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# “Fight is an inside path”

– A minor field study of how members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order perceive religious freedom in Mexico

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## **Abstract**

The interests for academic studies of contemporary Sufism and Sufism in non-Islamic countries have become more popular, but little has been done in Latin America. The studies of Islam in this continent are limited and studies on Sufism in Mexico seem to be an unexplored area. As a student of journalism target religion I see this as an important topic that can generate new information for the study of Sufism. This thesis is therefore aimed to describe the group of Sufis I have chosen to study, Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico, linked to Human Rights in form of how members of the Sufi order perceive Religious Freedom in Mexico.

A minor field study was carried out in Colonia Roma, Mexico City during October and November 2014. The place was chosen because this is the place where Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order exists in Mexico. The investigation is qualitative and based on an ethnographic study of eight weeks and semi structured interviews with three dervishes of the Sufi order, where two of them are men and one is a woman. Based on my purpose I have formulated the following questions:

- How do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico define Sufism? And how do they describe and practice their religious belief?
- How do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico express the situation to belong to a religious minority in the country? And how do the members perceive religious freedom in Mexico?

The question of my research is therefore: Do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico express that they feel free to practice their religion? And if so, how?

The results of the study shows that all the informants express that they feel free to practice their religion as a Sufi. One of the respondents that also belongs to the Conchero tradition, which is a group of the indigenous people of Mexico, says that he has experienced discrimination from both the government and other citizens due to that he belong to the Conchero tradition. Information from the respondents' shows that Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico is such a small community that people does not consider them. This might be one of the reasons why members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico have the freedom to practice their religion.

*Keywords: Sufism, Jerrahi, Religious freedom, discrimination, Mexico*

## **Preface**

I remember it was during the first days of my education at Södertörn University, three years ago, a teacher told us about studying abroad. I felt my interest awakened and I realized that this was something I really wanted to do. The education started and the years passed by. During springtime 2014 I brought to my mind this dream and decided to write an application for a Minor Field Study-scholarship from Sida. I had never written this kind of application before and I did not know what was expected from me. Thanks to my supervisor Simon Sorgenfrei I finished my application in time. If it was not for his support and commitment I think I never had done this, a great thanks to you.

I want to take the opportunity to thank all the people I met during my fieldwork in Mexico City. First of all I want to say a great thank you to my supervisor in the field Israel Rojas Cámara, who works as a supervisor at Luz Sobre Luz, which is an institution next to the community, founded by Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi and Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi. Without Cámara's help finding a place to stay during this period, getting information and contact with members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order, there would not be a thesis. It has been an honor to get to know you. I also want to say a great thank you to Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi, for letting me in and letting me take part of the community, even though I understand it must have felt a little bit odd that a person from Sweden wanted to come and study such a small community, which she also made clear to me the first time we met. She said: "You are the craziest person we ever had here, to come and study us. You are nuts. But that is the kind of people we like the most".

Of course I also want to say a big thank you to my three informants – Omar, Rágueb and Tasnim, for taking the time and sharing your stories with me. It has been a pleasure. I am also grateful for the warm welcome from the Imam, Khalifa and all the dervishes and members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order that I have met. A special thank you to the dervish who picked me up at the airport and who drove me home after the ceremonies in the nights, and also a special thank you to all of you who helped me with the translation, you know who you are.

Finally I want to say a big thank you to Karla, Tayde and Scarlet, the three girls who let me be their roomie. You made my time in Mexico unforgettable. I will come back, for sure.

*Sandra Forsvik, Stockholm 2014-12-11*

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# 1. Introduction

The 9/11 attacks were organized by terrorist against civil and militant places in the USA, September 11<sup>th</sup> in 2001. Four American planes were hijacked and two of them crashed into the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York City. Thousands of innocent people were killed, and the jihadi movement Al Quida, who is a terrorist organization according to the USA, the UN and the EU, was soon blamed for the attacks. This was the start of the media houses worldwide to besmirch the entire religion of Islam. In my opinion it appears that many newspapers seem to seek for negative aspects of Islam, just to prove to the world that this religion is filled with e.g. hate, oppression and patriarchy. As a student of religious studies I have learned that the phenomenon religion is more versatile than that, there are plenty of aspects.

During the time I have been studying journalism targeting religion at Södertörn University I have developed an interest in Islam and such Islamic traditions labeled Sufism, which is often described as Islam's mystical dimension. I think the interest has emerged from what I described above.

Throughout history Sufis have been important agents for an Islamic mission and proselytization, and the Sufi orders have often become popular amongst people for their religious practices as well as for their social activities, providing education and sometimes even social aid when needed. Even though we have seen an increasing interest in contemporary Sufism as well as Sufism in non-Islamic majority countries in the academic world, little has been done in Latin America and it seems to be no conducted research on Sufism in Mexico. As a future journalist and religion scientist I feel that I want to contribute to the research in this field. When I started looking closer into the subject I found Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico City that aroused my interest.

My ambition has been to describe this Sufi order, who are they? Considering that they exist in a country where the majority of the population belongs to the Catholic Church and information says that some minorities in Mexico are badly treated, how is it to live as a Sufi in this country? Also considering the bad reputation Islam got after the 9/11 attacks. What kind of attitudes can they have come across? All these questions linked to how members of the Sufi order perceive Religious Freedom in Mexico.

## **2. Purpose and research questions**

The purpose of this thesis is to describe Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico City and investigate how it might be to belong to a religious minority in Mexico, by an ethnographic fieldwork such as observations and by listening to three dervishes own stories and experiences. The question of my research is therefore: Do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico express that they feel free to practice their religion? And if so how?

From my research question I have formulated the following sub-questions:

- How do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico define Sufism? And how do they describe and practice their religious belief?
- How do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico express the situation to belong to a religious minority in the country? And how do the members perceive religious freedom in Mexico?

My hypothesis has been that the members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico could be subjected to discrimination, given that they belong to a religious minority in a country where victimization against minorities seems to be prevalent.

### **2.1 Disposition**

The opening chapter of the essay consists purpose and research questions. Thereafter comes method and material followed by presentation of theoretical foundations that are used to analyze and answer the results of the questions. The next part consisting of previous research on the topic and thereafter the background, where the reader gets an historical presentation and insight in the subject is presented. The second chapter will describe the results and analysis, which is the most extensive part of the essay. I disintegrate the result and look at the study in the light of my theoretical framework.

Finally there is the conclusion and the discussion part. These parts sums up what I have discovered about the subject, and I will discuss what the study's results might mean in a larger perspective. The conclusion is followed by a detailed bibliography. At last there are attachments, which consist a list of definitions and the interview guide I have used during the interviews.



During Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi's Urs – a combination of Zikir and Meshk ceremony. Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order, Colonia Roma, Mexico City. Fall 2014. Photo: Sandra Forsvik

### **3. Methods and material**

The methods for the material collection that have been used in this thesis are ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews. Both of these are qualitative methods.

#### **3.1 Ethnographic fieldwork as qualitative method**

I have followed Michael H. Agar's research process in terms of the ethnographic fieldwork, as he describes it in *the Professional stranger- An informal introduction to Ethnography*. Agar outlines four steps:

1. At first place a specific group in a specific area have been picked out – Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Colonia Roma, Mexico City. The reason why this community was chosen was because they seemed to be an unexplored area, and I saw my chance to come up with new information of the research of Sufism in this specific country in this part of the world.
2. An overview of literature and previous research of the subject have been done before, during and after the fieldwork.
3. I got funds in form of financial support from the Swedish international development co-operation agency Sida and a field assistant, Israel Rojas Cámara who became my gatekeeper in the community.
4. I located a network path from myself to the group. Before I went out in fieldwork I sent my application for the Minor Field Study scholarship to Cámara, where I described my purpose of studying Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order. During five months Cámara and I kept in touch via email where we established a contact. Once in place Cámara introduced me to Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi, and she introduced me to dervishes and members of the Sufi order. The fieldwork lasted for eight weeks and I visited the order 19 times during ceremonies, prayers and celebrations.

