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**OFFICIAL OFFICIAL SUNNI AND SHI'I ISLAM IN SYRIA**

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Since the coup d'état in 1963, Syrian politics of Islam has been characterized by a permanent search for Islamic legitimacy. The Sunnis, who represent the majority of the population, felt increasingly alienated by successive minority regimes. In the pre-Asad period from 1963 to 1970, the deteriorating relationship between the ruling elites and the Sunnis led to an excessive use of repressive strategies aimed at gaining control of the domestic Islamic landscape. With the advent of Hafiz al-Asad in 1970, little room for maneuver was left. The Sunni religious establishment rejected his effort to redefine the politics of Islam. This boycott frustrated Hafiz al-Asad so much that he turned towards Sufi and Shi'i Islam in search of possible cooperation. While most of the Sufi orders remained at a distance, the Naqshbandiyya<sup>2</sup> welcomed this unique chance to enter the political and religious scene. Close cooperation with the Kaftâriyya Sufi order of the Syrian Grand Mufti, Shaykh Ahmad Kaftârû, gave Sufi Islam a dominant role in Syrian religious politics. Another minor officially accepted Naqshbandi Sufi order is led by Shaykh Ahmad al-Khaznawî in Syrian Kurdistan. Shi'i Islam likewise became another powerful religious force with the introduction into the Syrian domestic scene of Twelver Shi'i transnational actors such as the Iranian state and the Beirut-based Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah. This paper will show how these Sufi and Twelver Shi'i actors became so dominant in official Islam in Syria.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Following the military putsch in 1963, Syria was ruled for the first time in its modern history by a coalition of ethnic and confessional minorities with a secular socialist ideology. The Sunni establishment, led by the '*ulamâ*', refused to cooperate with the new rulers. This applies to the period from 1963 to 1966 as well as that of the Neo-Ba'ath from 1966 to 1970, even though the spectrum of population represented in each regime was much broader than ever before (Rabinovich 1971, 167, 197-8). The phase of consolidation of Ba'athi rule established the antagonism between the secular socialist ruling elite and the Sunni majority strongly embedded in Islamic tradition and belief as a continuing pattern. There were various reasons for this lack of acceptance. It shows the annoyance of a layer of the *ancien régime* with its long tradition of political, economic, and cultural superiority vis-à-vis representatives of provincial descent and low social status. The petit bourgeois character of the new elite sharpened this confrontation of classes that further deepened the gap between urban and rural interests (Hinnebusch 1982, 146). It is therefore not surprising that this early phase of Ba'athi rule was accompanied by polemics and uprisings. After the Neo-Ba'athi coup in February 1966, the contradictions became even more pronounced. The nationalization of foreign trade and parts of industry as well as the land reform affected vital interests of the traders and the

'*ulamâ*'. On top of this, the secular ideas of the social order propagated with vigor by the new elites offended more traditional strata of society. By the time Hafiz al-Asad seized power in 1970 the tension was even greater. The fact that he was an Alawi<sup>3</sup> encouraged oppositional movements to concentrate on the religious and thus the political legitimacy of the regime. The struggle for Islamic legitimacy was just concealing a fierce struggle for economic and political power. The majority of the Alawis are from the hinterland of Lattakia, where they led a miserable existence of rural Lumpenproletariat until the late 1950s (Batatu 1981, 333-4).

The Sunnis saw the subsequent elevation of some members of this underprivileged sect to a political, economic, and cultural elite as a provocation. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, Asad's rule was based on a system of patronage that was formed along tribal, regional, and confessional loyalties (Hinnebusch 1982, 144; van Dam 1996). It was less competence than a direct and absolute relationship of loyalty that was decisive for the regime in regard to the distribution of positions. In the Middle East tribal, regional, and confessional factors are the main determinants of loyalties and thus it is not surprising that "accidentally" many Alawis occupied key posts (Abdallah 1983, 34f; Batatu 1981, 331f; Sadowski 1988, 161-84). A minority of Sunnis might prove the opposite, for example, Mustafâ Tlâs, who has been minister of defense since 1972 and was a long-standing comrade of Asad, 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Kasm, prime minister from 1980 to 1987, or Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihâbî (Koszinowski 1985, 551).

For the Sunnis, their presence served as a kind of alibi (Hinnebusch 1982, 144). Seen through the "prism of confessionalism" (Seurat 1989, 19) the Ba'ath Party barely represented the "civil facade of the regime" (Seurat 1989, 27, fn. 33). Under the cover of Ba'athism the Sunnis continued the practice of confessional politics (*tâ'ifiyya*).<sup>4</sup> The Sunni establishment challenged the Islamic legitimacy of the new regime and thus challenged its religious and political authority.<sup>5</sup> The role Sunni '*ulamâ*' of the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools of law (*madhâhib*) played in the escalation of the confrontation should not be underestimated. To control the Sunni infrastructure a wide range of bold and aggressive strategies were implemented, which almost completely overshadowed the efforts to develop a more sophisticated strategy of cooptation. The use of such measures as torture and imprisonment has earned Syria a reputation as an *état de barbarie*. The security apparatus, which reaches deep into the private sphere of the people, spreads terror and fear. Preachers and mosque personnel are imprisoned or suspended for not having complied with the demands of the ever-present secret service (*mukhâbarât*). This is reinforced by means of structural control of all forms of institutionalized Sunni Islam, such



as the administration of Islamic endowments and mosques, and Islamic teaching (Böttcher 1998a, 17-146).

