

Star Wars and Maghribi Sufi Islams:

Reasons Why the Religious Studies Literature Overlooks an Obvious Comparison

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The Star Wars franchise remains the most successful cinematic project in history and there is no shortage of scholarly analyses of its story, history or social impact. In the realm of religious studies, scholars have tended to focus on elements of existing religious traditions that appear to be present in what some call the “Star Wars theology”. Many make the argument for the presence of elements from Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Taoism and “Judeo-Christian” apocalypticism in the first released film in the series, *Star Wars: A New Hope (1977)*. Others have noted that the entire venture itself is a response to the Secularization Theory movement of the 1960s.

While these approaches are not entirely wrong, they do focus too heavily on a close textual reading of the films without properly historicizing their language or creation. Thus, they tend to overlook a series of significant influencing factors in the creation of *A New Hope*: the fact that it was largely filmed in Tunisia, that filming decisions were made spontaneously and that many parts of the Star Wars philosophy closely resemble and absorbed elements from Maghribi Islams, including Islamic apocalypticism and especially elements of Sufisms which were still largely in practice before the rise of fundamentalist Islams in the region after the 1980s. These theories are prominent in online blogs and popular publications but remain to be seen by way of taking up a significant portion of the memory-space in much of the academic literature. In this paper, I explore the evidence to make the case for a Star Wars appropriation of Maghribi Sufi Islams,

drawing on the script, film and documentation regarding the making of the film, including staff interviews. I conclude by questioning why such a hole exists in the scholarly literature, meditating on narratives that suggest the incompatibility of Islam and America (with Star Wars as the ultimate American export), and Islam with peaceful asceticism.

So what does some of the scholarly work on Star Wars in Religious Studies have to say? I want to uncharacteristically preface this by saying that this is by no means an exhaustive survey but that in looking at some of the top research hits, so to speak, into Star Wars and Religion, Islams are mentioned mainly in passing by the academy.

As recently as January 2016, Abdul-Azim Ahmed who is the co-founder of the UK religious studies journal, *On Religion*, published a surveying article of the literature surrounding what he calls the Theology of Star Wars. He puts it this way because, as he notes, upon second glance at the original Star Wars series in the era *after* secularization theory of the 1960s held sway, he became aware of how carefully religion was cultivated by George Lucas in the writing and directing of the films. For those who may be unaware, secularization theory was the teleological perception that religion would die off as an unavoidable consequence of developed societies – something which is completely disproven statistically today. So while the theory might be bunk, there is no less certainty that the Star Wars franchise was a response to it and fears that it might become a self-fulfilling prophecy, that is, it may not be inevitable, but if you say it is enough, it will be.

In Lucas' own words, "all I was trying to say in a very simple and straightforward way, is that there is a God and there is a good and bad side." Elsewhere, Lucas has said: "I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken...a belief in God... I think it's important to have a belief system and to have faith. ... I think there is a God. No question. ... Ultimately the Force is the larger mystery of the universe. ... I would hesitate to call the Force God. It's designed primarily to make young people think about the mystery."

Set against the backdrop of a society that thinks it is ultimately secularizing, one scene which Ahmed points out in *A New Hope* seems to speak even more succinctly to Lucas' modus operandi with Star Wars when in the famous scene just before Darth Vader chokes Admiral Motti using the Force, which he has mystical access to, Motti states: *Any attack made by the Rebels against this station would be a useless gesture, no matter what technical data they've obtained. This station is now the ultimate power in the universe. I suggest we use it!* To which Vader replies: *Don't be too proud of this technological terror you've constructed. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force.* Motti says, *Don't try to frighten us with your sorcerer's ways, Lord Vader. Your sad devotion to that ancient religion has not helped you conjure up the stolen data tapes, or given you clairvoyance enough to find the Rebel's hidden fort...* And just before he chokes him as a way to demonstrate the power and pervasiveness of the Force, Vader states: *I find your lack of faith disturbing.*

And this is important because Lucas wrote *and* directed the first film which laid the groundwork for subsequent installments and enrichments of the Star Wars Theology – though as we will

come to see, I take issue with the Christianoform language invoked (ie. Theology) for what I see as an amalgam of traditions, especially Islams, in which theology is not a relevant term.

