as a symbolic cloaking of the self. In this way, harmony is brought into the space because all dualities – masculine and feminine, self and soul, the outer world and the inner world – are brought together through the act of cloaking and are all directed towards their ultimate source of Oneness, being Allah, that exists without an 'other'. As we are all seated, Asma will add the final act of preparation – passing around a small bottle of homemade perfume to awaken the senses and still the mind. It is made from a mixture of lemon juice (from lemons picked from the Shaykh's own lemon trees) and essential oils. This harmony of the senses that is shared by all in the gathering fosters a strong bond between the students and the teacher and the ultimate purpose for the gathering – spiritual development.

Shaykh Kabir emphasises that it is only through "conscious worship with a harmony of movement, sound, and breath, [that] certain states are facilitated that open us to the relatively infinite capacities of mind and heart."[184] Sound is disciplined in the dhikr space through being silent before dhikrs. Before the dhikr begins, everyone

[184] Helminski, "Living Presence", 20.

recites *la ilaha illallah* (there is no god but God) aloud and in harmony. It is repeated with Asma leading the recitations. She varies the tone and volume till everyone is in harmony. At this point, Asma begins to guide our breathing through various exercises and the dhikr is in session.

This type of intentional organisation of space shows the way in which the environment shapes our interpretation. Bourdieu explains that the "social space is an invisible set of relationships which tends to retranslate itself, in a more or less direct manner, into physical space in the form of a definite distributional arrangement of agents and properties."[185] Bourdieu outlines a movement from the social space into the physical space. He places an emphasis on the way in which our interpretations shape the physical environment. However, the Sufis engage a pedagogical method that recognises the dynamism of movement, and actively utilise the ways in which the environment shapes our interpretation.

Bailey[186] considers the multiplicity in the built environment, and in particular, the construction of the house. Bailey, citing Rapoport, explains that "of particular relevance to the multiplicity of meanings for a house is Rapoport's contention that it is inaccurate to consider a 'setting' or an 'activity' as a single unit. Rather, one must think in terms of systems of activities occurring in systems of settings."[187] By moulding the physical environment toward dhikr, Asma recreated the space of her

[185] Bourdieu, "Physical Space", 12.
[186] Bailey, "The Living House".
[187] Ibid., 25.

home into a space of spiritual transcendence. This movement of making space for the dhikr not only allowed a physical setting for the gathering, it created a space of remembrance. It created, in the present, a space for the past and for the future.

To push this a step further, the movements (physical and social) of dhikr created a moment in the present where linear time was collapsed. In speaking to the other students, many of the experiences that they shared, specifically those who were more experienced at the meditations, would report feeling as if they had "lost time" during the dhikrs or that they were beyond time, "during the dhikr it was as if no one was dead – I could feel the presence of Everyone – they were all there". "Thus,"[188] says Bailey, "a specific building is linked through the activity systems of its occupants to a social [and, I would add, temporal] context which exists beyond the limitations of its own physical [and temporal] boundaries. In this way, Rapoport introduces the multiplicity and changeability of meaning of the built environment."[189]

So How Does a (Spatio-Temporal) Traveller Inhabit Space?

Bourdieu explains that "human beings are at once biological beings and social agents who are constituted as such and through their relation to a social space."[190] Ingold

[188] Ibid., 25.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Bourdieu, "Physical Space", 11.

explains that "the organism (animal or human) should be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space."[191] Shaykh Kabir, in a blending of these perspectives, says that within the Islamic tradition, we must consider the acts of spiritual discipline and development as movements toward strengthening one's presence. He outlines presence as "the way in which we *occupy space*, as well as how we *flow and move*… Presence decides whether we leak and scatter our energy or embody and direct it."[192]

By understanding that for a Sufi, presence *is* the way they occupy space and the way they move – or live – we can understand the intimate connection between ourselves and the environment. This is significant because the way we consider human beings expands beyond just social and biological beings acting upon our physical environment, as per Bourdieu, rather we begin to consider human beings not only as their bodies, but also as their movements and occupations. In this way, we recognise the intimate dynamism in how our environment shapes our interpretation and how our interpretation shapes us.

Ingold considers dwelling as an alternative framework with which to theorise space. He explains that "dwelling, by contrast [to building], is intransitive: it is about the way inhabitants, singly and together, produce their own lives, and like life, it carries

[191] Ingold, "Being Alive", 64.
[192] Helminski, "Living Presence", x [own italics].

on. Critically, then, dwelling is not merely the occupation of structures already built: it does not stand to building as consumption to production. It rather signifies that immersion of beings in the currents of the lifeworld without which such activities as designing, building and occupation could not take place at all."[193] Ingold's understanding of dwelling is very similar to Shaykh Kabir's understanding of presence. It is in the movements, in the *moving*, that the dwelling occurs and in which our presence manifests and permeates. It is in using a home to transcend the material world – to transcend the home itself – that the dwelling becomes apparent. It is in dhikr, in constantly remembering Allah, our return to Unity – and departure from this world – that we can traverse this world. It is in these acts – these movements – that our presence is felt and manifests in this world.

Ingold goes further to say that in modern times "the once strong and positive orientation towards the ground is being eroded."[194] In dhikr, this positive orientation is re-established. While the transcendence dhikrs are oriented towards 'taking flight' – towards transcending the ground – it is only for a short period in order to understand what the ground is (what the material world is) and what is beyond it (the eternal world). Thus, in the consequent 'grounding' dhikrs there is a return to the earth (the material world) that calls for an immersion of oneself in the currents of life upon earth with the understanding that it is not permanent, and neither is one's place in it. This understanding affirms a twofold positive orientation toward the ground both literally and figuratively to maintain and preserve a good environment

[193] Ingold, "Being Alive", 9-10.
[194] Ingold, "Being Alive", 41.

for others and those to come. Asma, referencing a period of seclusion that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) undertook to the cave of Hira and his subsequent return to Mecca, explained that the 'grounding' dhikrs are meant to teach you that you can't remain in the cave, "you have to come down from the mountain."