In these situations I established a contact with dervishes and members of the order by small talks, and it gave me the opportunity to create a trust from the people who became my informants (Agar, 1996: 73, 82).

As I mentioned above I have done an ethnographic fieldwork in form of observations and interviews. Agar says that the combination of observation and interviews can be a good choice because in some cases people do what they say but sometimes they do not (Agar, 1996: 156-157). This is also how I felt and my defined opinion is that this combination has been the best way to get so much varied information

as possible. During my observations in the community I have chosen to take part in the ceremonies but with some limits. I have for example not repeated Allah's name and I did not take part in the prayers. For some reason it did not feel right for me, and I also wanted to make a statement that I was not a part of the community, I was there to observe and try to understand what they were doing. The reason why I chose to participate in the ceremonies is because I believed and I am still sure that it gave me a chance to get closer to the community and my informants. Participant observations is something that Agar mentions as an important way to get rich points, as he calls it, which is the kind of data that the ethnographer focuses on (Agar, 1996: 32). If I stood in a corner with a notepad all the time, I think it would have created a distance and I am sure that the people of the community would not have felt the same confidence with me. Every time I have been in the community I have been taking notes of what I have observed and writing a field diary, something that Agar also recommend (Agar, 1996: 161).

### **3.2 Interviews as qualitative method**

The choice of interview method was semi structured depth interviews. I have followed the research process that Mats Ekström and Larsåke Larsson describe in *Metoder i kommunikationsvetenskap*. First of all, I developed an interview guide, which was tested in form of a pilot interview. Something the authors also recommend (Ekström & Larsson, 2010: 58, 65).

To analyze the interviews I have proceeded the five steps-analyze model that Steinar Kvale explains in *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*. The model contains the following steps:

1. The scientist reads through the interview and tries to formulate a general impression
1. The scientist defines the natural "sense units" in the text, as the informant has described it
2. The scientist formulates, as simply as possible, the themes that he perceives dominate a natural "sense unit", and thematises statements regarding the opinion of the informant, as the scientist understands it
3. Then questions are asked to the "sense unit", based on the investigation's purpose
4. At last the central themes in the complete interview are put together in a descriptive sentence (Kvale, 2009: 221-222).

After every interview I have been sitting down to see how I have understood the answers of the informants. Then I have searched for different themes in order to see if I could find some recurrent pattern and under which question it could be placed.

The ethnographic method is motivated because no other investigation of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order has been done in Mexico before. The literature about them is very limited and the information could not be obtained anywhere else than at the location. The interview method is motivated since this is a qualitative study. My understanding is that depth interviews give a broader perspective and shows the individual story, which also tells the reader about the personal variation in the community. In the analysis chapter I look closer to some different themes that have come up during the interviews.

An ethnographic fieldwork of eight weeks and interviews with three dervishes of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order, form the basis of this thesis. I have the field diary saved in a document and the interviews have been recorded and transcribed. My ambition was to have four informants but unfortunately one of the respondents chose to end her participation of the study. In that time I was already in Sweden again and a new interview was not possible to conduct. The interviews were conducted in English. English is not the first language for neither the informants nor for me, I am aware of that it may have contributed to misunderstandings. Therefor it has been important for me that all the informants have got the chance to change and approve their quotes.

Three people are a small number of respondents but my defined opinion is that these respondents' experiences say something of the variation of the community and also say something of a bigger phenomenon about how dervishes and members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order express how they experience religious freedom in Mexico. I also consider that my observations during the ethnographic fieldwork play an important part and they can complement and testify the information from the interviews with the respondents.

My ambition has been to investigate how members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order express how they experience religious freedom in Mexico. I consider that I have managed to answer my research questions and therefore have researched what I stated to investigate. There are always other circumstances that can change the result, for example if there had been another scientist who had observed the community, then my observation an impression could have differ from others. If I had been in the community for a longer time I may have observed other things, if the informants would have been more or others, if one of the informants had not chosen to end its participation in the study, the result may have been another. By the material I have collected, I conceive that I can make a good analysis.

### **3.3 Sample**

In discussion with my supervisor Simon Sorgenfrei, I decided that four informants are enough for this qualitative study. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, one of my informants decided to not be a part of the study anymore and therefore the thesis will be based on three respondents instead of four. My ambition has been to get an equal gender distribution, but the defection of one of the respondents resulted in that the thesis now will be based on interviews where the majority of the respondents are men.

One of the informants was Omar, a 72 years old man. Omar works as a musician and he is also a dancer of the Conchero tradition, which is one of the groups of the indigenous population in Mexico. He has been a part of the order since it was founded of Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi in the early 1980s. The second informant was Rágueb, a 27 years old man who works as a supervisor at the community and he is also Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi's assistant. Rágueb has been a part of the community for seven years and he is not involved in other religious movements. Tasnim, who was the third and last informant, is a 50 years old woman who works as a physiologist. She is not involved in another religious movements but she practices yoga and meditation. Tasnim has been a part of the community for 29 years. These three respondents have different experiences and connections to the order, and that is the reason why I chose these from others. There are a lot of people in the community that have interesting stories and connection to the order but I saw this specific mix of members as an opportunity to get a broader overall impression of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order.

All the respondents have given me the permission to use their dervish name.

## **4. Theoretical framework**

To answer the research questions of this thesis I have used different theories. In the result and analysis chapter I will look closer at the investigation by trying to classify what kind of Sufi order Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico might be, by using some classification theories. Then I will analyze the information of how the respondents express how they experience the situation to belong to a religious minority, and how they perceive religious freedom in Mexico, with help of models of immigrant or minority integration. In the conclusion and discussion chapter I will reflect the research topic by using the respondents own thoughts of how they express the situation to belong to a religious minority in Mexico, and how they apprehend religious freedom in the country.

#### **4.1 Gisela Webb's classifications of Sufi activities in the West**

Oluf Schönbeck mentions Gisela Webb's three major classifications when it comes to Sufism activity in America, which he describes in his chapter "*Sufism in the USA- Creolisation, hybridization, syncretisation?*" in *Sufism Today*. I have chosen to use Webb's classifications to get a clearer picture of what kind of Sufi order Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico might be. I will use Webb's classifications by trying to find common denominators between what is said in the classifications and what the informants says. Schönbeck describes Webb's three categories as following:

1. In 1910 Hazrat Inayat Khan, who represented the South Asian Chistyia Order founded an order in the West. This order represents a universalistic and theosophist orientation and Hazrat Inayat Khan saw the universal truth of Sufis as the center of all religions
2. An alternative religious setting, mainly inspired of Hindu and Buddhist traditions, became a part of some Sufi groups in the 1960s and the 1970s. A mixed of Sufi/Zen/Yoga/Kabbala traditions practiced in terms universal thriving
3. In the last ten years during the twenty-first century it has been common with local sheikhs even if the masters live abroad. Two of these types are the Helveti-Jerrahi Order, who has its roots in Istanbul, Turkey and the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, which is founded of an immigrant from Sri Lanka. In these orders dervishes and non-Sufi Muslims are welcomed. The practice in these group is traditional in the meaning of identify Islam and including the fundamental pillars of Islam. It is common that members dedicate ijthihad (traditional Islamic interpretation) in their daily life and direct global problems (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 178).

#### **4.2 Alan Godlas' classification theories about Sufism in the West**

Alan Godlas' talks about four general categories when it comes to Sufi orders and or organizations in the West. I have chosen to use three of them. The reason for that is because I do not consider the fourth category suitable for this thesis. I am aware of Simon Sorgenfrei's criticism of Godlas' categories. Sorgenfrei says in his thesis *America Dervish- Making Mevlism in the United States of America*, that Godlas' categories are problematic with a thought of that scholars have to evaluate Sufi practitioners and decide if one can call oneself a Muslim. Based on my purpose I have chosen to use Godlas' classifications because the thought is to get a picture where in the Sufi landscape Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico is located, and that is the reason I have chosen these categories. I will use Godlas' classifications in the same way as Webb does, videlicet by trying to find common denominators between what is said in the classifications and what the informants says.