The revolt of Hama, a town in central Syria, its siege, and partial destruction by the Syrian security forces in 1982 showed to what extent Hafiz al-Asad's regime was willing to use repressive measures in order to stay in power. Even though the uprising was led by only a small, radical faction of the Muslim Brothers and Sisters, it left a deep scar in the Syrian collective memory (Abd-Allah 1983, 191-6; Lobmeyer 1995; Reissner 1980). It marked the end of the open challenge to the power holders' legitimacy regarding religious and political authority. Since this incident, though both sides have been very careful to avoid another confrontation, nevertheless the struggle for legitimacy continues less openly.

After Hama the Syrian regime regained full control of the Sunni arena but pressure grew from the outside. Syria has since been confronted with a trend for religious orthopraxy felt throughout the Islamic world and this has exerted a strong effect on the Syrian Sunni population. As elsewhere in the Islamic world there has been a growing demand by Syrian Sunnis to integrate Islamic values in their social, political, and economic life. In order not to have radical Islamic currents provide these interpretations of Sunni Islam, the Syrian authorities decided to respond by developing their own version of Islam, the "official Islam" (*al-Islâm al-rasmî*). While on one hand any interpretation of Islam threatening the power holders is forbidden, on the other hand space has been created for those versions of "official Islam" which provide legitimacy to the regime. The strict rules of planning such as those applied to the economy are even more rigorously applied to the field of Islam. Just as in trade and commerce, an oligarchy of "official license-holders", the Ba'ṯhi shaykhs, are the profiteers of this monopolistic setting.

## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF "OFFICIAL SUNNI ISLAM"**

Syria's official Sunni Islam is a Sufi Islam and the most prominent "cooperation partners" of the regime are Sufi orders: the Kaftâriyya of Shaykh Ahmad Kaftârû and the Khaznawiyya of Shaykh Muhammad al-Khaznawî. While the Sufi network of Shaykh Kaftârû is an urban phenomenon based in Damascus with a branch in Lebanon, called the Rajabiyya, the Sufi network of Shaykh al-Fhaznawî is more of a rural phenomenon based in Syrian Kurdistan with branches in Kurdish communities all over the world. With the Sunni infrastructure being under strict surveillance, the activities of these Sufi orders come as a surprise. It is clear that their success would not be possible without the consent of the Syrian regime.

Over the centuries Sufism developed an organizational structure, the Sufi orders, that evolved around a master, the shaykh or *murshid*. Sufi orders such as the Qâdiriyya, the Mawlawiyya, and the Naqshbandiyya are among the most active and successful Islamic networks in the Middle East, Central Asia, China, the United States, and Europe. The size of Sufi networks varies from a dozen followers to hundreds of thousands. They are not confined to spiritual practice but also constitute powerful transnational economic, political, and social entities. Their flexibility in accommodating to the political, economic, and legal frameworks of their host states is the secret of their success.

The Syrian regime realized that these Sufi orders have a unique hierarchical structure that makes them reliable partners once the leading shaykh consents to some form of arrangement. Whether or not an Islamic network, be it Sufi, Salafi or Wahhabi, opposes, cooperates, or simply coexists with a state or regime depends on its leader. He (or less frequently she) has to make the decision whether or not the relations of authority and the principles of legitimacy as defined by the ruling political authority should be accepted by his or her network. Whether the decision to cooperate with the political leadership of a host state will be accepted by the majority of his followers is dependent on the leader's charisma. There is a risk that the decision to cooperate might expose the leader and his network to pressure from oppositional forces within the network and outside, while the decision not to cooperate might lead to pressure from the political authority. A network's concept of social and political arrangements must be adapted to the framework set by state Islam.

Sufi networks, particularly Naqshbandi Sufi networks, deal well with this adaptation process because of the links of loyalty within them. Compared to other religious organizations, Sufi networks are tightly knit because of their pyramidal shape with strict hierarchies for male and female disciples. The most important element of this structure is the link between the shaykh and his disciples. Every disciple is in some way connected to the shaykh at the top of the Sufi pyramid. This represents a line of interaction and communication characterized by duration, frequency, and intensity. In Sufism this link is called the *râbita* and is an expression of utmost dedication and trust. It is formally established through a ceremony that consists of taking an oath. Praying, meditating with the shaykh, talking to him, and listening to his teachings continuously renew it. The main interest for the majority of followers of a shaykh is the spiritual side. For them Sufism represents a spiritual approach concentrating on a Muslim's relation to God based on a set of rules of etiquette and behavior, litanies, and forms of meditation (Nasr 1991, 3). Disciples of large Sufi networks usually see their shaykhs only during collective prayers, invocations (*dhikr*), or teaching lessons. They are granted an occasional personal meeting with the help of mediators. Being accorded time with him or

his family is considered a privilege. Those who live in close proximity to the shaykh do not need the help of intermediaries (Schenk 1984, 47-51). Elite members of a Sufi network, such as family members, have the oldest *râbita*, which has lasted for decades. They are usually interrelated and from the same ethnic and confessional background. They are responsible for the integration of “new disciples” through endogenous marriage within the network. Reinforcement of the *râbita* through ties of kinship, confession, and ethnicity provides a maximum stability of network connections.