Breath

Okri introduces his compilation of essays, *A Way of Being Free*, by saying that "all [he] wanted to do was remind [himself] at all times to just sing [his] song. To sing it through all the difficulties and silences. [He] hope[s] that those who read these essays might also enjoy mental strolling, might also want to sing their unique songs through the ambiguous times in which we breathe and dream."[195] Okri speaks of the breath being mobilised as something which is more than just individually sustaining, but as an act that itself animates and manifests in such a way that it is a source of healing and strength.

Ingold speaks of astonishment as a key aspect in wayfaring, "as the other side of the coin to the very *openness* to the world… yet along with openness comes vulnerability… those who are truly open to the world, though perpetually astonished, are never surprised. If this attitude of unsurprised astonishment leaves them vulnerable, it is also a source of strength, resilience and wisdom. For rather

[195] Ibid., xii.

than waiting for the unexpected to occur, and being caught out in consequence, it allows them at every moment to respond to the flux of the world with care, judgement and sensitivity."[196] Ingold goes on to speak of breath, saying that "inhalation is wind becoming breath, exhalation is breath becoming wind… acknowledging that the living body, as it breathes, is necessarily swept up in the currents of the medium,… the wind is not so much embodied as the body is *enwinded*… we should say of the body, as it sings, hums, whistles or speaks, that it is *ensounded*."[197]

The connection between one's breath and one's lifeforce is a well-established link. Williams and Carel[198] discuss the link between anxiety and breathlessness. They explain that at the root of this is a fear of accepting one's own mortality and inevitable death. Through establishing a sense of control and intentionality in one's breathing, the individual gains a sense of empowerment over their own life and its living. In Islam, the breath is emphasised in its mention in the Qur'an, that says that Allah breathed the *ruh* (the spirit/soul/animating lifeforce) into Adam. Breath, and breathing, come to be more than just products or processes of the material body. They come to symbolise the act of creation, and the moment when consciousness was born. Through dhikr, an acute awareness of intention is brought to one's breath, and the way in which one breathes.

[196] Ibid., 74-75.
[197] Ibid., 138.139 [original italics].
[198] Tina Williams and H. Carel, *Breathlessness: From bodily symptom to existential experience,* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

During the 'taking flight' dhikrs, we were asked to draw our attention to our breath. Although silence characterised this period, vocalisations did occur. As we began, Asma asked us to focus on inhaling with *al*, and exhaling with *lah*.

Al (The) – in.

Lah (One) – out.

Asma would ask us to feel the breath reach every cell in our bodies, to *feel* our creation in every cell of our bodies. This would be the entry into the dhikr. Once we were all still, Asma would have us repeat after her, overlaying our breathing of *al-lah* with *la ilaha illal'ah* (there is no God but Allah). This is the first part of the *shahada*, which is the Muslim declaration of faith. Asma would use this first part of the *shahada* to vary the rhythm of our breathing as well as the volume in which we recited it.

During the taking flight dhikrs, we were learning that we *could* learn as well as *how* to learn. Through reciting *al-lah* and the *shahada* along with Asma, learning to vary our tone and *feel* the knowledge in the verses, we were learning what it means to have *iman* (faith). Faith, here, isn't something you believe, but rather something that you *do*. Through beginning the dhikr by *doing* the shahada, declaring and reaffirming our faith, incorporating it into the practice of dhikr, we have several processes of remembering running parallel to each other: remembering Allah, the Unity we have all come from; remembering the promise of our souls to their Creator;

remembering to remember in our daily lives and incorporate this into our routines; remembering our souls; etc.

The less experienced meditators recited with Asma and other learned meditators that joined the dhikrs occasionally, but they did not lead the dhikrs. The dhikrs were led by those who had a recognised voice-authority in this space. Those recognised were those that had been given permission by the Shaykh to lead groups in dhikr. This was reflected in the sincerity of their voice. Bahr al-Ulum explains that "the emergence of wisdom from one's heart to his tongue is the result of travelling *within* the realm of sincerity. It is not about travelling in order to *achieve* sincerity."[199]

In one of the reflections that were shared after these sessions, Naeem and Sofia asked Asma how she knew when to vary the volume and the rhythm of the dhikr, and when to be silent. Asma smiled and said she just knew, she sought guidance from Allah and He guided her appropriately for what the moment required. The questions were repeated – but how do you *know*? Asma laughed gently at the urgency in the questions and said that as long as it was having a good result then that's what matters. After many months, she did add to this, telling me that "sometimes a phrase or something will pop into my head at a certain time and so I say it." She never claimed to have any saintly connection to Allah, rather explaining that anyone could interpret the moment in the way she did, but it required a heightened awareness of the present that not many people wanted to discipline

[199] Bahr al-Ulum, "Treatise", 17 [original italics].

themselves to. This is what characterises wayfarers, she said, they're committed to seeking, to knowing.

In this session of reflections, and a little while after the questions were posed to her, Asma reflected on her own voice during the dhikrs. She said it was always sweeter, softer than her usual talking voice. She shared how it took many years to find her voice and find the source of sweetness within her from which it came. Asma had been crafting her voice, just as she was encouraging us to craft our own now.