**1) Islamic Sufi orders in the West:** this category is signified by the avowed to Islam, in particular the Sharia. Godlas mentions Shadhiliya Sufi Center of North America, the Jerrahi Order and the Quadiriyah Order as examples of these types of orders.

**2) Quasi- Islamic Sufi organizations or orders:** the practice of Islam is not a condition for being trained in this path, even if it is common that the sheikh is addressed to the sharia. These groups consist of Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Godlas mentions the Mevli Order and the Bawa Muhayyiden Fellowship as groups of this classification.

**3) Non-Islamic Sufi Organisations:** these types of groups have more or less cut all the bonds to Islam. The majority of the members are non-Muslims. Sufi Order International, Sufi Ruhaniat International and the Mevli Order of America are examples of these types of Sufi orders.

(Godlas, Alan's webpage).

To get a better understanding of Godlas' classifications, I have chosen to use the examples that Oluf Schönbeck describes in the chapter "*Sufism in the USA- Creolisation, hybridization, syncretisation?*" in *Sufism Today*.

**1) Islamic Sufi orders in the West:** Schönbeck mentions Shadhiliya Center in California as one example of an Islamic organization. The leader of this center is Sidi Shaykh Muhammad Saïd al-Jamal, who belongs to a Syrian branch of the Shadhili Order, even though he has done most of his work in Jerusalem. According to Schönbeck, *Dhikr* is one of the repetitive activities in the center and take place in Sundays and Thursdays, in Thursdays as the preparation for the *jum'á* (Friday prayer) and *zawaiya* (spiritual retreats). Schönbeck also says that Shadhiliya Center in California use Arabic terms and words, for example Islam's five pillars, an Arabic lexicon and a guide to Arabic pronunciation. In the Arabic lexicon, Sharia is defined as 'the divine law' and by the information from their website, everyone- apart from background- are invited to explore their Sufi path (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 180-181).

**2) Quasi Islamic Sufi organizations or orders:** Bawa Muhayydeen Fellowship in Boston is a local subsection from the national Bawa Muhayydeen Fellowship in Philadelphia, which in term see themselves as a branch of the Quadiriyah Order. Schönbeck mentions the Bawa Muhayydeen Fellowship in Boston as an example of a quasi Islamic Sufi organization or order and according to Schönbeck Bawa Muhayydeen (the Guru) himself sees his teaching as Islamic (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 181). The traditional Islamic invocation of Allah, videlicet the Bismillah, could be opened and led by any member of the order, both men and women. After the reading it was common that the members

requested special prayers or the *faitha*, chanting of the first chapter of the Quran in Arabic, all the members together and this might followed by *dhikr*. The majority of the members had an Arabic name that was given by the Guru (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 181).

**3) Non Islamic Sufi organizations or orders:** Schönbeck mentions the Sufi Order International as an example of a non-Islamic Sufi organization or order. Schönbeck say that this order has its roots in Christian tradition and the founder was a Sufi and musician from India, his name was Hazrat Inayat Khan. He came to the USA in 1910 and played an important role in women's active participation in the community and his statement has passed through generations (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 182). Schönbeck describes that the Sufi Order International can be characterized as the following: "Sufi Order International is characterized as 'An Inter-Religious Path to Spiritual Growth', and it is the purpose of the order to awake the divine consciousness in every human individual, to root out suffering and to further a transformation creating a new life of love, harmony, balance and creativity" (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 182). Godlas also bring up the universal essence, spiritual concentration and control and universal dance of peace as other important parts that signify this kind of classification of Sufi orders (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 182).

### **4.3 Hans Ingvar Roth's models about immigrant or minority integration**

Hans Ingvar Roth is a Swedish professor in human rights at Stockholm University. He has come up with theories about immigrant or minority integration. Even though Roth is focusing the ethnic groups as immigrants and minorities I see parallels to the group I have been studying, since they belong to a religious minority. I will use Roth's models by trying to find information in the respondents quotes that can be linked in what Roth describe in different models. Roth's models is described as the following:

**1) The majority-conformity model:** The idea of the majority-conformity model is that the ethnic group practices its own way without requirement of immersion into the majority culture. The ideal is also that various groups should be possible to live together in a shared society and need for example the same language or education. The language is often the language of the majority. It is also important that the majorities and the minorities make assured compromises if shared projects should last in the long term. A state that has allowed minorities to enter the society and accepted them as members indicates that the country belongs to the minorities as well as the majority population. If the minority for an instance is an indigenous population it might be affected what kind of cultural requirement they can make, for example when it comes to territorial rights (Roth, 2002: 415, 416).

**2) The melting pot model:** This model underlines that the society need a unity, but the unity reveals in different ways through mutual interaction among different groups. The ethnic groups will experience diversity of properties and also new mixtures that appears. Various cultures are necessary parts for a valuable society. The cultural differences are not supposed to be seen as negative segregation, rather as a social equality between the groups, so they can share life experience (Roth, 2002: 416).

**3) Cultural pluralism model:** According to Roth himself, this model is hard to pinpoint because the society should maintain a climate where every ethnic group could retain its individuality. Roth says that this model is imprecise and asks in what kind of context this pluralism could exist. He then mention that Horace Kallen says that democracy give people the opportunity to develop their cultural heritage. One can say that democracy can be one thing for people to have in common – democratic rights and a public arena where people can meet and exchange ideas (Roth, 2002: 417).

## 5. Previous research

As I mentioned in the introduction, the study of Sufism seems to be an unexplored area in Mexico and the research of Islam and Muslims in Latin America is limited. When I came to Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico City I was told that I was the first visitor from another country to come and study them. I see a gap regarding the international study of Sufism in this country and the Latin America continent. My hope is through this study, contribute with new knowledge to the research of Sufism in Mexico and hopefully focus the topic.

We have seen an increasing academic interest in contemporary Sufism as well as Sufism in non-Islamic majority countries over the pas two decades. You can find research of the subject among others like Catharina Raudvere, Leif Stenberg, Martin Von Bruinessen, Julia Day Howell, Neil Green, Magnus Lundberg, David Westerlund and Simon Sorgenfrei. These scientists are the ones who have been the greatest basis of my study. The difference between their research and mine are for instance that their focus is mainly on Sufism in non-Islamic majority countries in the West, when I study the topic in Latin America.

As Magnus Lundberg and David Westerlund mention, migration has played an important part in the spread of Muslim traditions to non-Islamic majority countries (Lundberg & Westerlund, 2012: 276). Catharina Raudvere and Leif Stenberg say in “*Sufism Today*” nowadays the web plays an important role

in the case of sources, mission and information about the orders (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009:159). The information about the role of Internet, linked to sources about Sufism has played a crucial role in my study of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico City, though it was by the Internet I found this Sufi Order.

In “*Sufism Today*” Raudvere and Stenberg talk about Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in the USA and only mention the branch of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico City very briefly. Even though Raudvere and Stenbergs focus are Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in the USA, their information has helped me to get a perspective of this Sufi order and also giving me the opportunity to compare their information between the main order and the branch in Mexico City, even though these differences are nothing that I focus on in my thesis.

In “*Sufism and the ‘Modern’ in Islam*”, Martin Von Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell point out that Sufi traditions with its music, poetry and mystical experiences is associated with the modern life and neither with Muslim communities, and that many social scientists are unfamiliar with the academic study of mystical traditions (Bruinessen & Howell, 2007:5). Bruinessen and Howells research about Sufism has giving me knowledge about Sufism in the modern life and giving me the understandings of that this area seem to unexplored in many aspects.