I want to note here that Lucas himself is not clear about the influence of Islams in his work, stating, “I didn’t want to invent a religion. I wanted to try to explain in a different way the religions that have already existed. I wanted to express it all.” So it is possible that he was aware of the influence of certain brands of Islam and I hope to show this to be the case, but there was something he was going for that more universal than that. That being said, that doesn’t mean that Islams, particularly in the Tunisian context in which they filmed among others, weren’t a significant and immediate influence beyond Lucas’ own awareness of that fact. Rarely do I delve into the realm of the subconscious of historical figures, nor is that what I am trying to do here with Lucas; however, I am most interested not only in how Islams can be found in Star Wars beyond the writing (but also including costuming, language, and soundscapes) and, more importantly, why this is less frequently talked about in the scholarly and popular literature. So before I get there, let’s talk a little bit about what kind of articles exist about the Star Wars religion.

I want to be careful here and mention that I am not talking about Jediism which has since been recognized as an official religion by various states. I’m talking only of what is found written in the scripts of the films. The discussion of religion in Star Wars tends to follow four major trends of comparative analyses: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Judeo-Christian Apocalypticism.

The writing on Star Wars and Zoroastrianism is significant in volume but lacking in depth. The vast majority of authors only scratch the surface of the tradition, focusing primarily on its emphasis that the world was an eternal battle-field between good and evil. Interestingly, this doesn't seem to pose problems for later proponents of the argument that Taoism is at the heart of Star Wars theology because of its emphasis on balance and imbalance rather than outright evil or good; however, both camps tend to cite instances where their particular narrative is prevalent while de-emphasizing the seemingly contradictory other narrative.

Selective discourse is at work elsewhere in the literature. In his article “Apocalyptic Determinism and *Star Wars*” John Lyden discusses how a heightened acceptance of apocalypticism and apocalyptic narratives in American culture can be traced by looking at the differences between the first and second trilogies and he spends the rest of his chapter trying to answer why this holds such appeal for American audiences and whether or not such literary examples as Star Wars are reflective or prescriptive – I'm, of course, inclined to answer that it is likely both. For Lyden, American apocalypticism in greater society and Star Wars is both disastrous and dualistic, deterministic and yet hinges on one's decision within duality. It results in a final deliverance based on the preceding factors, elements of which are found throughout the first and second Star Wars trilogies.

Lyden further argues that the films place great emphasis on this deliverance through a messianic figure. Notably absent in his analysis are any allusions to Islamic apocalypticism – something baffling for students of the so-called Abrahamic faiths as it would be a natural continuation but it is especially baffling when later scholars move away from so-called “western” influences on the

films to look at so-called eastern influences. Poor geographical dichotomies aside, in these eastern influences, Islam is also notably absent, occupying a place in neither east nor west. This is especially true in the writing of Amir Hussain, not least because he has a Muslim name, preferring to delve into Yoda as the figure of a Taoist master or Luke as an allusion to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. Of course, I'm not arguing that because a scholar has a Muslim-sounding name that they have to focus on Islam in their work – and I say this as a Muslim student of Jewish studies; however, that it goes even without mention in a rather long list of so-called Eastern religions is highly suspect.

Dozens of articles attempt to corroborate the Taoism-Star Wars connection but none so popular as *The Tao of Star Wars* by John Porter in which the connections between the Force and the Tao are continuously drawn especially through the teachings of Yoda. It should be noted however, that Dr. Porter is a M.D. not a PhD, and that Star Wars is primarily used to illuminate the teachings of Taoism for contemporary practitioners of it, rather than the other way around.

A similar book is found about the series and Buddhism entitled *The Dharma of Star Wars* by Matthew Bortolin in which the words ascribed to Buddha are used to illuminate the teachings about the Force and vice versa, primarily for a popular audience, but also with the intention to draw attention to the influence of Buddhism in the making of the film.