Breathing

We've just closed a dhikr session. We're all still sitting quietly, not yet ready to leave the charged space of the dhikr. Asma suggests we remain seated and share our reflections. We do. Each one shares, as we go around the circle. But still. We are not yet ready to leave. Mariam closes her eyes and hums deeply. It sounds as if her lungs are cavernous. We follow suit, closing our eyes. She falls into the familiar dhikr format of reciting certain phrases. We all join in. Her voice is strong, and powerful, and as sad as it is happy. She leads us through a loud recitation and leaves us gently on whispers.

When we open our eyes again, there are many tears, but none more so than hers. Mariam is thanked for adding her voice to the moment. It has allowed everyone to feel the repertoire of what they had been unable to release in the previous moments. Now. Now, we can stand up and end the formal dhikr.

The way that Mariam uses her breath, practiced in the formats of dhikr, is twofold. Firstly, she is actively teaching the others how to control their breathing toward a focused dhikr intention. Secondly, she is manifesting her*self* through her breathing. She is sharing her own sincerity of Spirit with others in the room. Okri says that "stories may well be some hidden divinity's dialogue with the human soul."[200] Mariam sharing her voice in a dhikr is like broadcasting this channel of communication. Each person opens this channel to different parts in the story as it were, and so the experience from Asma's dhikr to Mariam's would be different but still connected to the same source.

Myers, Lewis and Dutton, in a study regarding the role of breath and silence in meditation, say that the "practice of using pain to open the heart and connect to others also allows a person to focus one's self in a kind of communication with the self that is different from psychotherapy."[201] Mariam uses her breath as a way to ease the group into a collective silence so that each person can address their emotions in a way that they find to be appropriate. Yet, by collectively addressing individual inner

[200] Okri, "A Way", 36.
[201] Neely Myers, S. Lewis, and M. A. Dutton, "Open Mind, Open Heart: An Anthropological Study of the Therapeutics of Meditation Practice in the US", (Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry website, 2015).

pain, the process of having to address it becomes easier to manage. By emphasising the role of the breath in the dhikrs, breath becomes not only a way to calm and centre the individual, but as Kenner explains, becomes "a sense of *breathing-with*, an orientation that allows us to think about environments and the spaces we share with others."[202]

In the instance above, Mariam used her breath to ease a transition in the social gathering that allowed those gathered to release whatever was holding them through a collective expression of release. She used the art of the sincerity in her voice in a manner that was relevant to the moment. This ability to hone one's skills – be it in crafting one's sincerity to voice, one's habits, one's book knowledge – is always considered relevant and truly a part of successful learning if the person is able to put these skills to use in a practical way.

Crossings

"For there to be rhythm, movement must be *felt*… By way of perception, the practitioner's rhythmic gestures are attuned to the multiple rhythms of the environment. Thus, any task, itself a movement, unfolds within the 'network of movements' in which the existence of every living being, animal or human, is suspended."[203] What Ingold refers to as rhythm[204], Kalla refers to as the sacred

[202] Ali Kenner, "Invisibilities: Provocation", (Cultural Anthropology website, 2013).
[203] Ingold, "Being Alive", 60 [original italics].
[204] Ibid.

alchemy[205] that occurs when seeking spiritual transformation. Asma too would speak of the alchemy, an often-used concept in Sufism, that occurs as one begins strengthening one's presence through dhikr and begins to be, or feel, the knowledge they are engaging.

Both Bahr al-Ulum and Ingold emphasise in their theorising of wayfaring[206] and living systems[207] respectively, the alchemical process – a bond between person and person, and person and environment. It is this approach, focusing on fluidity and movement, that allows for a person's consciousness to momentarily transcend their bodies.

Viewing bodies and places as fluid elements, able to be combined to produce transcendental experiences and states, indicates an engagement with not only space, but also the body as within space and time, and therefore, as malleable. By disciplining both the environment (through preparation practices before a dhikr), to disciplining the body (through breathing techniques and focused thought), the consciousness is made to transcend space/time and experience the transcendental. As mentioned in a prior chapter, those skilled at meditation acquire 'weighty' presences, while those that are less skilled have 'flighty' presences. This paradox of becoming heavier when transcending the body hints at, as per Sufi thought, the necessity of duality in all experience.

[205] Kalla, "Sacred Alchemy".
[206] Bahr al-Ulum, "Treatise".
[207] Ingold, "Being alive".

Rest

Dear drunken hermit

You come boasting of your Beloved.

You burst forth as a streamlet that has found the ocean.

You preach to all who will give you half an ear – I have found what we have been searching for! I have found Her, our Beloved!

You yell out for all to hear – here She is, here She is! Do you not see Her? Is She not lovely?

Besotted, have you not yet learnt the courtesy of knowledge? Have your lips, your tongue, your mouth, not learnt mindfulness? Will they just rattle on, stuffing theirs and others ears full of words that were never meant for them?

Soon you will learn that you cannot bully your way with knowledge. You must treat it gently, infuse yourself with it, learn what it is and act as it would. Learn to sew with dexterity your intentions and actions with this golden thread you have found. Work at it every day and every night, add stitches and revise those you have completed to make sure all is blending well. Hold the overall pattern in mind always, but do not get so focused on what it will become that you act hastily to get there and admire your work. Easy, gently, softly. Work with your creation. Let it do its work on you. Every now and then, take it outside and dust it out, let the threads glisten in the sunlight and dazzle the passers-by. Do not tarry too long now, gather up your bundle and take it back inside.

Invite others. Be invited by others. Show each other the patterns each is weaving. See how it all fits together. See how all the threads catch the light differently, but when put together, side by side, it is a single point of utter illumination. Bathe in that light. But not too long. We live in the world of shadows, and to this world you must return.

Do you see now? A little more perhaps? You have found a ray of light, intended for you, and you are trying to blind all around you with it.

Be courteous, young one, all in its time and in its way.