Since the research on Muslims and Islam seem to be an unexplored area in Mexico it has also been hard to find information about the situation for these groups in this area. Due to the lack of information about the situation for Muslims in this country I have chosen to look closer to international attitudes against Muslims in the West. A study that focuses anti-Muslim attitudes and resistance is called *Opposition and Support: A Study of Swedish Muslim Congregations*, by Klas Borell och Arne Gerdner. This study shows that Muslims in the Western world are exposed for instance of discrimination and liability (Borell & Gerdener 2010).

## **6. Background**

### **6.1 The religious landscape in Mexico**

The religious and cultural landscape in Mexico is relatively complex. The country is like a melting pot with influences. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was the Aztecs who reigned when the Spaniards came. The

Aztecs were badly hurt during the colonization and a considerable part of the indigenous people died due to disease and oppression. In year 1821 Mexico was independently from Spain. The Aztecs and the Maya's religion and culture still remain in the country today (Landguiden website, 2014).

In 2013 the population in Mexico were calculated around 122 million, according to the World Bank (The World Banks website, 2014), of which 21 million live in Mexico City (John, 2010: 95). It is expected that nearly 90 percent of the population belong to Roman Catholicism; which makes Mexico the second-biggest Catholic-country after Brazil (Noble, 2010: 60).

## **6.2 Religious freedom and situation for religious minorities in Mexico**

The Swedish Foreign Ministry's report- *Mexiko\_MR-Rapport*- says that religious freedom is enshrined in the Mexican Constitution, and the Mexican Constitution prohibits discrimination due to religious belief and establishes the separation of church and state (Utrikesdepartementet, 2012: 9).

Most of the reports that consider discrimination because of religious belief, take place at the federal state or local level. People who belong to original population have according to resources been denied government benefits because of their affiliation. There is also information about Lutheran groups in some societies who have been unwelcomed because they have been seen as economical and political threats. Therefore some families have been displaced because of their religious affiliation. These incidents have taking place mainly in the center and the southern part of the country. The government authority- *Dirección General de Asociaciones Religiosas*- reported 21 complaint of religious intolerance during 2011 (Utrikesdepartementet, 2012: 9).

## **6.3 Islam in Mexico**

Göran Larsson and David Westerlund say in their chapter *Islam*, in *Religion I Latinamerika* that the presence of Muslims in Latin America can be linked to historical process as colonization, migration and globalization. Larsson and Westerlund say that even if the presence of Muslims has a long history in Latin America, there are few reliable sources that can attest how Islam was passed over to the continent. A reasonable explanation seems to be that a significant proportion of slaves who were brought across the ocean from Africa during the colonization were Muslims. When the slave trade was banned since the 1800s, the number of Muslim immigrants increased, mainly from Asia and the Middle East (Lundberg &Westerlund, 2012: 276).

## 6.4 What is Sufism?

Traditionally Western scholars have defined Sufism as Islamic mysticism or mystical Islam, which is a tradition still true today (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 177). Sufism can be described as love's mystical way and knowledge of God. Besides of the commercial external path – Sharia – runs the inner road – tariqua – of Sufi mysticism, which is an important and popular movement in both Sunni Islam and Shia Islam (Esposito, 2011: 156).

Sharia can be seen as the way of obligations and rights, which keep discipline among the life of individuals and communities. Sufism can offer the way to spiritual discipline to know God. As in other mystical movements as in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism – Sufism is a way of purifying, called *tasawwuf*. The soul and the body's discipline are the goal to directly experience the ultimate reality (Esposito, 2011: 156, 157).

The central part of Sufism is the conviction of that one's self has to die, which means you have to let the lower self-centered self get erased – *fana*- to find peace – *baqua*- in God. You have to refrain from everything that is impermanent and fleeting – the phenomenal world – to get realization of the divine that exist in all human beings. The goal for Sufis is to win the directly insight about, or personally experience the presence of God (Esposito, 2011: 164, 165).

It is the sheikh – the spiritual leader – who leads the disciples through a various successive phases – denial, purifying and insight. During the time the disciple are rewarded and encouraged of God by experience some religious and psychological conditions (Esposito, 2011: 165).

## 6.5 Sufism today

In contemporary religious life, Sufism and Sufi ritual practices are one of the few areas where Islam has had an influence on late modern spiritual expression, and it is not uncommon to come across the notion of Sufism as something associated with Muslim traditions, but not necessarily with Islam (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 1). Nowadays there are Sufi rituals that are integrated in various New Age practices. The fellowship and the rituals that are characteristic of Sufism are transfigured by born Muslims and modified in urbanization due to transnational migration under the impact of national and international politics (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 1).

In one-way Sufism can be explained as an umbrella term, where each case can be representative only for its own local context. During the history of Orientalism, Sufism has been seen as a world filled with poetry, rituals and as abstract outlines of universalist, separated from the society. The image has also characterized that Sufism has regarded a challenge to Islam and Muslims (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 2).

The outcome of economics and cultural aspects of globalization has developed and opened up for new arenas and new agents. Gender and generation are parameters that visualize the impact of change. Practicing Sufism has become an important platform for young people and women to find forms for a contemporary Muslim spiritual life. Sufi groups have navigated between a defense of tradition and willingness to adapt new cultural norms. The establishment of a local community can therefore work as norm keepers but also norm breakers (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 5, 9).

## **6.6 Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in the USA**

In 1983 Lex Hixon the American converter to Islam – also known as Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi founded Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in New York City, which presently maintain affiliate circles around the USA, Mexico, England and Australia. The branch has its origin from Pir Nureddin al-Jerrahi, who is the founder of the Helveti-Jerrahi Sufi Order, which is a side branch of the transnational Helveti- Khalawati- Sufi Order from Turkey, founded in 1704 (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 160).

There is another Sufi Order named Helveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes, founded and current led by the native-born Turk, Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Helveti. This branch is based in Spring Valley, New York but have offshoots in e.g. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada and Italy. Helveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes also has its roots in Pir Nureddin al-Jerrahi. Both Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order and Helveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes share guidance of the nineteenth sheikh of the Istanbul based Helveti-Jerrahi Sufi Order – Muzaffer Ashki Ozak al-Jerrahi. But these two branches – Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order and Helveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes differ significantly in some ways, which also led to that founders of each branch decided to develop in separate unities (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 160-161).

During the years 1978-1984 Muzaffer Ashki Ozak al-Jerrahi visited the USA a couple of times and came in contact with Lex Hixon. They turned out to be really good friends and in 1980 Muzaffer Ashki

Ozak al-Jerrahi gave the crown of sheikh-hood to Phillipa Friedrish – Sheikha Fariha Fatima al-Jerrahi and Lex Hixon – Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi.

In 1985 when Muzaffer Ashki Ozak al-Jerrahi passed away Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi took over the leadership of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order, and after Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi's death Sheikha Fariha Fatima al-Jerrahi assumed the management (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 161-162).

## 6.7 Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico City

### Historical background

<sup>1</sup>Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi is the founder of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi order in Mexico. He came to Mexico in the 1980s. During his first visits he met members of the Conchero tradition – Concheros are a group of the indigenous population in Mexico – and one of these members were a man called Omar. Omar is one of the first dervishes who completed the *bay'a* from Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi.

In 1987 Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi founded the subside circle Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico City (the American Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Orders webpage). Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi gave the crown of sheikh-hood to Edelín Oritz Graham – Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi, who is still the sheikh of this Sufi order (the American Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Orders webpage).

Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi follows the guidance of Sheikha Fariha Fatima al-Jerrahi. Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi has a long track regarding the study of religion. To mention a few, she has been practicing and studying Islamic *tasawwuf* path in 28 years under various teachers of the Jerrahi Order of Istanbul Turkey, studying Advaita Vedanta tradition under a Indian monk of the Rhamakrishna Order of Calcutta, she has also been studying Zen Buddhism under the Japanese Soto Lineage (the American Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Orders webpage). This variation of influences of different religions is also something that shows in the *tekke* in Mexico City. For example they have a picture of Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen – who was a Sufi mystic from Sri Lanka. I asked one of the dervishes about this picture and he said he thought they have the picture because Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi respected this Sufi mystic (Field notes 2014-10).