More scholarly works, such as that written by Christian Feichtinger have looked at what elements of Buddhism were appropriated by Lucas in his search for a new spiritual and moral guidance for a young audience. And I guess, to be fair, I'd have to ask why he doesn't look at Christianity, given his name. That's a joke folks. For Feichtinger, Lucas adopts Buddhist

symbols, values, and ideas in his concept of the order of the Jedi and their spirituality which include sitting meditation, mindfulness, compassion, interdependence, or the overcoming of attachment. Star Wars thus represents and promotes Buddhist elements, but deprives them of their Buddhist origin. Feichtinger concludes by arguing that although Star Wars might serve as a vehicle to bring Buddhist ideas to Western audiences, in fact Lucas uses the distance of Asian and Buddhist culture to the Western world to also enact the Jedi as the Other, mysterious and fascinating, in an approach that can be defined as orientalist.

As I have mentioned, in these cases and elsewhere, Islam rarely appears as an influencing factor in philosophies of the Force or Jedi theology, except very occasionally in a list lumping all so-called Eastern religions together, and even then it is not consistently present in the dozens of articles I have surveyed whether authors are looking at either western or eastern religions. How can Islam occupy little to no memory space in the literary and historical interpretations of Star Wars particularly when Muslim contexts were so influential in the making of the films, as we will see?

I should point out that there is one major pool of literature in which authors claim Islam appears to have influenced Lucas in the making of Star Wars: the press media. This tends to revolve around the dark forces of the films, (one author literally asks if Radical Islam is the galactic empire) including being the inspiration behind the Phantom Menace and using evil metaphors, motifs and analogies to talk about real-life terrorists and extremist leaders like Osama Bin Laden, whether that be comparing him to the evil overlord of the dark empire, or when the CIA commissioned the creator of GI Joe action figures to develop a toy that resembled both Bin

Laden and Darth Maul to demonize the AlQaeda leader to young children (yes, that actually happened, people).

The list could go on here, but most recently, in some of the few online articles to recognize the Jedis as having Islamic influence, this is sadly for the worse because they paint Luke in particular as a disenchanted youth groomed for terrorism by extremists like Obi Wan-Kenobi, following the so-called Islamic formula used to detect radicals by the Department of Homeland Security. Just saying that sentence makes me a bit ill. They claim that from introducing Luke to us in *A New Hope* (as a simple farm boy gazing into the Tatooine sunset), to his eventual transformation into the radicalized insurgent of *Return of the Jedi* (as one who sets his own father's corpse on fire and celebrates the successful bombing of the Death Star), each film in the original trilogy is another step in Luke's descent into terrorism. By carefully looking for the same signs governments and scholars use to detect radicalization, the authors claim that we can witness Luke's dark journey into religious fundamentalism and extremism happen before our very eyes. Obviously this understanding of Islam is rather distorted to say the least, but even practicing, knowledgeable Muslims included are not immune from the corrupted versions of traditional Islamic terms.

On telling a colleague that I planned to use the term Jihadi Jedi to describe Luke, he (being a huge Star Wars nerd) immediately protested that the Jedis are were the "good guys" telling me more about his internal colonization of the term Jihad than it does about what I meant, which I will get to shortly.

In a bizarre article written for CNN entitled “Star Wars or ISIS: Which is more Islamic?” H.A. Hellyer argues that George Lucas avoided using overt Islamic terminology in his “discreetly, very Islamic” film because he didn’t want them to be directly associatable with the controversial religion, thereby protecting Lucas who has been accused, by some, of “creeping Shariah”. I say that this article is bizarre because as if it weren’t kitschy and marketing SEO friendly enough to write an article on Islam and Star Wars, Hellyer had to throw in a comparison with ISIS to boot, thankfully claiming that Star Wars is the more Islamic of the two, but not without making the ever-present comparison between the Sith Lord and Daesh founder, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Insert facepalm here.