Chapter Seven

Dhikr: Taking Flight and Grounding

(Embodied and Ensouled Approaches to Knowledge)

Departures

The Sufi youth group began during my year of fieldwork. The format of the group over this time changed to accommodate the progress of the students. Initially, as the students were new to dhikr, the meditations of the group were focused on transcendence meditations. The main purpose of these meditations was for students to be initiated into the practices of dhikr and of learning the differences between their body and their soul (between experiencing ultimate Duality and Unity). The interpretation of texts, during this initial phase, is used to frame the experience of the body. As the students became adept at experiencing nuanced dhikr sessions, the meditations of the group became more theory-based. These meditations were for students to become fluent in practices of dhikr and to focus on crafting their bodily presence. During this secondary phase, the experience of the body is used to frame the interpretation of texts.

The format of these meditations emphasises how the body shapes, and is shaped by, interpretation practices. Wright[208] likens this process to an epistemology of embodied knowledge, "except that approaches to knowledge were usually assumed in practice, only rarely articulated as 'epistemology', and except that the teacher's implantation of sacred knowledge in human hearts transformed physical beings entirely, transcending the specific corporeality normally associated with embodiment… [Rather,] as the means to actualising Muslim identity in the contemporary world."[209] I will discuss these movements of interpretation within the two main phases that occurred in terms of the meditation format: firstly, I will discuss the body being shaped by interpretation through the transcendence meditations, which were referred to as 'taking flight' dhikrs; secondly, I will discuss the body shaping interpretation through the theory-based meditations, which were referred to as 'grounding' dhikrs; and thirdly, I will end with a discussion to show how these approaches towards texts and the body are resonant with critical approaches to pedgagogy. As Wright points to, within these phases, learning is framed not only as an embodied process, but as something that transcends embodiment. I motivate for "ensoulment"[210] as a way to understand this process.

For Sufi's, "true knowledge [is] contained in people, and transmitted in their company"[211]. Ingold, drawing on Merleau-Ponty, echoes this perspective when he argues that "the living body is primordially and irrevocably stitched into the fabric

[208] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 4.
[209] Ibid., 4.
[210] Asad, "Formations", 89.
[211] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 1.

of the world, [and that] our perception of the world is no more, and no less, than the world's perception of itself – in and through us."[212] Approaching the meditation space with this in mind, Sufi gatherings become dynamic sites in which bodies are actively engaged in being shaped and in shaping others and their environment. Being able to read the textuality of these gatherings depends on how habituated and intentional one's own body is, and how learned one is in sacred knowledge. Through learning how to discipline one's body in dhikr, students begin learning to read their environments, and as they became more perceptive, they are encouraged to begin actively engaging in their environments through selected texts.

Manifesting and gaining knowledge through the intertwining of theory and practice is typical of Islamic understandings of identity[213]. Through the highly personalised[214] relationships between students and their teacher, thorough "attention [is paid] to the pedagogical process by which a habitus is learned"[215]. Citing Ibn Khaldun, Wright explains that habit "belongs solely and exclusively to the scholar or the person well versed in scientific disciplines…All habits are corporeal, whether they are of the body, or… from man's ability to think… [and] all corporeal things are sensibilia. Thus, they require instruction."[216] Shaykh Helminski discusses realisation as "not

[212] Ingold, "Being Alive", 13.
[213] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 4.
[214] Shah, "The Way"; Wright, "Living Knowledge".
[215] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 11.
[216] Ibid., 12.

merely knowing something but making it real in oneself… the West offers few traditional models for this kind of intentional human development."[217]

Within Sufism, studentship (receiving spiritual instruction) is a position that is earned. The potential student must show a desire to learn. In speaking to Asma, she explained that there is a courtesy to knowledge – it would be unkind to burden a person with knowledge that they are not ready to hold within themselves. For this reason, knowledge is passed on to students gradually, as they delve deeper into their studies and cultivate the necessary habits. This approach to the transmission of knowledge between people upholds a firm hierarchy of teacher and student, with most members inhabiting both roles.

In conversation with Naeem and Sofia, they expressed an initial concern raised by their parents that they did not know all they would learn if they only received knowledge in bits and pieces. For the Sufi, it is considered to be discourteous to pass on knowledge that someone is not ready to receive. Of course, concerns over who deems whether a person is 'ready' or not are significant as it can be used to maintain a power dynamic. The responsibility of avoiding this fate falls to the student to choose a sincere Shaykh with integrity[218]. By framing life as a process of constant wayfaring, of constant journeying, Sufi's believe that it is through seeking

[217] Helminski, "Living Presence", 10.
[218] Bahr al-Ulum, "Treatise".

knowledge that one comes across it. As Shaykh Kabir puts it: "A person must work to become human."[219]

Taking Flight

"Get comfortable." We're sitting cross-legged on one of many small pillows, each arranged carefully to form a circle. "Breathe. Let your breath fill every atom of your being. Feel the oxygen reaching every part of your body. Then slowly – slowly – release your breath. Let everything that you have stored in your body – the anxiety, the stress, the to-do lists, the thoughts and the distractions – all be released from your body along with the breath. Inhale Unity and exhale Duality. Let your self be emptied. And when you think that you are empty, then dig further into your body, into your being – allow your breath to penetrate every cell of your being, and with every exhalation allow your self to empty some more." Asma breathed the words gently.

For the first few months, the group engaged in transcendence dhikrs which took place in the evenings, once all other responsibilities were seen to and we could clear our minds easier and focus on the meditations. We would gather at Asma's home at least twice a month. The gatherings were conducted in silence, with strictly meditation-focused conversation after the session when tea was shared. The meditations were an hour long. We would sit in a circle and Asma would guide the session with short phrases to focus our attention on the task of disciplining our bodies and thoughts.

