



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia



CENTRO STUDI  
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ  
COMPARATE

*fondazione* ONLUS  
**GIORGIO CINI**

## Call for Papers

### Sufism and Gender in Contemporary Societies



“Sound 6” @Maimouna Guerresi

**Symposium**  
**Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 03 December 2021**

Sufism, a spiritual and esoteric tradition in Islam, is experiencing a period of renewal as charismatic leaders attract new disciples from different sociocultural backgrounds around the world. The globalization of Sufism also marked the rising visibility of female, Queer, and non-binary Sufi masters and disciples. As the issues of gender are also closely intertwined with the debates of Islam's compatibility with modernity, secularism, and democracy, women and non-binary bodies have emerged as the main site of contestation not only among politicians, intellectuals, and theologians, but also across a variety of Sufi traditions ranging from the most progressive to the most conservative. On the one hand, often dubbed as the moderate, liberal, and tolerant face of Islam, Sufism seems to open up more possibilities for spaces, ritual access, and leadership roles for women and non-binary Muslims; such access is premised on interpretations of Islamic resources like the Qur'an and hadith. At the same time, new Sufi leaders have increasingly challenged the traditional Islamic heteronormativity and offered progressive interpretations that are also compatible with secular-liberal values. Still, many other Sufi leaders around the world have been acting as the guardians of a patriarchal Islamic tradition within the Sufi brotherhoods. As such, the historical and contemporary terrain of Sufism's entanglements with gendered norms are complex, contested, and diverse.

This conference then aims to explore these themes of gender and sexuality within contemporary and historical Sufi traditions. Keeping in mind the call to decolonize knowledge production and epistemologies that subvert binaries of "resistance versus subordination" in Muslim women's life-worlds, we aim to take an expansive discussion of the complex processes of the agentive formation of gendered Sufi subjectivities. Some of the questions we would like to explore, are as follows, but not limited to: How do the Sufis inhabit their religious and sexual identities in the Sufi path? How do various Sufis engage with the issues of gender and social change around the world? In what ways do the Sufis challenge or reinforce heteronormative regimes? How do the secular-liberal and Islamic narratives on gender converge and/or clash in the everyday lives of Sufis? How do female/non-binary/Queer Sufis negotiate their sexual and religious identities within Sufi orders? What are the main problems they encounter in the Sufi path? How do they strategically navigate the patriarchal and heteronormative boundaries both inside and outside the Sufi lodge? How do female shaykhas legitimize or negotiate their spiritual authority leading both men and women? What is the role of intersectionality of class, ethnicity, race, and religion in their approach to Islamic gender norms? How do contemporary Sufis respond to Islamic feminism? How do they reconcile their Sufi and feminist consciousness?

We wish to involve scholars from various scientific backgrounds in the Humanities and the Social Sciences and those who work in any geographical or historical periods. We invite contributions focusing on one or more of the following areas:

- Sufism, gender, queer theory, intersectionality, decolonialism, and social change
- Islamic feminism and Sufism
- New discourses on Islam and gender by Sufi leaders
- The relation between metaphysical doctrines and daily practices
- Contemporary or historical female/non-binary Sufi authorities, intellectuals, artists, and politicians
- Contemporary or historical female/non-binary Sufi disciples

## Organisers

Francesco Piraino (Ca' Foscari University)  
 Feyza Burak-Adli (Northwestern University)  
 M. Shobhana Xavier (Queen's University)

## Abstracts and Texts

Abstracts up to 300 words, accompanied by a short CV, should be submitted in English by the 1<sup>st</sup> of June to [civilta.compare@cini.it](mailto:civilta.compare@cini.it). A notification of acceptance will be forwarded by the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. Following the notification of acceptance, we will require you to send us a working draft chapter by the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, so that all the participants in the conference can prepare in advance. Two months after the Conference, we will ask participants to send us their full paper, to be published in a special issue. We welcome submissions from doctoral students, early career researchers and established scholars.

## Timetable

1. The call for papers is open – 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2021.
2. Abstracts (300-500 words maximum) and CVs to be received by 1st June 2021.
3. Notifications of acceptance will be given by 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021.
4. Draft Papers (around 4000 words), to be received by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021.
5. The conference will be held the 03 of December 2021.
6. Final papers to be received by 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2022.
7. Publication of the special issue in late 2022, early 2023.

## **Practicalities and Funding**

The Giorgio Cini Foundation and Ca' Foscari University of Venice will provide accommodation on San Giorgio Island, coffee breaks and lunches for all participants. Participants will arrange and pay for their own transportation and will be requested to donate to the Library of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities one book related to religious studies they authored or in which they have participated. Extra funding may be available to cover the travel expenses of a limited number of scholars who cannot obtain funding from their own institutions. If extra funding is needed, please indicate this in the email with which you submit your abstract.

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