The lack of the individual follower’s participation in the decision-making process makes Sufi orders attractive collective cooperation partners for authoritarian states such as the Syrian. Sufi orders also cope well with expansion and easily absorb a growing periphery of sympathizers and profiteers. These join for reasons of economic, political, or social opportunism but for one reason or another they do not have the time or the interest in getting more involved. They are part of the network but might not be drawn towards the center until a later stage of their religious and spiritual development. As long as ordinary Muslims are involved in one way or another in a Sufi order, they will not be attracted to Islamic currents that are in opposition to the regime.

By playing the Sufi card, the Syrian regime is revitalizing a long tradition of Sufi Islam, which has always played an important role in Syrian religious, social, and political life. Famous Sufi shaykhs such as Khâlîd al-Naqshband or Amîn al-Kurdî lived in Damascus and spread their Sufi teachings all over Syria (Geoffroy 1995). Sufi Islam has usually peacefully coexisted with Salafî and Wahhâbi oriented Islamic currents in Syria. Sufi shaykhs have been respected members of the Sunni religious establishments. In modern day Syria active Sufi communities flourish all over the country particularly in Damascus, Alep-po, and in the northeast of the country (Batatu 1999, 103-5; Jong 1986, 205-43; Pinto 2001). The fact that Sufi Islam has gained such a prominent role as an instrument in religious politics is not a Syrian phenomenon. Sufi shaykhs and their movements have always been powerful actors supporting or opposing political power.<sup>6</sup>

## **THE KAFTÂRIYYA SUFI-ORDER IN DAMASCUS**

The Naqshbandi Sufi order of Shaykh Kaftârû is the classic example of a Sufi network whose leader decided to cooperate with the political authority.<sup>7</sup> This cooperation developed slowly and was accepted by the majority of the elite members within the network. The Kaftâriyya’s elite consists of Kurdish, Sunni disciples of the Shafî’î school of law. They are all interrelated by marriage and kinship ties with the leading shaykh. Some of their relatives fled with Shaykh Kaftârû’s father, Shaykh Amîn, from Kurdistan and settled in the *Hayy al-*

*Akrâd*, the Kurdish neighborhood of Damascus. They joined Shaykh Amîn in his study circles and later, after he had taken over the leadership position of the Sufi order, became his disciples. Their children studied with his son, Shaykh Ahmad (b. 1912). He succeeded his father in 1938 at the head of the Sufi order and developed it into what later became known as the Kaftâriyya. These disciples represent the core of the network. They occupy key posts and make sure that the policies of the leading shaykh are being implemented. Meetings for the male and female “top Sufi management” are held regularly in the private residence of the shaykh on the outskirts of Damascus. For them the material success of their Sufi order on earth is as important as their spiritual advancement on the path to God. This attitude facilitates the implementation of certain crucial decisions entailed by cooperation with the authoritarian regime.

Shaykh Ahmad Kaftârû’s joint venture with the Ba‘th party dates back to the 1950s and took many years to develop. It was facilitated by the experience he acquired within the state apparatus. Beginning in 1948, he joined the *fatwâ*-administration as a teacher of Islam in Qunaytra on the Golan and in Damascus. In 1958, he was nominated Shafi‘i mufti of Damascus. From 1959 to 1964 he had his own program on Syrian radio, where he explained Islamic topics to a broad public (Kaftârû 1990). Following his motto, “cooperation with any national government” (al-Habash 1996, 78) he showed great flexibility in adapting to the demands of the changing Ba‘thi-regimes. A year after the coup d’état in 1963, he was elected Grand Mufti (*al-muftî al-‘âmm*) of Syria. To this day this election is considered highly controversial in Syria even though it is not discussed officially. Three months after the Ba‘thi seizure of power in 1963, the acting Grand Mufti, Shaykh Abû al-Yusr ‘Âbidîn, was dismissed from his post. He was a popular shaykh in Syria and his dismissal was a clear move by the new regime to reduce the influence of Sunni shaykhs. An interim mufti filled the vacancy for almost a year while the new power holders desperately sought a cooperative successor. Finally in 1964 an election was held and the popular Shaykh Hasan Habannaka lost by one vote against Shaykh Kaftârû (Böttcher 1998a, 54-9). The Sunni clerical establishment never forgave Shaykh Kaftârû for his willingness to run against Shaykh Habannaka and has remained at a distance from him, isolating him from an important power base. But the Ba‘thi regime discovered to their delight that Shaykh Kaftârû would cooperate with them in reducing his jurisdiction within the Ministry of Islamic Endowments (*wizârat al-awqâf*).

While his power as Grand Mufti continued to diminish, his career as the leader of a growing Sufi network received a boost at the beginning of the 1970s when Hafiz al-Asad took power. An excellent working relationship with President Hafiz al-Asad provided Shaykh Kaftârû with the necessary backing to expand his Sufi network. The two men had much in common. Shaykh Kaftârû’s

ethnic affiliation, his ambitions, and the fact of being a "newcomer" among the tight-ly knit networks of the Sunni establishment in Damascus gave him the status of an outsider with a twofold implication. On the one hand he must have seemed trustworthy to a dictator who himself was a newcomer. On the other hand, the Sunni establishment's dislike for Shaykh Kaftârû made any alliance between the two improbable. Having no backing from this substantial Sunni power base, the shaykh was an ideal partner. His growing Sufi network provided a well-organized and reliable institutional structure for the implementation of official Islam. Through the network, Syrian official Sunni Islam gained visibi-lity on a national and international level.