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<sup>1</sup> Omar, dervish of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico, interview 2014-11-22

## **The community**

Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico is based in Colonia Roma, Mexico City. This neighborhood is modern in the way of how the urban environment is constructed, if you compare to other parts of the city. Most of the people who live in this area and the areas around belong to the middle class (Field notes 2014-11). The *tekke* is located in a multi-story building, some distance from the main street in Colonia Roma. The *tekke* consists of four rooms apart from the hall and the wardrobe. Three of the rooms are smaller and one is bigger. One of the smaller rooms next to the bigger one is the room of the sheikh. The *tekke* also has a kitchen, a restroom and a little shop. In the bigger room is the qibla-, which shows the prayer direction to Kaba in Mecca. The prayers, reading aloud from sacred texts and ceremonies like *Zikir* are usually taking place in this room (Field notes 2014-11). One of the most widely read text in this community is *The Heart of the Quran*, by their founder Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi. *The Heart of the Quran* includes verses of the Quran that Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi considered as the most important ones (Field notes 2014-10).

## **Members of the community**

There are 3000 people who have completed the *bay'a* from Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi. *Bay'a* can also be called “taking the hand”, which seem to be a common term among the dervishes of this community (Field notes 2014-11). Of these 3000 dervishes there are around 500 who constantly keep in touch with the community, and there are like 30 dervishes who take part in the gatherings every week. There is a mix of different ages in the group but the majority of the dervishes are in the middle age and live in the city and the districts around.

## **Activities**

In Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order they have three gatherings every week. On Mondays they have *Wird*, when they read from a special book by their founder Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi. This is only for the dervishes who have completed the *bay'a* (Field notes 2014-11).

On Thursdays- they have *Zikir*. These gatherings start in the night with a prayer. Men and women pray side by side in the same room. They are facing the qibla, which shows the direction to pray to Kaba in Mecca. After the prayer the *Sheikh*, the *Imam* or the *Khalfa* read verses from *The heart of the Quran*. They are reading from a translated version in Spanish. After the reading they walk around and greet each other, during the same time they prepare for the *Zikir*. To prepare the *Zikir* they put out sheepskins, one colored in blue for the *Sheikha*, two colored in red for the *Imam* and the *Khalifa*, one colored in

black for the dervish who will make the whirling dance, and white sheepskins for the rest (Field notes 2014-11).

The *Zikir* starts with the *Sheikha*, the *Imam* and the *Khalifa* sitting next to each other. The dervish who will do the whirling dance is sitting opposite from the *Sheikha*, *Imam* and *Khalifa*. The rest of the dervishes are sitting on each side of these people, men on one side and the women on the other side (Field notes 2014-11).

During the dance the *Sheikha*, *Imam*, *Khalifa* and the dervish who do the whirling dance stand in the middle, the other dervishes forming two circles around. Sometimes they use the bendir, which is a drum often used during *Zikir* ceremonies among *Sufis*. It also happens that one of the dervishes' plays a string instrument called dilruba but most of the time one dervish named Omar plays the jarana (string instrument) that is used in the Conchero tradition. Omar is a member of the Conchero tradition, which is a group of the indigenous people in Mexico (Field notes 2014-11). After the *Zikir* they walk around and greet each other, "Salam aleykum", which means, "peace be upon you", and chatting with each other before they eat a dinner together (Field notes 2014-11).

On Fridays they have a prayer called Uma in the afternoon and it is held by the *Imam* and he reads from a translated version of the Quran. During these prayers there are around five dervishes who participate. In Friday nights the community also have workshops for dervishes or other curious people who want to learn how to dance like a whirling dervish. There is a dervish named Tasnim who is in charge of these workshops (Field notes 2014-10).

## **7. Result and analysis**

In this chapter I will present the analysis and results of this study, by reproduce what the respondents have said during the interviews and my observations that was conducted during my fieldwork in Colonia Roma, Mexico City, fall 2014. After the collection of research my ambition has been to systematic describe how members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico define Sufism and how they describe and practice their religious belief. And find out how the members express the situation to belong to a religious minority in the country, also how they perceive religious freedom in Mexico. To make the analysis so evident and easy to grasp I have chosen to structure it by the sub questions, where the main topic will get the most place. I will also discuss other questions in a more flexibly way.

## **7.1 How do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico define Sufism? And how do they describe and practice their religious belief?**

According to the information my respondents have given me in the interviews and what I have observed during the ethnographic fieldwork at Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico, I see different kinds of influences that reflect the community. To get a more clear picture of where in the Sufi landscape this order exist, I have chosen to use Alan Godlas' and Gisela Webb's classifications of Sufi orders and organizations. Based on what the informants have said during the interviews I seem to be able to see three themes of how they describe and practice their religious belief, these themes are: 1) Sufism linked to Islam, 2) Sufism linked to other religions or traditions and 3) Sufism linked to universal thinking.

### **1) Sufism linked to Islam**

Rágueb works as a supervisor at Luz Sobre Luz, which is an institution next to Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order, founded by Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi and Sheikha Amina Teslima al-Jerrahi. Rágueb says that he is aware of some people may think that Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order is in a certain sense of New Age. "It is kind of complicated being in a non-Muslim country because we are Sufis but we are also Muslims, so it could be hard to understand", Rágueb says. The community has regularly guests of many other spiritual traditions and Rágueb says some people may think that only the traditional and cultural forms of religion are the true ones. Some people might think it is wrong to have interreligious relations, Rágueb tells and continues:

This is the historical way of thinking that only the ancient are correct and the new are only an invention. I think it is the gift that Shêij Nur brought to us- that the diverse of religion is true, so this could be consider as a New Age point of view for closed minds and hearts, but we only pray to Allah.

In Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Community they believe that people can have other paths too, Rágueb explains. "Some people can not handle the idea of that, and they think that we pray to everything that appears in front of us, but that is wrong", he submits and continues:

I think that we have clearly known that we pray to Allah. Only to Allah and we say it every week "La ilaha ila-lah, Muhammad Rasula-lah"- the only the realness is Allah and Prophet Muhammad is its messenger. So we are still correct and we do not pray to another or in other forms.

Quasi Islamic Sufi orders or organizations are one of Alan Godlas' classifications of the relation between Sufism and Islam. Godlas' declares that the Guru Bawa Muhaiydeen sees his teaching Islamic but the traditional Islamic invocation of Allah and the Bismillah could be opened and led by any member of the order (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 181). This is something that Rágueb seems to declare when he says in his quotes above, that they see themselves as Muslims and they have made it clear that Allah is the only God they pray to. According to my observation at Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico I saw that various members could open and led the invocation of Allah and the Bismillah (Field notes from 2014-10).

Tasnim works as a freelance psychologist and she is also in charge of the whirling dance practice at Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order, she says: "I am a Sufi-Muslim, Insh Al-Láh- "if God allows" – so the first I believe is that everything is Allah, only The Supreme Source exists, and there is nothing besides Alláh". She tries to live her whole life in that way – "experiencing the unity of the Reality", as she explains it. She says it is not easy to live in that way because as a human being you are a limiting self. " I have a limited understanding, and as everybodys' ego, my ego wants to pretend he's the king of myself, trying to trap me into hundreds of illusions. So is not easy, you need to fight to defend the real being that you are", Tasnim explains and also say:

My personal experience is that if you start to live your life in that way, you start having peace and trusting that everything is in Allah's hands. Then you will see what your duty is in each given situation, what do you need to do, learn or think. Everyday is different and it is kind of a mystery. As soon as you say "nothing exist but Alláh", your real self will start to unveil.