The rest of Hellyer’s article follows a similar vein as the other pool of literature in which some authors claim Islam appears to have influenced Lucas in the making of Star Wars: personal blogs. While these tend to be surprisingly rich in terms of their analysis, most are close textual readings of the script weighed against comparative Islamic concepts.

Many claim that rather than being a Taoist master, Yoda is actually a Sufi Murshid or guide who aids Skywalker on his different levels towards spiritual advancement towards the Absolute, as Samad, one of the 99 names of Allah, or “if you prefer, The Force,” to quote one author.

Hellyer argues that the relationship between Skywalker and his master progresses, and we must ask if Master Yoda’s residence in a cave is an accident or not — it was in the Quranic chapter of “the Cave” where one of the greatest inspirations of Islamic spirituality, the Prophet Moses, encounters the Al-Khidr. Al-Khidr, a mysterious character that many argue is the subject of a Quranic story, is one who the Prophet Moses is meant to learn from and follow — but owing to

what appears to be erratic behavior, the latter neglects to do so. He notes that "aKhidr" is also the Arabic word for "green" – and Yoda, surprise, surprise, is green. So this is the kind of literary analysis we're getting here,

Other writers such as Aziz Poonawalla have focused more closely on the notion of Allah as the Force. He asks us to consider how Obi-Wan (Luke's 'alim) explained The Force to his young student, in the desert madrasah on Tatooine: "The Force is what gives a Jedi his power... It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together." In other words, the Force is not confined to any one place but exists in all places, arising from life itself. In Islam, Allah is also omnipresent in Creation, upon the throne of Heaven and at the same time "closer to Man than his jugular vein" (Qur'an 50:16). Though the Force is described as an energy field arising from living things, in Islam it is life that arose from Allah's will – the connection to life itself is inextricable.

Later, Yoda teaches Luke about how the Force elevates him above the level of the merely material: *[The Force's] energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, Luke* (Yoda pinches Luke's shoulder), *not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you. Here, between you, me... the tree.. the rock... everywhere!*

Again, Poonawalla claims, the emphasis on the omnipresence of Allah, but here Yoda also explains to Luke that it is via The Force that our true selves can be realized. He states that "Our existence on this mortal plane is not the totality of our existence, we are more than merely our "crude matter" of flesh. In Islam, as well, acceptance of the Oneness of Allah (Tawhid) is the key to unlocking the truth about our reality."

Another author compares the wandering Luke to Moses in the desert, likening his vision of fire to the ubiquitous Force being an energy field that can, if practiced correctly, bring about the good. He reminds us that, of course the opposite is also true, hence the dark side of the Force. Not coincidentally, the “fire” in the Quran is also used negatively for the fire can consume us as well as enlighten us.

These kinds of arguments are not wholly convincing, to say the least, but they do present similar points that other comparative religious analyses make, except that they mainly appear in popular online writing. Few, if any of these articles, focus on the historical context of the making of the films, the language appropriated in the films, the costuming and spatial appropriation of Muslim characteristic styles, and Lucas’ own journey consulting with Sufi Brotherhoods for information. I want to say that I am only going to scratch the surface of an argument here. My point is just to gesture in directions for future research before I meditate on why these areas have hitherto been mainly absent from the scholarly literature on Star Wars.

First of all, the ever important context of the filming in Tunisia starting in 1975. Many documentaries I have seen skip over this fact as if the country was merely a backdrop to an all-American bonanza in the desert, overlooking the fact that it wasn’t Lucas’ first choice for filming and all of the adaptations and spontaneous decisions that arose because of it, directly affecting the final production of it, thereby not lending credence to the incredible influence of space on the construction of meaning within it. This has more to do with the context’s unfamiliarity to both the audience and the crew than it disproves that the location had no influence on the look, sound and content of the film. In an interview for a documentary from 2015, *The Making of the Star*

Wars Original, Mark Hamill openly states “We felt like strangers in a strange land because we were *so American*.”