A visible indicator of this success story is the expansion of Shaykh Kaftârû's headquarters in the Kurdish neighborhood of Damascus, the Majma' Abî al-Nûr al-Islâmî or the Abû al-Nûr Islamic Center (ANIC) (Böttcher 1998a, 156-64). The ANIC contains Islamic schools, four universities, the mosque's main prayer hall, offices, a library, apartments, meeting rooms, and the headquarters of the *Ansâr* charitable organization. When Hafiz al-Asad took power, the ANIC expanded dramatically. A concrete fortress replaced the old mosque in 1973. Two years later the *Ma'had al-Da'wa wa-al-Irshâd* "(Institute for mis-sion and moral guidance), an Islamic secondary school, was founded. In 1974 the first of the four universities, the Faculty of Islamic Mission, was founded as a branch of the Association of Islamic Affairs based in Libya. The Lebanese Open Faculty of Islamic Studies opened in 1989 as a branch of the *Kullîyat al-Imâm al-'Awzâ'î* (Imâm al-'Awzâ'î faculty) in Beirut.<sup>8</sup> The Islamic University of Pakistan was founded in 1989 and in 1992 the Sudanese Faculty of the Pil-lars of Faith was created, which is a branch of the University of Omdurman. These universities were developed because the existing public Faculty of Shari'a Law at the University of Damascus persistently refused to cooperate with the promotion of Sunni official Islam (Böttcher 1998a, 131-46). The ANIC responded to the regime's demand. It trains functionaries and mosque personnel who actively contribute their share to official Sunni Islam. A number of Syrian officials in the Ministry of Islamic Endowments carry master and doctoral degrees from these universities, as do most of the holders of high-ranking posts in the ANIC hierarchy. All key positions for the management of the Kaftâriyya network are in the hands of the shaykh's extended family. This elite represents the think-tank of the whole network, providing its *esprit de corps*. It controls the economic, political, and religious resources of the Sufi network and implements the shaykh's interpretations. Despite its well-established institutional structure and the large number of followers, the ANIC has no legal basis and remains extremely vulnerable to regime intervention. There is no decree or law granting it an official status. In the early 1990s the secret service in a show of strength demanded legal proofs of a number of

Islamic centers. The problem was finally settled through top-level intervention, but this shows how fragile the basis the network is.

Since the 1980s a rising number of foreign students from Arab countries, Central Asian republics, Europe, and the United States have participated in training programs for Arabic language and Islamic Studies in the ANIC. Originally directed by elite members of the Kaftâriyya, these courses recently became more professional and americanized due to the involvement of American converts. In the summer of 1993, the first international intensive summer course for Arabic and English speaking imams, preachers, and teachers of Islamic religion took place. These summer courses have proved a great success for the ANIC allowing it both to establish a link with the Islamic world and to expand its Sufi network internationally. The ANIC's ability to respond to the demand for official Islam by other Islamic countries has made it the number one exporter of Islamic training in the Middle East. Its marketing department, the office for the surveillance of the Islamic mission abroad (*maktab ri'âyat al-da'wa al-islâmiyya fî-al-khârij*), has signed a number of bilateral treaties with Islamic centers abroad. American and British disciples of Shaykh Kaftârû opened a branch of the ANIC in Baltimore, Maryland, called the College of Maqasid ash-Sharia. In spring 2001, this college invited English-speaking students to its first summer program in Damascus.<sup>9</sup> It is intended that the summer courses be recorded on video and later used as an online core curriculum for a virtual Islamic university, which would teach Islam through the internet to western-born Muslims and converts to Islam. This project is supported by Shaykh Nâzim al-Qubrusî al-Haqqânî, the leader of one of the biggest international Naqshbandi networks.

There is an increasing awareness in Syria of the ANIC as the main Syrian connection to the international Islamic world. This is reflected by a growing presence and financial support of members of the Syrian business community in ANIC activities. They do not personally adhere to the network but rather use it to express loyalty to the regime and to make contacts with individuals of the international Islamic community. Foreign diplomats, journalists, researchers, and tourists flock to the ANIC in great numbers and are taken care of by a marketing department with well-trained male and female personnel. Thus the ANIC polishes the regime's Islamic image, which is still badly tarnished by the excessive use of repressive strategies. However, its success among the Sunni Syrian population is very limited and criticism by the Sunni establishment of "these Kurds up on the mountain" is strong.

At the height of the clashes with the Muslim Brothers, the regime revitalized the Qur'ân institutes in Syria. At first there was no demand for them from the Sunni population who was terrified by the effects of the repressive

strategies. By the end of the 1980s a hesitant interest in the holy scripture had developed into a large-scale demand, especially on the part of women. While any activity connected to the teaching of Islam is closely monitored by the regime, learning Qur'anic verses by heart, studying the techniques of recitation, and interpreting the verses seemed less likely to attract its adverse attention. The ANIC was integrated into this new policy and as early as 1981 it founded the Hafiz al-Asad Institutes for the Memorization of the Noble Qur'ân. More institutes directed by close disciples of Shaykh Kaftârû followed. During the 1990s, the Qur'ân institute in the ANIC had about 2 000 participants.