[219] Helminski, "Living Presence", 8.

The first few sessions were healing sessions intended to cleanse our bodies of any past traumas that we had been carrying. Asma would instruct us toward visualisations of the *nur* of Allah ("the Divine Light of Allah") that we were to sense and enter. A strong emphasis was placed on dissolving into this Light and absolving ourselves of any anxieties. When ending these meditation sessions, Asma would encourage us to "bathe in this Light and open your eyes from within this ever-flowing Light". In speaking to Sofia, Samiya and Naeem, they all said that they felt an immense sense of peace after these meditations. Sofia, who had meditated for the first time when attending the dhikrs, said she cried during her first dhikr. She explained that they were tears of relief from sensing the presence of Allah in such a focused manner. She said that she felt like traumas that she had been carrying for years were being lifted from her shoulders and she felt "lighter".

The next few sessions were focused on reaching a sense of Unity – of leaving the material world of Duality and experiencing the Oneness of existence. In these meditations Asma would instruct us to see the *nur* of Allah and "fly toward it". When ending these meditations, Asma would gently draw attention to our bodies before closing the session. She would tell us to remember Earth, "to find the ground we are sitting upon, see your bodies and sit within yourself, touch your fingertips together and wiggle your toes, and when you feel settled open your eyes." Everyone in the group expressed feelings of being intoxicated after these meditations. When I spoke to Asma about this, she said that transcendence meditations have these effects because you are experiencing a sense of Oneness, a taste of truly being Home, after

only knowing what it is to be a traveller in this life. Al-Jilani speaks of this being the literal effects of dhikr, of remembrance[220]. He explains the Sufi understanding that souls are created from the Divine Light of Allah and have descended from this realm into the material world[221]. He goes further to explain that a "time came when these souls started binding themselves to the flesh and forgot their source"[222]. Within this understanding, dhikr is the act of remembering one's source of creation and living in this life with the practical understanding that all of existence comes from the same source.

In this first phase of the group's transcendence meditations, the body is framed as being a vessel to be emptied of the self. The dhikrs are focused on experiencing the body as a site of temporary belonging. In this period, the ultimate focus is toward experiencing Oneness. Asma explained to me that this manifests in the learning process in many ways. Large amounts of *oudh* (a type of incense) is burnt to shock the senses upon entering to make it easier for students to focus on the present moment and draw them out of their minds and prevent them from dwelling on distracting thoughts. There is an emphasis on silence when entering Asma's house until the end of the meditation. This emphasis on silence is intended to erode individual egos and have the students think collectively with one purpose in mind. When sitting within the meditation circle, students are encouraged to cross their legs and place a scarf or shawl over their legs and drape another one over their heads. A

[220] Al-Jilani, "The Secret".
[221] Ibid., 6.
[222] Ibid., 7.

lowering of the gaze toward the ground is encouraged as a part of the courtesies. This is intended to focus the students' attention on each other's bodily presence, rather than physical attributes.

Students are encouraged to bring something small to eat to add to the tea table. This is intended to humble them when entering the meditation and ease them into accepting guidance from Asma, because they are entering the meditation space with an offering and acknowledgement of their host and teacher. Herbal teas are served by Asma at the end of each session, the flavour of which depends on what mood she wants to set for the reflection session. Additionally, Asma lays out a small bowl or two of salted snacks on the table, intended to create a sobering experience after the 'high' of the meditation. Conversation during tea is kept strictly, but gently, focused on reflections from the meditation.

Most of the students that attend the meditations know Asma in some way but do not know each other. By controlling the content of the conversation, there is an implicit emphasis on the lack of biographical exchange of information. Information exchange is focused solely on experiences of meditations and of texts framing Sufism and dhikr. Often, as students are departing, Asma gifts them a copy of one of Shaykh's books dealing with certain aspects of Sufism, or they return a book that they have read to be loaned another one.

The students' bodies are strictly controlled in this phase of learning. From the moment they enter the meditation space, they train their body to behave in certain ways. Ingold says of human beings that "like all other creatures, human beings… swim in an ocean of materials."[223] Sufi's intimately recognise the 'ocean of materials' that they are teaching and learning within, and intentionally harness their environment to aid in the learning process. By being mindful of the materiality of their bodies and surrounds, they manifest their knowledge even within the learning process.

Students are first expected to train their bodies and minds in service to the knowledge they seek, and it is only after they achieve this that they begin to directly engage with a discussion of the texts. Students develop a strong sense of being not just a part of a community, but part of a family. Naeem, explaining what it was about the meditation space that allowed for the development of such intimate bonds, said that in his life, even with his biological family, he constantly felt a need to explain himself and why he is changing his habits. Within the meditation space, he explained, we are all there for the same reason. This is strongly resonant of Selim's discussion of the intimate friendships that are formed in silence, from deeply listening and focusing on the same task[224].

[223] Ingold, "Being Alive", 24.
[224] Selim, "Friendship".

All movements and framing techniques in this phase are geared towards students learning the practices of dhikr and the differences between the body and the soul (between Duality and Unity). Through disciplining the body and framing the experience of the body as that of a vessel, a site of temporary belonging, students learn to experience their own and others' bodily presence. Bodies are initiated into practices of meditation with the intention of becoming skilled to engage with the texts that, at this phase, are being used to shape the body and lived experience.

Grounding

"Close your eyes. Fall into your breaths. See yourself sitting here, step outside of your body, face yourself. Look at yourself, enter your Inner being through your forehead… Travel downwards, veering slightly left till you reach your heart. Set to work clearing out the distractions and the pain that has cluttered up your heart. Dust all the corners of your heart, then travel further – enter your heart of hearts. Set to work clearing what you find here… Repeat this process over and over, going further into yourself, till you feel you cannot go any further. When you have reached the deepest you can go, sit down in the centre of your heart, as you are sitting now. And when you are ready, open your eyes from the depths of your heart." Asma spoke the words sweetly, in a tone I now recognised as her 'dhikr-voice', reserved only for these moments.