In the documentary from 1987, *From Star Wars to Jedi: The Making of a Saga*, Lucas notes that he and others on the crew didn’t elaborate much on the look and content of the scenes to be shot there until they had actually arrived in the environment. In *The Making of the Star Wars Original*, the sound artist for all 3 films notes that the soundscape of Tunisia directly influenced the creation of the film including the braying of donkeys which had transported the gear into the desert and the manipulation of indigenous Saharan languages, among others, to mimic the gibberish of the Jawa.

It should be noted that Tunisia in the context of 1975 was not what people who lack experience with Islamic countries during this period might expect. Images of graduating classes from Tunis university might surprise some by showing youth with cropped hair, unveiled heads, short skirts and western clothes...something obvious for those of us studying the region. Why, then, the deliberate appropriation of long North African Djelleba-like robes in exactly the style and materials of Sufi brotherhoods? It should be noted that this style was common in rural and Saharan regions of the Maghreb (it still is) and was emblematic of very early Sufi orders who are said to have gotten their name from these garments as *Suf* means Wool from which they were humbly made. Another important contextual point is a common historiographical narrative that this time predates the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region and the import of more puritanical strains of Islams from the Gulf in the late 1980s. It is common among historians to

discuss the unique elements of Maghribi Islams before their penetration by purifying so-called eastern elements that rid them of the majority of their Sufi influences.

The western adoption of Sufi orders was also seen to be quite influential on Lucas, including claims that he contacted the Habibiyyah Sufi Order in Berkeley, California prior to the writing the final draft of *A New Hope* script in January, 1976, after they had already been shooting in Tunisia. However, it should be noted that more work needs to be done on the direct influence this order had on Lucas and his writing, particularly in light of the fact that he also sought other knowledge from other religious orders during his writing. Thus I am less interested in what I am calling, not without great trepidation, subconscious appropriations of Sufi Islams that have ties to the crew's time in Tunisia.

Perhaps there is a better term for this and it hinges on removing Christianoform Secularist presumptions about religion from our vocabulary because religion, if it can ever be defined, is at *least* part of its greater cultural system if not comprising it entirely – a concept which rails against the assumption that it needs to refer in some way to the supernatural or to internal beliefs; hence that if we don't find Lucas' conscious writing of Islamic *beliefs* into the script, the influence of Islam is not there. When we reject this and look at Islam for what it is, a Deen, a way of life that saturates everything, we find that there is no way for Star Wars to be free of the Islamic influence just because its crew and many ideas that influenced it were imported to the desert oasis in which it was filmed. They might have felt like Hamill described, as strangers in a strange land, ill-equipped as the audience to interpret the land and soundscapes before them,

making them all the more alien, but that doesn't mean influence and Islamic nuancing is absent for reasons I have mentioned above and will continue to talk about below.

I mean, it is a true testament to the Othering of Islams in the film that Luke's Tatooine home was seen as wholly otherworldly when in fact, it was a genuine Tunisian hotel in a town called Tataouine that would appear rather ordinary to its "native" patrons. That American films crews would come in and make it part of their intergalactic landscape as the truly exotic doesn't take away from it shaping the film – influence in meaning, as were, is not unidirectional.

The same is true for language which is another area to look into in terms of influence, particularly the term Jedi itself which, if pronounced correctly (that is, in Arabic, *al-Jeddi*) which is used by some groups to mean Master of the mystic warrior way and coming from the root related to the meaning of serious or beloved (by a deity). Palawan, which is similar to Padawan meaning Jedi apprentice in the films, though admittedly not a perfect match, refers to titles used by Muslim knights and likely is a borrowed term from the Sanskrit Padawan meaning learner. As Irfan Rydhan argues, the "Jedi" study and train under the apprentice-master relationship similar to how many religious students study under a priest or religious scholar until they have learned enough to teach and train the next generation of students. He states that from a Muslim perspective, the similarities between the Jedi and the Islamic traditions of instruction are strikingly similar. For example a Sufi Muslim scholar usually trains under a Sheikh for a number of years before they are given the right or permission ("Ijazah" in Arabic) to professionally teach others about Islam. "In Islamic Sufism Sheikhs will have "silsilas" that list the chain of teachers going back to the Prophet Muhammad (saw). A "silisia" indicates a Sheikh's lineage of mystical learning from which he draws his spiritual authority." Similarly in

the “Jedi” tradition of Star Wars, each “Padwan” (apprentice) is taught the same tradition and skills their Jedi masters were taught by their previous masters.