The Iranian Cultural Center in Damascus has increasingly cooperated with the ANIC in organizing Qur'ân recitation competitions, in conformity with the growing activities of the Iranians in the field of Shi'i religious teaching in Syria. This also seems to have been one of the few areas where a religious cooperation between Shi'is and Sunnis could be attempted without regard to sensitive dogmatic differences. Since the 1990s the Iranian Cultural Center has organized a celebration at the Asad-Library in Damascus in which the ANIC's institute participates. Syrian Sunnis are reluctant to accept Iranian Shi'i presence in Syria, which for them serves only strategic purposes. Only the ANIC agrees to cooperate with the Iranian Shi'is. Iranian and Iraqi Shi'is are frequent visitors in the ANIC. They attend the Friday prayer and participate in some of the ANIC activities. One of the keynote speakers of the international intensive summer course for Arabic- and English-speaking imams, preachers, and teachers in July 2001 was Shaykh Qâsim al-Na'îm. He is the secretary-general of Hizballah, the Lebanese resistance movement, and a high ranking Twelver Shi'i who studied with Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah in Beirut.

To fully implement this Naqshbandi-Shi'i cooperation Shaykh Kaftârû would have had to reinterpret some doctrines of classic Naqshbandi teaching where strong anti-Shi'i polemics are still very much alive. But he did not do so. A closer look reveals that the rapprochement between Shaykh Kaftârû and Twel-ver Shi'is is very superficial and merely a formal arrangement to please the Syrian regime. Having established for himself a place in the complex network connecting Syrian Alawis, Iranian Shi'is, Lebanese Shi'is, and Sunni Islamists in Syria and abroad, Shaykh Kaftârû has managed to maintain credibility among his disciples but he has lost the respect of the Sunni establishment and the majority of the Sunni population. Sunnis have not forgotten that during the Muslim Brothers' confrontation with the Syrian regime, Iran made a tactical decision and supported the Syrian authorities not the Muslim Brothers.

## THE SUFI WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Since the 1980s, islamization in Syria has meant the mobilization of female Sunnis (Böttcher forthcoming). During the violent confrontations with the Muslim Brotherhood the Syrian regime killed or imprisoned thousands of male Sunnis. Others went into exile. Tensions ran so high that male Sunnis were even arrested for going to the mosque for prayers. While male Sunnis kept a very low profile under the repression, female Sunnis became very active in the field of Islam, challenging state authorities in subtle ways. It is likely that this massive female mobilization was started by the female relatives of those male Sunnis who were victims of the regime's repression. The segregation between male and female spheres, which for religious and cultural reasons is very rigid in Syria, helped female islamization spread geographically and among all social levels of the society. This strict segregation makes surveillance of female Sunni activities very difficult for the Syrian secret service. It is accustomed to operate in a secular male-dominated society and has some difficulties adapting to the challenges of a civil society that is becoming increasingly religious. Sunni women have realized this and are quietly conquering one of the few uncontrolled spaces in civil society. Many urban Sunni girls and women have started to study Islam in private circles. They usually learn Qur'ân by heart, study Qur'ân interpretation and recitation, Islamic history, and the basics of Islamic law. Equipped by these introductory courses with rudimentary knowledge of Islamic law, the students can adapt their daily individual and family life to the precepts of the shari'a. At a higher level of studies, the message conveyed by the teacher might be more political. Underground Islamic movements such as the Qubaysiyya or the Muslim Sisters read Islamic books forbidden in Syria. They are particularly popular among upper class girls and women who return to Syria with a Western education and are in search for intellectually more challenging studies of Islam. The regime realized that it could not stop the growth of female Islamic networks, so it tried to offer its own infrastructure to absorb the female Sunnis in search of Islamic studies.

The female Sufi order of the Kaftâriyya has received strong support from the regime. Shaykh Kaftârû has always encouraged the education of girls and women and has urged them to participate actively in religious, political, and economic life. As early as the 1950s women were given a space in the old Abû al-Nûr mosque to participate in lessons and in Friday prayers. Since then, Shaykh Kaftârû has trained two generations of female Sufis with his daughter, Shaykha Waffa' Kaftârû, being the most prominent. She was trained for a shaykha-career and a role of leadership by her father and other shaykhs and shaykhas. She heads most of the female branch of the Kaftâriyya and was for many years the director of the ANIC schools and universities (Böttcher 1998b, 129-31). Shaykh Kaftârû's second wife, Sabâh al-Jabrî, who married the shaykh



after the death of his first wife in 1992, is gaining considerable influence within the female movement. The inner core of the female Kaftâriyya is committed to *da'wa*, raising the awareness of Muslims of their Islamic identity and the conversion of non-Muslims (Böttcher 1998b, 131-7). They have spread all over Damascus and control official mosque teaching. By the end of the 1990s most of the lessons on Islam offered in mosques in and around Damascus were given by female disciples of Shaykh Kaftârû. Both, his daughter and wife were appointed official mosque teachers by the Ministry of Islamic Endowments, even though permanent positions are extremely limited and usually not available for women. The growth of a female branch within the Kaftâriyya was warmly welcomed by the regime. Their well-organized activities in Damascus aim to bring Islamic teaching out of private houses and into the public realm, into mosques, Qur'ân institutes, and Islamic centers, thus reducing the opportunities for Sunni teachings critical of the regime.