Tasnim says that people need to stop having dogmas, because "Reality is alive and actually Reality offers you a link to Love". Tasnim explains that you have to learn how to love, how to become a lover of that reality and there are a lot of ups and downs, but little by little people will understand the treasures of the spiritual path, she says and adds: "Sufism is life, no dogma but the personal experience of the lover with the Beloved". Tasnim further explains that there are no dogmas in Sufism, but Sufism contains spiritual responsibilities and it is called *Sharia*, "The way to live in the Sacred way", she says and continue:

As a Muslim I do *Salat*, which is the five prayers per day, which I try to do everyday because it is very helpful to me. You can not imagine how much support, love, protection, guidance and renewal you get by daily prayers [...] because human beings seek to be contained by something. Some people

use shopping, making money, using drugs, sex, etc. For me, thanks Allah, my main container is *Salat*, it is like having five times dating with God. So, through spiritual practice you become aware of how much Allah cares for you.

Alan Godlas says that one thing that signifies the Islamic Sufi order in the West is that *Sharia* can be defined as ‘the divine law’ (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 180-181). According to Tasnim *Sharia* can be described as "The way to live in the Sacred way", this might be comparable to the definition ‘the divine law’.

“I have been in different Sufi orders in the USA but you know some of them do not have Islam. Some Sufis think that Sufism is different from Islam and I do not feel that way. I like my community because we are Muslims and I want to be a Muslim”, Tasnim declares.

Tasnim explains that traditional Muslims – as she describes it – are different from Sufis and further says that she does not think that she would fit into – conservative Islam – as she calls it. For instance there is a different understanding about woman’s position in the Mosque, she says and women are not allowed to be in the main prayer room and men might act like they have the right to tell woman what to do, Tasnim says. “I might not fit in that form of religion, because I am a Western woman living in a context of gender equality”.

“When we enter the *tekke* we are totally trying to get together. We know that God is inside our heart even though we forget it sometimes”, Omar tells. He also says the *Zikir* – the remembrance ceremony helps them to keep close to God. “The feeling during the time you do for example the *Dhikr* or the *Uma* pray, that you are aware of that you are next to God. That space, it is happiness”, he says.

According to Alan Godlas, the *Zikr* and the *juma* prayers are the center in this type of Islamic Sufi orders or organizations in the West (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 180-181). These ceremonies seemed to be the repetitive activities even at Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico (Field notes 2014-10). Godlas also says that Shadhiliya Center in California – which he classifies as a Islamic Sufi order – welcomes everyone apart from background (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 180-181). Something that also applies in Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico, according to what Omar says about non-problems with being a part of the Conchero tradition and be a part in the Sufi order at the same time. This is something that also can be proved of my observations in the community (Field notes 2014-11).

## 2) Sufism linked to other religions or traditions

“The music is an important part for us”, Rágueb says further explain that there is a specific rhythm called *macams*. “Macam is the rhythm of the bendir and the *Zikir* is regularly led by the instrument bendir, but in our *Zikir* we also have other instruments like the jarana, which is the instrument of the Concheros”.

Omar is the one who plays the jarana, Rágueb tells and continue: “He was one of the first dervishes of the order. He took the hand with Shêij Nur and Amina respects him a lot and that is the reason why she asks him to play the jarana’s chant”. Rágueb says that the community is influenced by the Concheros tradition, but only in the music because they have to make the limits clear that they are not a New Age Order that allows everything for everyone.

Omar is a musician and a dancer of the Concheros tradition and he tells that the concept of God does not exist in the Conchero tradition, because they believe that the phenomenon God can not be named because you can not imagine how big it is. “It is universe that we have in our hearts and we try to keep the heart clean from bad feelings”, Omar explains and also say that the Conchero dance is linked to the sun and he see the dervish dance linked to the moon, since the Sufis do their whirling dance during the night. Omar continue:

The Sufis came here and gave us a lot of peace. Our Conchero dance is more warfare – it is very strong and very explosive. The Sufi dance is more about the inside. Sheykh Nur came to us to give us the other path that we did not have, and we still try to keep it together – the sun and the moon. Omar say it was like a big door opened when Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi came to Mexico and taught members of the Concherros tradition about the world religions. “Sheikh Nur was a very clever gentleman and he had a lot of information that we did not have because the information here is not at hand”, Omar explains and continue:

We did not know the Quran before the Sufis came here and for me it has been a great help. For example the Uma prayer, it is always giving you something. The Quran is a living book and very precise what you feel and what you need to hear.

“In my case I don’t have any problems to be with the dervishes and being with the Conchero tradition, for me it is one thing. Once I told Sheikh Nur how I felt and he said you are one, don’t forget that”

### 3) Sufism linked to universal thinking

Rágueb thinks that Sufism is a complex and a wide road that you can walk through; because there are a lot of things that you can do being a Sufi, he says. “You have a lot of things to do, I do not know if you can chose what you want to do of all the things because you are supposed to do everything, for example the *Salwat* prayers, the *Zikr* – the remembrance of God, the *Wird* and *Yumma* prayer”.

Rágueb also thinks that the Catholic fathers could not give him the entire guide that he needed and he came in contact with Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order when he was doing research for school, when he was studying anthropology. This is how he describes his first visit at the order: “When I came to the *tekke* I felt a strange connection. I could not describe the connection but through the weeks that passed I felt more comfortable with what Sheikha Amina told people; that every path that you have in your life can be real if you truly believe in it”.

Gisela Webb mentions in her first classification that Hazrat Inayat Khan, the founder of the South Asian Chistyia Order in the West saw the universal truth of Sufis as the center of all religions. This might be the vision Sheikha Amina has, according to Rágueb, she se every path as a real path as long as you truly believe in it (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009:178).

Rágueb then says it makes sense that he chose a career that he did not like because he had to study anthropology to get to know the *tekke*. “That is how my heart and my mind explained why I chose to study anthropology”.

The vision of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Community has changed a lot through the years, Rágueb says. “In the beginning I was so in love. Everything and everyone looked so beautiful and amazing to me. You know when you are so in love it is kind of annoying when you are not”. Rágueb says, in the beginning he wanted everything to be Islamic, for example the decoration of his room and so. “But then, it is like when you have eaten too much sugar”, Rágueb says.

This new feeling for the community occurred around two years after he had taking the hand, Rágueb tells. He talked to Sheikha Amina and said that he did not like her community. “In that moment I felt that all the members were so hippie and I did not want to be surrounded by them. I did not understand that every person does the best they can do in their specific moment”. Rágueb continues and says that he did not realize that they were doing the best thing. He thought they were too lazy or not spiritually involved enough. He wanted to put them and the community away and focus on his relationship with Sheikha Amina. “After that, I slowly understood that this is how humanity works. Everyone is different

but in the same time the same. So the task for me now is to exercise of seeing the realness in every person”, Rágueb says. He also says that Sheikha Amina helped him to realize that, because she allowed him to disapprove the community when hating was an illusion of his ego.

Gisela Webb’s third classification of Sufi activities tells that during the twenty-first century it has been common with local sheikhs even if the masters live abroad. Webb mentions the Helveti-Jerrahi Order as an example of this type of Sufi order. Though Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order is a branch of the Helveti-Jerrahi Order and they have their roots in Turkey I see this order as an example of this classification (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009:178).

The realization of trying to understand that all human are the same and when you hurt someone you are hurting the whole humanity, and when you give someone something nice you are giving it to the whole humanity, have been important for Rágueb. He says that these are the most vital things for him and he try to be the best human being he ever can. But he also thinks he is still learning and it will never stop to be in that way.

Gisela Webb also says that the South Asian Chistyya Order in the West represent a universalistic and theosophist orientation (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009:178). A way of thinking that Rágueb seems to have when he says if you hurt one person, you are hurting the whole humanity.

Tasnim describes Sufi as a person who wants to experience the reality. “Reality is Allah and the reality is so Majestic, so complex and so infinite”, she tells. Sufi is the person who wants to experience the truth. Love is for example true, but you need to have the experience of love. The way that you continue to grow is another way that you can testify the evolution of your soul, Tasnim says. “Sometimes you might experience abandonment, it is the other part of love, it is not easy. At the end you’ll know what is happening and you need to take the challenge. This is the way that Sufis trying to live, always loving”.