This list is hardly exhaustive and does not include Islamic influences on the later trilogies including fighting techniques from the Eskrima Serrada Muslim groups in the Philippines and Malaysia. Nor does it include a discussion of the sand people to whom Lucas appears sympathetic and whom Rydhan argues are meant to resemble nomadic Arabs. Other writers claim that the Bush War on Terror came to be transposed into Star Wars mythology after 9/11 noting, among other evidence, that Anakin tells Obi Wan “Either you’re with me, or against me” in their final duel.

One author however (not looking for the Islamic influence over Star Wars) looks to the franchise to illuminate the Islamic world for polarizing media pundits and politicians alike, rather than the other way around. Babak Rahimi argues that for them, the Islamic world is a divided universe of competing worlds. Among other planetary dominions, the Islamic world is perceived as a distinct realm, at times far away from an imagined West, enlightened and, well, more civilized. Implicit to the mythos of competing worlds is not merely a clash of civilizations, but the self-realization of a unique Western culture standing apart from other imagined worlds. Conflict may ensue, but the primarily aim is for the other, inferior worlds to be subdued. In essence, discourses of world civilizations are triumphant self-narratives.

However, Rahimi continues that, in sharp contrast to civilizational narratives, Star Wars is not a tale of competing worlds, but a triumph of universal love, the Force that “surrounds us and

penetrates us,” and ultimately “binds the galaxy together.” The Galactic Empire is the politics of fear manifested in self-triumphalism, while the Republic is the politics of love articulated in self-awareness of oneness with all. Star Wars ultimately invites us to “join” the Force, to see the world as one intergalactic reality. Its mythology is meant for self-critique, a way of enabling us to see beyond ourselves, beyond our perceived differences.

Which brings me to a couple of theories I have about why, in the academic literature, Islams are largely absent from the discourse on Star Wars and why, in popular lit, the historical context of the original films is overlooked or seen just a neutral backdrop against which *the best American film of all time* was made.

The perceived incompatibility of America, represented by the Star Wars franchise, and Islam, represented by whatever is the monolithic flavour of the day, is a main factor in inviting such theories. It certainly has been put forth that Lucas failing to mention it as a reference explicitly in creating Star Wars is a protective tool to prevent him being the ultimate wool-puller over the eyes of the American public since Michael Jackson (who many fringe thinkers claim converted to Islam and embedded his music with subliminal Allahu Akbars). Of course, I do feel that the former *actually* makes a case, (sorry MJ) especially when we reaffirm that we don’t need Lucas to have been aware of the Islamic touch on either his conceptions of the Force or the spatial development of the film in order for that to have been there.

A long (far longer than since the commonly cited post 9/11 era) and unfortunate but relatively established American tradition of branding Islam as un-American, and demonising Muslim

bodies as a threat through targeted policing, selective immigration, profiling makes imagining the “good guys” in Star Wars as Muslim unthinkable. As noted in *Sacred Interests: The United States and the Islamic World 1821-1921*”, Karine Walther that in the nineteenth century, many Christian Americans saw themselves as a crucial leader of global Christendom. Fueled by the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening, Christian activists saw it as their divine role to spread Christianity to the “heathens” of the world. When it came to the Islamic world, they portrayed the “Christian world” in a global battle of “cross against crescent.” Such feelings would rise to the fore when Americans witnessed revolutionary movements by Ottoman Christian subjects against Ottoman Muslim rulers. American support for revolutionary insurrections in Greece in 1821, Crete in 1866, and Bulgaria in 1876 drew the attention of thousands of Americans who rallied to their cause, based in part on their belief that such battles were part of this alleged global battle between Christianity and Islam. At these moments, Americans maintained that Muslims’ alleged religious fanaticism, political and religious decadence, and intolerance for other religions made their rule over Christian subjects. It’s not hard to see how this sort of rhetoric has continued today, even if it’s not “everywhere”. And let’s not forget that many historians estimate that 15-30% of all enslaved African men were said to be Muslims and less than 15% of African women. Indeed, even after the abolition of slavery, there is evidence that darkness of skin and Islam are still correlated, and then demonized. #blacklivesmatter #muslimlivesmatter