### **SYRIA'S FIRST ISLAMIC FORUM**

Under the presidency of Bashar al-Asad, about 70 forums debating political, social, and economic issues were held all over Syria. Most of them were hosted by secular intellectuals, businessmen, or politicians. In July 2001 Muhammad al-Habash, a prominent member of the Kaftârriyya Sufi order, was allowed to open the first Islamic forum. He is married to one of the granddaughters of Shaykh Ahmad Kaftârû and has made his career in the ANIC. With the help of Shaykh Kaftârû he later became director of Islamic Education in the Ministry of Islamic Endowments in Damascus. It is remarkable that Syria's Islamic forum is a Sufi one, led by a prominent Naqshbandi representing official Islam. By licensing it the regime is merely renaming its successful cooperation with the ANIC and marketing it to a broader public. Before forums became fashionable for a certain period in Syria the ANIC has de facto already been one of the few spaces in the country where conferences, talks, and discussions on Islam were organized for a hand-picked audience.

### **THE KHAZNAWIYYA SUFI ORDER IN NORTHEASTERN SYRIA**

Another Kurdish Sufi shaykh from the Naqshbandi-tradition, Shaykh Muhammad al-Khaznawî, attracts many followers in Syria. His Sufi order, the Khaznawiyya, has its headquarters in Tell Ma'rûf near Qamishly on the Turkish border. Like many other Kurds, his grandparents migrated to Syria from Turkey because of the liberal Islamic and Kurdish policies of the French mandate (van Bruinessen 1998, 30). In 1969 Shaykh Muhammad took over the Sufi order from his father, Shaykh 'Izz al-Dîn (*al-Ârif billah* n.d., 78). He had been initiated by Shaykh Junayd who trained a number of prominent Naqshbandi shaykhs in the Middle East. They later became leaders of influential Sufi

networks in the Middle East and abroad.<sup>10</sup> In many ways the Khaznawiyya Sufi network resembles the Kaftâriyya. Its Islamic school was founded in 1920 and recently a branch of al-Azhar University in Cairo was opened in its Islamic center. The wife of Shaykh Muhammad al-Khaznawî, who is a trained shaykha, directs the female movement. The Khaznawiyya has a strong following among Kurds in the Middle East with branches all over the migrant Kurdish community in Europe and the United States (Qâsim 2001, 19). Most of its followers are Kurds and its headquarters is in the heart of Kurdistan.

## **KURDISH ISLAM AS SYRIA'S SUNNI OFFICIAL ISLAM**

From the perspective of the Syrian Sunni establishment, a surprisingly high percentage of Kurds are very active in the politics of Sunni official Islam. The size and the organizational structure of the two Naqshbandi Sufi networks show that official Sunni Islam in Syria is to a large extent dominated by Sufi Islam of the Naqshbandi tradition and its propagators are mainly Kurds. Trained Sufis of Kurdish origin can be found in key positions in Islamic teaching, in the Ministry of Islamic Endowments, and in Syrian television. The Syrian Ba'ṯhi regime under Hafiz al-Asad was frustrated with the Sunni Salafi and Wahhabi establishment's strict refusal to cooperate. Syria's religious legitimacy and its image in the Islamic world have deteriorated as a result of the confrontations with the Muslim Brothers and Sisters. It was in desperate need of individuals and institutions to help improve this tarnished image and legitimize its religious and political power base. The regime's interest in Sufi orders of the Naqshbandi tradition developed gradually and its successful cooperation with the Kaftâriyya encouraged an extension of this cooperation with other Sufi networks, in Lebanon, for example. For the leaders of the Sufi networks involved, this cooperation represented an opportunity to improve their poor economic and political situation. Leaders of powerful networks became mediators who can support their disciples in dealing with state institutions. These leaders also manage powerful economic networks providing social services, and moral support.

The most prominent force in the field of non-Sufi Islam is also a Kurd: Shaykh Muhammad Sa'îd Ramadân al-Bûtî. He represents the Salafi-oriented Sunni Islam in Syria, a current which is very strong. Over the decades he has published a large number of books on Islam and topics related to it, which are read with great enthusiasm by Sunni Muslims in Syria and abroad. He has trained a new generation of male and female Sunni Muslims at the Faculty of Shari'a Law at the University of Damascus and as a preacher in a small mosque in the Kurdish quarter of Damascus. Among them is his son, who teaches at the same faculty. Salafi-oriented Islam is very critical of Sufism, but tolerates the Naqshbandiyya.