In the latter months of the year that I was with the group, we engaged in dhikrs focused on 'grounding', on theory-based meditations. The format of these meditations was a ten-minute silent meditation at the beginning at ending of the

session to centre your self on the 'heart' aspect of your bodily presence. In between the silent meditations, was an hour-long discussion on a chosen *surah*, section of the Qur'an, that is chosen by Asma. In contrast to the transcendence meditations, these took place at Asma's house in the early morning and took place once a month. This forced students to exit and enter the 'outside world' of the meditative sphere during the processes of life and living. There was also no tea served afterward, so we went straight from the meditations into our lives and were left to reflect between ourselves and largely on our own.

Initially, students found this change difficult, because they felt a stark tension in having to balance the dhikr sessions which sought to detach the self from the material world and having to go about their daily responsibilities and interactions immediately before and after which absorbed them into attachments with the material world. I found that I adjusted to this change a bit easier because I was used to leaving the dhikr and mulling over what happened as I went about the other tasks before I was able to record and reflect on my experiences in a private moment as a part of my research process. This tension was raised by the students, and Asma explained that this was an important lesson in how take the lessons they were learning in the dhikr sessions and apply it to all aspects of their lived experience. By placing the dhikr sessions at an earlier slot in the day, amidst other activities of living, it was intended to teach the students how to be wayfarers and experience their bodies as vessels in all situations, not just the contained space of the dhikr sessions.

In the first few 'grounding' sessions, the discussions centred on reflections of chosen texts from the Qur'an through intellectualising. Students were encouraged to share their thoughts on the possible interpretations of the verses that were being discussed. In these sessions, Naeem, Zain, and Muhammad tended to monopolise on the conversation. Naeem, upon sharing his thoughts, would often reference other scholars and their works, hands and head gesturing to the heavens almost as if in prayer as he spoke. When I asked Asma her thoughts about the dhikr sessions, she shared that she was concerned that speaking about our thoughts regarding the texts was creating an intellectual arrogance in the space. She quoted Imam Ali, who said that "words spoken from the heart, will touch the heart, but words spoken from the mouth, will only touch the ears". Shortly after this discussion, after having consulted the Shaykh about her concerns, she changed the format of the group.

The next few sessions were focused on speaking from our hearts and sharing knowledge that was **felt** when reading the texts – what we were feeling, where we were feeling it in our bodies, how it was feeling. When we reflected on the chosen verses for these sessions, there was a lot less speaking. When Naeem's turn came around, he began, "This reminds me of a book I read where'"

Asma gently interrupted him, "How does it make you feel?"

He paused, lowered his head and bunched his eyebrows, "This is a powerful verse."

"So it makes you feel powerful?"

A pause, and then he responded, "No… **It** is powerful… I feel humbled, I feel awe." In this way Asma pushed us to share what we were learning based on how it was feeling, sharing what we were learning by the ways in which we were being affected by the knowledge. As we read the texts, we now refrained from abstracting the texts. Asma forced us to reflect on what the knowledge was doing to us, what, after having read the verses, was happening to ourselves. In this way, we used our experiences of our bodies to frame interpretations of the texts.

During these 'grounding' meditations, students began to exchange biographical information. After the dhikrs, and during socials that we organised to get to know one another, we began extending our social sphere. Having shared in the dhikrs together, this allowed us to fall into an easy familiarity when we met on social grounds.

During this time, Naeem received permission from the Shaykh to start his own dhikr group, under Asma's guidance, with a slightly different format. Hasan also received permission to start a group, which he formatted as a Sufi poetry group, performing dhikr through Rumi's poetry. Students from Asma's group were invited to attend the other groups alongside others that were being invited into those spaces. A sense of community was growing. This expansion in our social circles occurred as we entered the second phase of dhikrs within Asma's group. Sufis believe that a person gains an identity through others and that it is through others that knowledge is

transferred[225]. The overlapping movements of a growth in social circles as there is a growth occurring in spiritual knowledge being gained, reflects this belief. This shows that the students, having learned to sense theirs and others' bodily presences in the first phase of meditations, were beginning to consciously shape their own and put it into play with more intentionality in their lived experience.

Beyond the Body

"You know the way now. Remember what we've done in previous sessions and repeat the process. Go deeper into your heart and your self. When you feel you can go no further, open your eyes."

By framing the body, during the 'taking flight' and 'grounding' dhikrs, as a vessel through which the interpretation of texts is filtered and as a mechanism of filtering the interpretation of texts, Sufis engage in a process of knowledge production that is more resonant of knowledge *transmission*. By acutely disciplining the body and learning how to filter and make sense of experiences of the body, the body becomes a tool in knowledge transmission to be used at the will of the individual.

Shah provides a commentary by Junubi regarding the treatment of Sufi knowledge:

> "it does not refer to book-knowledge, something which can be written down or preserved in factual form; because such material would not be diminished by

[225] Wright, "Living Knowledge", 21.