Alan Godlas describes the non-Islamic order or organizations purpose is to awake the divine consciousness in every human individual, to root out suffering and to further transformation by creating a new life of love, harmony, balance and creativity” (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009: 182). This can be something that Tasnim declares in her quotes above, when she says that Sufi is a person who wants to experience reality and live a life by loving.

In 1985 Tasnim went through a crisis because she lost her best soul-friend – as she says it – which also was her spiritual teacher. During that time she was not a member of a religious organization. She says that her therapist told her she needed to find her spiritual path, because no one could fill the void left by her friend. “I started to look for a spiritual path and one friend told me about this Sufi community. I started to have dreams of Arab carpets and Arab ornaments and I was like; what is this? Finally, one of my friends invited me and as soon as I put one foot in the *tekke* my soul said here. I just felt this is my place. I could not stop coming”, Tasnim says.

Omar says that he believes in the unity – that the human being belongs to the planet and the humanity “all though we are despaired of nations and politics we are one and forever”, he says.

As a human we are looking for what is going on outside and we forget about what is inside us, Omar says. “Ourselves are full of information that does not help us to survive in this this world. The things we learn in the *tekke* do not have so much to do with what is going on in the outside world and withe the publicity and so. Sufism is a way to keep yourself real, to be a true human being”, he explains.

Given what Omar says about all people belong to the humanity and the planet, he seems to have a universalistic way of thinking, something that Gisela Webb says that the South Asian Chistyya Order in the West represent has (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009:178).

## **7.2 How do members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico express the situation to belong to a religious minority in the country? And how do the members perceive religious freedom in Mexico?**

By the information to indicate of the Swedish Foreign Ministry’s report- *Mexiko\_MR-Rapport* that religious freedom is inscribed in the Mexican Constitution and discrimination due to religious belief is prohibited. The church and the state are separated according to the Constitution (Utrikesdepartementet, 2012: 9). The majority of the reports that tell about incidents according to discrimination of religious belief are against people who belong to the original population. There are also some reports, which inform that Lutheran groups in some local societies have been unwelcomed and displaced (Utrikesdepartementet, 2012: 9). There seem to be no reliable resources available, according to the situation for Muslims or people who belong to Islam in Mexico.

Based on what the respondents have said during the interviews I seem to be able to see four themes of how they express the situation to belong to a religious minority in Mexico, and how they perceive religious freedom in the country. These four themes are the following: 1) the majority of the population in Mexico consider themselves as religious people, 2) the variation of religions and traditions in Mexico, 3) members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order do not seek attention, 4) religion as a support in life.

### **1) The majority of the population in Mexico consider themselves as religious people**

Rágueb says that perhaps in some artistic and in some specific intellectual circles, believers can be seen as something wrong. “Because you know nowadays it is so good to be intellectual [...] for example in my school when I was study anthropology people saw religion as something that exists in the culture but not something that can be real”.

Tasnim declares that Mexico is a “religious country” in many ways. “It is difficult to find people who do not believe in God. I mean, some academic and intellectual people, they don’t believe in religion, but most of the population, rich or poor people, they believe in God”, Tasnim says.

### **2) The variation of religions and traditions in Mexico**

Rágueb thinks that the population in Mexico has the freedom to believe. Even if the majority of the people consider themselves as Catholics, Mexico is influenced by other religions and traditions too, he says. Rágueb mention for an instance how the Mexicans celebrate “Dia de los muertos”, which is “Day of the Death” and it is incident in conjunction to All Saints, and also the way they celebrate Christmas. “I think it is a bit mixed and today I think the freedom to believe in different things is not a problem”.

As Hans Ingvar Roth says according to the major conformity model – is that the ethnic group practices its own way without requirement of immersion into the majority culture. The ideal is also that various groups should have a possibility to live together in a shared society and need for example the same language or education (Roth, 2002: 415, 416). Based on what Rágueb explains above and what I have observed during my ethnographic fieldwork, I consider that it seems like a lot of people – at least in Mexico City – are used get in contact with other religions, and they seem to have no problem with that, except in the case of the indigenous people who seem to experience oppression both from the government and other citizens, something that I will mention later in this chapter.

It is not an issue to have another belief than Catholicism in Mexico City, because we are a big city. In another Federal State it could be a problem, or even though with your own family, like the oldest generations. For example when my grandmother knew that I was doing the Islamic prayers she asked me; 'Oh my little boy what are you doing', because she always took me to the church and was very happy that I was the only one who was practicing the Catholic Church

“Sometimes in other states it is complicated because people will ask you if you are a Catholic and the question is not question, there is more like a attack inside the question”, Rágueb says and mention one of his own experiences:

People who knew me before I chose this path started to ask me why and how it turned out that I am not a Catholic anymore, because with a thought of that I was such a truly believer in the Catholic Church. 'What is the truth in your thoughts?', they asked me. I think that I did not stop believe in Isa or in Holy Mary. I think that I only have another point of view and that is what I told them.

Roth say that according to the majority-conformity model there are also important that the majorities and the minorities make assured compromises if shared projects should last in the long term. A state that has allowed minorities to enter the society and accepted them as members indicates that the country belongs to the minorities as well as the majority population (Roth, 2002: 415, 416). According to Rágueb tells in the quotes above it seems that people in Mexico City are used to meet different kind of people from different cultures and religions, but in other states in Mexico the situation can be different. According to the Swedish Ministry's report – *Mexiko\_MR-Rapport*, oppression against religious minorities is more common at state or local level (Utrikesdepartementet, 2012: 9). This is something that Rágueb confirms when he says that in Mexico City there is no problem to belong to another religion than the Catholic Church, but in other Federal States it could be a problem.

“We have religious freedom” Tasnim declare and further says that you can see all kinds of religions in Mexico, and it is no problem to practice your religion. There are a lot of organizations she says and continue:

I think that religious communities can help families who are in crisis. People who suffer poverty, they can find a community to help them. There is not just that people have passion about God, the religion is useful too. The communities help people to stop drinking, finding a job and things like that. Religion is very important in Mexico. I think the government respects that, Alhamdulillah.

What Tasnim mentions in her quote above about you can see all kinds of religion in Mexico and she does not see any problem to practice different religions in the country, I see this as something that can be linked to Roth's majority-conformity model in the way it is important that the majorities and the minorities make assured compromises if shared projects should last in the long term, and a state that has allowed minorities to enter the society and accepted them as members indicates that the country belongs to the minorities as well as the majority population (Roth, 2002: 415, 416).

Omar tells as a Conchero, which is one of the groups of the indigenous population called Mexicas he has experienced discrimination from both the government and citizens in Mexico. Omar explains that for the Conchero tradition it is important to live close to the family and to live close to the nature. "We try to do everything together but the power of our souls are despair, because today people are working for themselves and forget about others. This is the American highway of life".

Omar says that Mexico has a corrupt government and the culture is Americanized. Omar tells that he feel that the government is fighting for themselves, and their language is money. "We in the Conchero tradition do not work for money, we are fighting for freedom for our culture and people. A lot of native communities here are very badly hurt. The situation for a lot of young people is terrible. They do not have a future because there are no jobs and there is no opportunity to study. The progress is always about money and the money is the foundation of corruption", Omar declares.

What Omar explains in the paragraph above I see as an example of what Roth explains in his majority-conformity model, if the minority for an instance is an indigenous population it might be affected what kind of cultural demands they can make, for example when it comes to territorial rights (Roth, 2002: 415, 416). Omar says that the Concheros have experienced discrimination and they have been forced to move from some Federal States due to too much violence against them. Some of the Conchero groups do not seem to have anything to say when it comes to territorial rights.