The decision to have Sunni Kurds dominate Sunni official Islam was made by Hafiz al-Asad in response to the refusal on the part of the *'ulamâ* to cooperate with the authorities. Asad favored a “confessional minority,” that is Sufis over Salafis, and an ethnic minority, the Kurds, over the Arabs. Those coopted have little choice. In Syria, Kurds are the largest non-Arab ethnic minority, comprising about 4.3 percent of the population (Human Rights Watch 1996). About 67 465 (according to Syrian government figures) to 200 000 (according to Kurdish sources) Kurds have been denied the right to Syrian nationality even if they were born in Syria (Meho 1995, 37). Many of them are not permitted to own land, housing, or businesses. They cannot be employed by government agencies or state-owned enterprises and cannot practice as doctors or engineers. They are not eligible for food subsidies or admission to public hospitals. They cannot vote in elections or referendums or run for public offices. Their marriages to Syrian citizens are not legally recognized. Without passports or other internationally recognized travel documents, they are literally trapped in Syria (Human Rights Watch 1996; Nida' ul Islam Magazin 1997). Given the situation of many Kurds in Syria and the Middle East (Meho 1995, 38), powerful mediation and support can be secured through the adherence to an expanding Sufi network. Many Kurdish families and clans traditionally have ties to Naqshbandi and Qâdiri Sufi networks and interest in reestablishing these ties is growing.

## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF “OFFICIAL SHI'I ISLAM”**

Many Syrian Sunnis do not consider Alawis to be Muslims because of the particularities of the Alawi religious doctrine. According to the Syrian constitution the president of Syria has to be a Muslim, but if Alawis are not accepted as Muslims, then the current president's political legitimacy is questionable (Donohue 1972-3, 81-96). For the ruling elite these confessional polemics represent a serious threat. One way of proving that Alawis are Muslims is to enforce the rapprochement between the schools of Islamic law, which is called *taqrîb*. With regard to Alawis, *taqrîb* underlines common traits between both, the Twelver Shi'i and the Alawi dogma and comes to the conclusion that Alawis are Shi'is. These efforts date back to the Ottoman Empire and were revitalized by the French mandatory powers. In the 1950s some members of the Alawi religious hierarchy adopted certain organizational and legal concepts of Twelver Shi'i Islamic jurisprudence as a result of *taqrîb*. Since Hafiz al-Asad's seizure of power, *taqrîb* became the official policy (Kramer 1987b, 239-46; Mervin 2000, 321-7). With the Sunni religious establishment imposing the confessionalist paradigm on the definition of Islamic policies, Hafiz al-Asad had little choice. Syria's strategic role in the Middle East has provided it with credible partners for the implementation of its *taqrîb*, namely the Twelver Shi'is of Iran and Lebanon. Around this triangle of

military, economic, and political relationship between Syria, Iran, and Lebanon a complex set of ties with the Twelver Shi'i international community is developing. The new Syrian president, Bashar al-Asad, continues his father's policies. He is even said to have a personal liking for Twelver Shi'i Islam, especially Ayatollah Fadlallah's interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

## **IRANIAN TWELVER SHI'I ISLAM**

In exchange for military and political support by the Iranian government Hafiz al-Asad granted Iran considerable freedom for Twelver Shi'i activities in Syria. The Iranian presence has often been explained by Syria's need for Islamic legitimacy but Iran has benefited more from this cooperation than Syria. Ties between the Syrian regime and members of the revolutionary Iranian establishment already existed, when the latter were still in opposition to the Shah (Kramer 1987b, 250). For the Islamic Republic of Iran the generous offer to expand on Syrian territory came at a time when it was at war with Iraq. The most important religious sites for the Iranian Twelver Shi'is in Iraq, namely Karbala and Najaf, were not and still are not easily accessible. Iran saw an opportunity in Syria to fill the gap. Since the 1990s Iranian Twelver Shi'i Islam has become very visible in Syria. With the help of local entrepreneurs, Twelver Shi'i religious sites, such as Sayyida Zaynab on the outskirts of Damascus, Sayyida Ruqayya in the old city of Damascus, and Raqqa in the north of Syria, were developed into flourishing centers for pilgrimage, tourism, and religious studies. Each year these sites attract thousands of Shi'i pilgrims from Iran and around the world. Throughout the year an endless stream of Shi'i scholars and students come from Iran to visit Syria and Lebanon. Many of them tour the Shi'i sites in Damascus and Aleppo and then continue through the Bekaa valley to Beirut and South Lebanon. Since the mid-1990s pilgrimages (*hamlât*) have also been arranged for Lebanese Twelver Shi'is to visit Syria on special occasions, such as the commemoration of a birthday or of the death of one of the twelve imams. Large markets, selling books, household items, and religious objects, have grown around the Syrian religious sites. Hundreds of students and scholars of Twelver Shi'i theology and jurisprudence have settled and founded a number of publishing houses and theological institutes, most notably in Sayyida Zaynab. The growing infra-structure also hosts exiled Twelver Shi'is from Iraq and the Gulf. The activities of the Iranian Twelver Shi'is in Syria are coordinated and controlled by the Iranian Embassy and the Iranian Cultural Center in Damascus. The Iranian Embassy depends on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Teheran. It is also the main decision-making center for Iranian affairs in Lebanon with the Beirut Iranian Embassy playing a minor role. The strained relationship between these two Iranian embassies has caused many tensions. The post of the Iranian ambassador in Beirut remained vacant for some time because no diplomat wanted to work under these conditions. The Iranian

Cultural Center in Damascus deals with religious and cultural matters and depends on the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Teheran. Activities concerned with *taqrîb* are coordinated by the Iranian Cultural Center. For the past decade it has organized Qur'ân exhibitions, Qur'ân recitation competitions, lectures, and big conferences. In commemoration of Ayatollah Khomeini's death a big Islamic conference is organized each year. For this occasion hundreds of leading Muslim and Islamist activists and opposition leaders from all over the Islamic world are invited to Damascus to present lectures. In the mid-1990s, the Iranian diplomatic representation slowly changed policies. Followers of President Khatami started to take over and Syrian-Iranian cooperation in cultural matters was redefined.