> exposing it to someone who might fail to benefit from it. It is the knowledge given in the time and manner which verifies and makes live the book-knowledge. 'Giving knowledge which can be lost' refers to allowing certain 'states' of recognition of truth to be engendered in an individual before that person is in a condition to preserve that state; hence he loses its advantage and it is lost."[226]

During the 'taking flight' dhikrs, students used textual interpretations to frame their bodies, they learnt to experience their body as a vessel and what this meant for their lived experience. In the 'grounding' dhikr sessions, students used the experiences of their bodies to frame their interpretations of texts. These movements of interpretation, from being text-based to be more body-based seems to refer to an embodied sense of knowledge. However, considering the expanded sense of the body, and acknowledging rather, the bodily presence, students explore a process of knowledge transmission that is **ensouled**. Asad describes ensoulment as "the idea that the living human body is an integrated totality having developable capacities for activity and experience unique to it, the capacities for sensing, imagining, and doing that are culturally mediated."[227]

Ingold speaks about the body's capacity to remember when he says that "*only the body remembers*… the hand can bring itself into use, and in its practised movements can tell the story of its own life."[228] Thinking about this through the lens of dhikr, it

[226] Shah, "The Way", 62.
[227] Asad, "Formations", 89.
[228] Ingold, "Being Alive", 58 [original text italics].

is more than just an enacting of remembrance or remembering, it is, as Al-Jilani outlines, the intimate remembrance of Allah despite the forgetfulness of the flesh-body[229]. Dhikr is more than embodied learning, because knowledge is not produced or consumed by the body. Knowledge is *awakened*[230] to by the spirit within the forgetfulness of the flesh. By this we can understand that knowledge is not considered located within the body, but rather within the spirit that is enrobed by the body. It is for this reason that ensoulment is a useful concept to think with when considering Sufi practices of knowledge transmission.

The positioning of the theory sessions (learning about different interpretations and translations of the Qur'an), in the middle of the guided meditation seems paradoxical if we understand the dhikr to be a meditation in the sense of achieving relaxation. However, dhikr is an act of remembrance[231]. To situate a theory session, pre-fixed and suffixed with a guided transcendence meditation, is to intimately connect the body, mind, and soul in the process of thinking and learning such that the knowledge learned is not only embodied, but ensouled.

[229] Al-Jilani, "The Secret".
[230] Ibid.
[231] Selim, "Healing the City"; Al-Jilani, "The Secret".

Crossings

Within the Sufi pedagogical process, there is a seamless blending between lived experience and theology. This is reflected not only in individual dhikr structures, but also the overall course of learning. This approach towards knowledge and pedagogy that Sufis engage in is resonant of Freire's notion of progressive education[232]. In considering the "basic theme of ethnoscience today: how to avoid a dichotomy between the knowledges, the popular and the erudite[,]… [he explains that] with progressive education, respect for the knowledge of living experience is inserted into the larger horizon against which is it generated."[233]

The initial transcendence dhikrs were focused on healing within the dhikr itself and in the subsequent discussions that were considered to be a part of the process of "unburdening". The next few dhikrs centred on experiencing the body as a vessel and emptying it of the self/ego. Hooks describes this approach toward pedagogy that is inclusive of the soul and a sense of well-being. She emphasises teaching in a way that "respects and cares for the souls of our students."[234] Hooks problematises the "objectification of the teacher… '[that] denigrate[s] notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports

[232] Freire, Paulo, and A. M. A. Freire, "EPZ Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed", (A&C Black, 2004).
[233] Freire and Freire, "EPZ Pedagogy", 3.
[234] Bell Hooks, "Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope", (Psychology Press, 2003), 13.

compartmentalisation."[235] Through Asma making herself emotionally available – not as a therapist – but as a guide to ensure the well-being of the students before they even engaged the theory, shows this. the students themselves, during this phase, learnt that their learning was their responsibility.

The theory-based dhikrs began with intellectually engaging different *surahs* from the Qur'an, and the various perspectives and interpretations that exist. However, when Asma felt that the link between the theory and the impact of what it was seeking to instil in the students was being lost through excessive theorising, she changed the format. The following dhikrs were centred around the effects of what the theory was speaking to in terms of the lived experiences of the students. This ability to be flexible in one's approach towards pedagogy is important to avoid reinforcing "the dualistic separation of public and private [that] encourage[es] teachers and students to see no connection between life practices, habits of being, and the role of the professors."[236]

[235] Hooks, "Teaching Community", 15.
[236] Ibid., 15.

[Rest]

Dear Seeker

A teacher once told me that knowledge is a spectrum. It is not about belief. We absorb knowledge and it infuses us. Like petrified wood, that which we absorb displaces other elements in us until we become the knowledge that we have absorbed.

Epilogue: A Becoming

"He himself could not decide how to respond: whether congratulations or condolences should come first.

'The world must feel much smaller to you.' he said timidly, and then wondered what had prompted him to say so.

The convert considered this for a moment.

'No,' she said. 'Just the opposite. I feel like the horizon has been pushed back and there's infinitely more between it and me than I once thought. And yet I have less anxiety about everything. About what I'm supposed to do, what I'm supposed to think, how I can stay in control of my life. I've just stopped trying. I just act, now, just respond to whatever the situation demands. I'm not so committed to the rational barrier between seen and unseen. It feels like – like passing straight from disbelief into certainty. Without stopping at belief in between.'" – G. Willow Wilson, Alif the Unseen[237]

The past year has had a significant impact upon me and my life. Methodologically adopting the framework of wayfaring as a part of my lived experience has allowed me to engage the process of becoming that a wayfarer travels as an ensouled being. While I struggled for most of the year, trying to make sense of the intellectual and the spiritual aspects of my learning (and in many instances attempting to decipher which is which), I have come to the understanding that these need not be separate processes. The initial phase of the research process allowed for the dichotomy of

[237] G. Willow Wilson, "Alif the Unseen: A Novel", (Grove/Atlantic Inc., 2012), 345.

intellectual and spiritual to be maintained. My engagement with the Sufi youth group as a researcher concerned with immersion, meant that I entered the dhikr spaces as a full participant, not trying to identify themes or dissonances, not trying in any way to assess the moment other than being present.