### **3) Members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order do not seek attention**

Rágueb thinks that Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico is such a small group that people do not consider them. "I think that maybe 98 or 99 per cent of the people in Mexico City do not know that there is a Sufi Order in Mexico City. We do not seek attention; if people come to us they will always be welcomed", Rágueb explains and say that Sheikh Nur belived when someone ask you "which religion do you think is the best?" the correct answer for them is to say "it is up to you", and that is why they do

not ask people to join them. “We think what people do is correct for them, and that is the best religion people can have. If they want to join us it is correct for us but we do not want to convert people into what we think is our path. We truly believe that they are in the correct path. That is why we do not seek for attention or making Public Relations”.

The idea of the melting pot model is that the society needs unity, but the unity can be revealed in different ways through mutual interaction among different groups. The ethnic groups will experience diversity of property and also new mixtures that appears. Various cultures are necessary parts for a valuable society. The cultural differences are not supposed to be seen as negative segregation, rather as a social equality between the groups, Roth claims (Roth, 2002: 416). I see Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order as a new mix that has appeared in Mexico. They have their traditional roots in Turkey but they have also adapted new elements, for example the instrument jarana that originates from the Conchero tradition (a group from the indigenous population), since one of the dervishes of the community is a Conchero.

When it comes to the Sufi tradition Omar says “The Sufism in Mexico is not a massive thing, it is very intimate and we want to keep it that way. Once I asked Sheykh Nur how many dervishes he wanted here and he said that this is not a massive movement. The Sufism came to us like a blessing from God. We did not go out and look for them; they came to us, to our tradition, the Concheros. We also had a great luck with a great sheikh”, Omar tells.

Omar also tells there is no way to feel bad with Sufism because it is so much harmony about it, as he explains it. “We are not against anything and we have not done any scandals though we are not a very open public thing. This is a very small movement, but it is big inside. We do not seek for attention at all. Sometimes we have public *Zikir*, but not very often”, Omar explains.

#### **4) Religion as a support in life**

Tasnim explains that the community is involved in inter-religious movement and she says that she can see that spiritual leaders from different religions feel comfortable in Mexico. “We receive monks from for instance Buddhism and Hindu tradition and they can walk all over the city and nobody is going to say anything. It is great” she says and continues:

We live in a very difficult time, a lot of people are lost, and millions of people are addicted to drugs and alcohol. In our society there is a lot of violence and crime. I feel that true religions can help

people to wake up and be free from the slavery that we are living in. I really believe- Insh Al-Láh- that people realize that religion is important and that it is a way to save our lives.

According to Roth's cultural pluralism model that is hard to pinpoint because the society should maintain a climate where every ethnic group could retain its individuality. He mentions democracy as something for people to have in common. Democratic rights and a public arena where people can meet and exchange ideas, he says (Roth, 2002: 417). I would say that the public arena that Roth mentions in his cultural pluralism model could be linked to what Tasnim tells about the community's inter- religious movements, because these movements take part in public space.

Tasnims hope is that people can find power in religion, as in Islam, Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism. "Insh Al-Láh, " if God allows", I hope that people notice that Allah has not abandoned us, and if all of us suffer that pain it shows us that we need to fight, because with religion you can fight against the forces of the destruction", she says.

"Fight is an inside path", Tasnim says and further explains that if you change your way of thinking, you will clean your mind from negativity and then you are doing your job. This is the way to be free – to realize that Allah is giving us Paradise, she says. "There are a lot of manipulations I know about that, but not all the religions are manipulative and I think there are a lot of places where you can find the real treasure of life, which is connected to The Ultimate Force of Existence who calls itself Alláh", Tasnim tells and also say that it is a challenge to live that way because you have to take care of your relationship with Allah. If you abandon your relationship with Allah, you will lose everything. "I saw that, you have to maintain a discipline".

During the last 25 years it has been a strong push from the capitalism in Mexico, Omar tells and further say that international capitalists want to get the oil, gas, water and land. "The communities of our Conchero culture in the north part of Mexico are closed because of too much violence. All this violence is fed by the USA. They sell the arms and they give you the arms for violence", Omar declares and says that he see religion as the only way to survive when you do not have anything else to trust. "We have to keep ourselves under the umbrella of God", he says.

## 8. Conclusions and discussions

The dervishes I have interviewed say that they feel freedom to practice their religion and as a Sufi they have not experienced oppression in any significant extent, except of being questioned in some situations. This means that my hypothesis was incorrect. My idea was that members of Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico could be subjected to discrimination due to that they belong to a religious minority in a country where oppression against minorities seems to be prevalent.

After my ethnographic fieldwork and the information I got in the interviews I realize that this community is such a small one that no one seems to consider them, something that one of my informants Rágueb also mentions. My belief is that one of the reasons why Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico does not seek for attention is because they might feel that they can practice their religion as they want, because the majority of the population do not know that they even exist. This has given them a free space and in one way I think that this is a conscious choice. The larger an organization is the more attention they will get.

The fact that Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order exist in Colonia Roma, Mexico City plays an important role in the way that they can practice their religion. Colonia Roma is a modern place if you compare to other parts of the city and I truly believe that the mix of various people in this area and the ones around give them this freedom. Given what Omar says in his interview that this Sufi community is filled with harmony and it has not been any scandals around them, and Rágueb says that the community welcomes everyone; why should people feel bad about them, one can ask.

When it comes to Gisela Webb's and Alan Godlas' classifications of Sufi orders I found it difficult to classify Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in one specific category. For me it seems hard to try to classify a group in this way. In my point of view Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico has a lot of different influences and I believe as a scientist you have to account the context where the group exists because, as I mentioned in the result and analysis chapter, the community has its roots from Turkey but they have also adapted other traditions, for instance they have a sheikh who is a woman, which is not very common. Their founder, Sheikh Nur al-Anwar Ashki al-Jerrahi, also influences them with his views of, for instance that every path in life is right if you truly believe in it. In the music they are impact by the Conchero tradition because one of the members, Omar, belongs to that tradition and he plays the jarana which heritage from the Concheros.

The reason why people of the Conchero tradition experience discrimination, might be because they belong to the indigenous population and the major society consider them as a threat since they want to live close to the nature and perhaps the major society finds them in the way for building modern neighborhoods.

During the work on this study several ideas for future research projects has arisen. Given that no previous research has been done of this group in Mexico, there is a lot to explore. For an instance that Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order in Mexico has a female sheikh, Sufism linked to New Age- movements. More interesting subjects could be to investigate other Sufi orders in Mexico.

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## Appendix Definitions

Tekke: Sufi lodge

Dhikr/Zikir: ‘remembrance (of God)’, recitation of God’s names or other short formulas as a spiritual discipline

Dervish: the term used in Iran for the ‘low’ variety of Sufi: the intoxicated, beginning vagrant

Salat: the Muslim prayer, performed five times a day

Salawat: formulaic invocation of divine blessing on the Prophet and his family

Wird: litany, formula

Tasawwuf: Sufism, Islamic mysticism

Sheikh/Sheikha: religious authority, esp. the head of a Sufi order

Urs: death anniversary of a saint or sheikh

*All these words are quoted from the glossary presented in van Bruinessen & Howell 2013: 354-360. In van Bruinessen & Howell’s book dervish is spelled derwish and sheikh is spelled shaykh.*

Fana: “passing away”, experience of the dissolution of personal identity

Baqua: “surviving” the experience of ultimate being after fana

Bay’a: “oath”, a pledge of allegiance to a Sufi master

Khalifa: “successor lieutenant”, a deputy appointed by a Sufi master

Sharia: Islamic law, as formulated through interpretations of the Quran and Hadith

Hadith: “reports” originally oral accounts of the sayings and deeds of Muhammad

Tariqa: “path”, the Sufi path, a Sufi brotherhood

*All these words are quoted from the glossary presented in Green 2012: 239-241. In Green’s book sharia is spelled shari’a.*

Sufis: followers of Sufism, the Islamic mysticism

Imam: leader of prayers. In Shia-Islam imam is the designation of Prophet Muhammad’s successor

*All these words are quoted from the glossary presented in Esposito 2010: 369-372.*