Of course, this is its own discussion but going hand in hand with the argument that America and Islam are incompatible is a) the presumption that America is peaceful by default b) that is Islam is violent and therefore, c) that Islam cannot be peaceful.

This notion is all wrapped up in the quasi-religious worldviews and political agendas that praise Huntington's Clash of Civilizations as the new gospel and likely change their Facebook profile picture paintings of the Crusades every time a terrorist attack happens. To imagine a peaceful, religious warrior coming from Islamic Sufi orders is wholly incoherent with such a worldview. This incoherence does not even need to be limited to the overtly Islamophobic but permeates the academy as well which contrives to be divided into disciplines of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and the "everything else" as if the history of the MENA region is a) unrelated, b) uninfluential and uninfluenced and c) self-contained. (And I might add d) irrelevant).

And yet, many of the traditions of North African Sufis fail to fit the mold of a whirling dervish, harmless, drunk on wine, connecting with the creator. Other orders in the Maghreb region and the Pacific would regularly arm themselves or train adherents in hand to hand or hand to sword combat as part of their Jihad – meaning justified, warfare of self-defense. (That discussion is a whole other ball of wax I have to leave to a later date) The Jedi could thus be considered "Holy Warriors" (or "Muhajideen" in Arabic – yet another dirty word for the West) as they fight for truth, justice and peace. They meditate (i.e. "Dhikr" remembrance of Allah) as much as they can, to become "one with the Force", even in the midst of battle which was famously done by Muslims.

One such group argues for a more coherent understanding of Jihad that encompasses both the ascetic struggle and the worldly self-protection by stating "*We are at the core a Movement of Jeddi; masters of Futuwwat ("the Way of the mystic-warrior"). We encourage adherents to train both physically AND spiritually, for their own personal edification and to enhance their knowledge and abilities in the STRUGGLE. The Real does not lie alone in contemplation, prayer*

and meditation; nor does it lie alone in action and revolution. Both of these are notions of “one or the other” and Allah is not “one or the other.” “Allah” literally means “the One[ness] which manifests from Nothing.” As we have stressed before, this “Nothing” is not the “lack” of all, but rather, it is Nothing in the sense of Totality of Being, which is symbolized by the numeral zero this number itself originated with Sufis. Allah is neither the positive alone, nor the negative. Allah is the perfect balance between the two. The direct center of two polarities is always zero, Pure Nothing, from which the Totality, the Tawhid (Unity), the Oneness of ALL becomes manifest. For it is out of zero that all subsequent positive and negative numbers reel. That is Allah.”

I will have to end here since this could go on and on, and prior to writing this I had absolutely zero interest in Star Wars, but I want to conclude by saying that this argument is not any more compelling than any other comparative religious argument except by virtue of what is possible to claim after further investigation of the Tunisian Connection and other historicities. This is especially the case if we let go of close textual literary analyses and ethnographies where authors tend to take oral offerings as the only narrative. Of course, I am not knocking oral histories, only pointing a common caveat between anthropologists and historians which is that an interviewee may not and *need* not be fully aware of the genealogies of their testimony.

What *is* provocative is when these testimonies or secondary literature in press media and popular blogs overlooks what seems to invite obvious comparison, only heightened by its relative absence in the scholarly lit. In looking at the influence of Islam on *Star Wars*, it is less about the textual argument, many of which have been made about many traditions in less close proximity than Maghribi Sufi Islams. Rather, it is far more interesting to ponder why such an absence or

negative portrayal exists and what a pop icon such as *Star Wars* can illuminate about the ways in which the people who use it narrate the worlds they live in.

May the Force be with you.