When outside of the dhikr space, I would read up on Sufism, the concept of wayfaring, and anthropological accounts of meditation and engaging the transcendental. I had perceived this process of 'reading' as the intellectual work and consolidation. Yet, even within this activity I found a separation being made between what is considered an 'anthropological' text and thus weightier, and what is considered a 'Sufi' text and thus subject to further analysis and scrutiny. Having to subject the Sufi texts to further analysis by considering the ways in which the language used perpetuated certain world views and cosmologies, while not being expected to apply this reasoning to the anthropological texts, created a dissonance within myself. There was an implicit assumption being perpetuated in this activity that said that the anthropological accounts held some sort of higher truth because of the emphasis on rationality that the Sufi texts did not hold because of their inclusion of the transcendental, and thus irrational, into their accounts, which disqualified them as likely to hold any higher truth.

As I tried to consolidate a way forward that drew together both approaches, I began reflecting on experiences from a spiritual point of view, and then from an intellectual

point of view. This stripped Sufi thought down to being just a spiritual perspective. After some time, realising that I had began to perpetuate the spiritual/intellectual dichotomy in my own experiences and writings, I tried to re-enter the writing process in a way that would engage, on level-footing, each of the perspectives.

While the structure of my paper did allow me to achieve this balance slightly more, I found it difficult, after spending the year with the Sufi youth group, to then step back from my engagement and dissect it critically. However, it was writing from within the Sufi cosmology, that treats knowledge as something that emerges from experience, that I saw what a bridge between communities could be, because the anthropological tradition emphasises the importance of experience as well, in the research process.

Within my writing, I tend to lapse into a focus on experience and description, perhaps at the sacrifice of a more critical engagement with the themes (which I believe will come further into the maturing process). What I offer is a paper that seeks to creatively engage what it means to be an anthropologist in the field, as well as how we approach the writing process itself to convey knowledge and experience.

Passing Barriers

As mentioned in the first chapter, this paper imagines itself as a bridge between scholarly communities – a passage that allows movement between orientations, rather than being a destination itself. Navigating its way between the cautioning from a Sufi teacher to not allow the "academic gaze" be a hindrance to spiritual education on one hand, and the cautioning from an academic teacher to be wary of losing a critical gaze on the other hand. This paper, and the experiences that went into producing it, have been a difficult education in the complexities that arise when writing across communities and cosmologies. However, through my active engagement with the research and writing process I have been guided by the resonances and infusions that emerged. Entering the dhikrs with an acceptance of the knowledges of the space allowed me to anthropologically engage the spiritual and transcendental in a manner that sought bridges and connections rather than barriers.

The conceptual and lived framework of wayfaring, one which I adopted into my lived experience over the course of the year, produced interesting tensions and inspirations within the conversation of living knowledge[238] and living systems[239].

[238] Wright, "Living Knowledge".
[239] Ingold, "Being alive".

This ultimately guided my attention to expanding upon Asad's[240] theorising of ensoulment, which runs throughout the paper in various ways.

Elaborating upon wayfaring as a framework that sustains a transnational community and yet is not tied to earthly sites, with 'home' a destination beyond the material world, allowed an exploration of the notions of distance and travel. This discussion flowed into another regarding the implications of what a society of travellers that are hovering in a state of constant unrooting means for social ties and relations. The ongoing role that silence played in these interactions as both a medium for spiritual knowledge, and friendship and belonging was significant and extended Selim's[241] and Pagis'[242] theorising of the role of silence in meditative spaces and relationships in an ongoing relationship.

Furthermore, the making of the religious space, discussed in chapter six, opened an understanding in Sufi thought of bodies and places as fluid elements that are malleable in allowing access to transcendental experience.

Finally, chapter seven engaged the role of the body and pedagogy in dhikrs. Experienced as a vessel, the body interprets, and I interpreted by spiritual texts (primarily the Qur'an). This both active and passive role of the body in accessing the

[240] Asad, "Formations".
[241] Selim, "Friendship".
[242] Pagis, "Producing Intersubjectivity".

transcendental situates the body within a broader cosmology that recognises and experiences spiritual knowledge as ensouled.

From Disbelief to Certainty

Throughout my paper, I have refrained from referring to practices of 'belief', rather focusing on 'ways of knowing' or 'ensouled knowledge' as frameworks through which to understand the practices of the Sufi youth group. I have done this to avoid the dichotomy of rational/irrational that the word 'belief' incurs. For the Sufis, religion and spirituality is not about belief, it is about knowing.

I first met the Shaykh of the group at his home in PTA, which is attached to the community's mosque. Asma introduced me to him, and he invited us into his garden. Leaning on my shoulder for support over the uneven paving that led to the garden, I was intimately aware of his humanness and age. He claimed neither sainthood nor beyond humanly powers. Overseeing his lemon trees and lemongrass that were thriving, he picked some of each and filled our arms.

"It makes very good tea." He smiled and nodded.

We moved toward the shaded area of the garden. There were couches with many cushions, a glass table in the middle of the space, and vines trailing overhead, lazily

lounging from the wooden frame of the gazebo. We fell into conversation. Shaykh spoke about many things, lingering on the nature of time and space. He ended by saying that,

"All of this," he gestured upwards, smiling, "is as it should be."

"I cannot even comprehend that." I said.

"It's not meant to be comprehended, it just is." Came Shaykh's reply.

This approach towards knowledge as known and awakened to within the body is at stark contrast to the practices of 'belief' that are often associated with religious and spiritual discourse in anthropology. Consequently, the literature that I have proceeded from, are those that would allow for and interact within this framework. In my discussion of practices of dhikr and the treatment of knowledge as ensouled, I have sought to present my paper in a way that captures the experience of *knowing* the transcendental and religious.

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