## LEBANESE TWELVER SHI'Ī ISLAM IN SYRIA

While officially an Iranian ally, Syria's regime tries to counterbalance Iranian influence in Syria and the Middle East by giving space to Arab Twelver Shi'ism. One way is to give Arab Twelver Shi'i '*ulamâ*' from Iraq, the Gulf, and Lebanon an opportunity to teach, write, and publish in Syria. Among them are the followers of Ayatollah Muhammad al-Shirâzî and his brother Hasan, who own a number of publishing houses and bookshops in Syria and Lebanon. Through them they print and publish works of the ayatollah and his disciples, such as Hasan al-Shirâzî, Muhammad Tâqî al-Mudarrisî, and Hâdî al-Mudarrisî, all of them from Kerbala in Iraq (Rosiny 2000, 27). Hasan al-Shirâzî fled from Kerbala to Lebanon in 1970 and taught there. He was murdered in Beirut in 1980. He seems to have been a supporter of the *taqrîb* between Syrian Alawis and Twelver Shi'is (Kramer 1987b, 249).

With Syria in control of Lebanon since 1976, Syrian policies concerning official Islam have included Lebanese territory as well. For those networks who support the Syrian regime, this means privileged access to the Lebanese territory as a new market for transnational expansion.

Since the 1970s Syrian state-sponsored Islam has been exported to Lebanon. Shaykh Kaftârû's presence in Lebanon dates back to 1969, when he sent one of his most trusted disciples, Shaykh Rajab Dîb, on a teaching mission to Beirut during the month of Ramadan. Shaykh Rajab returned every week to Beirut for a number of years to teach and build a Sufi network. This sub-network of the Kaftâriyya was later named the Rajabiyya and it is currently directed by Shaykh Muhammad Ziyât al-Sâhib. He was trained in the ANIC in Damascus and is married to one of Shaykh Rajab's daughters. The Rajabiyya has a welfare organization, a health club, schools, and mosques. Since the end of the civil war in Lebanon in 1992, many Kurds in Lebanon have rediscovered their Sufi heritage. When Shaykh Muhammad al-Khaznawî visited Beirut for

the first time in the mid-1990s, a large crowd came to see him; later many followed him to Syria to take the oath from him and some stayed to study with him.

By the same token, Syria's tight military, political, and economic grip on Lebanon since 1976 is an essential prerequisite for the cooptation of "Lebanese" Islam in the Syrian domestic scene. Syrian control over Lebanese policy-making has facilitated Iranian and Syrian support for Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements, most notably Hizballah (Ranstorp 1997, 30-8, 45-70). It has also helped to organize the resurgent Lebanese Twelver Shi'i community. The Twelver Shi'is in Lebanon were a confessional group with no organisational structure or influence on the political and economic decision-making processes in their own country. Disregarding the presence of a number of very influential and rich Shi'i landholding families, such as the 'Usayrans or the As'ads, who have always held high-ranking political positions (Osseyran 1997, 14-73), the majority of Twelver Shi'is in South Lebanon, the Bekaa valley, and the southern suburbs of Beirut, lived in misery. The confessional system gave them practically no access to the educational and political system. It was not until Musa al-Sadr, an Iranian cleric, settled in Lebanon in 1959 that the Shi'is started to organize themselves. He united the Twelver Shi'is of Lebanon into a political movement and founded the Higher Shi'i Council, an institution guaranteeing Shi'i autonomy (Ajami 1986). He also incorporated about 20 000 Alawis from Tripoli and the Akkar into the Twelver Shi'i organizational structure (Kramer 1987b, 246-49). With his disappearance in Libya in 1978, the Shi'is lost their most charismatic figure. His organization was divided between two men. Nabih Barri became AMAL's new leader. Born in Sierra Leone, he is a lawyer and self-made man. He was a member of the Ba'th-Party and enjoys very good relations with Syria and to a lesser extent with Iran. Ayatollah Shams al-Dîn became the vice-president of the Higher Shi'i Council. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 was a turning point for Lebanon's Islamic community in general and its Twelver Shi'i community in particular, because the establishment of a Shi'i Islamic republic contributed to Islamic self-assertion. Three years later, Israel invaded Lebanon. Even though the threat of the PLO using Lebanon as a territory from which to attack Israel was eliminated, Israel's political and strategic calculations went completely wrong. The Twel-ver Shi'i population refused to cooperate with the Israeli occupational forces and instead a resistance movement grew which was later taken over by a radical wing of AMAL, Islamic AMAL. This was the beginning of Hizballah.

Hizballah's emergence is closely connected to the career of its spiritual guide, Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah. The Fadlallah-family is originally from Aynata in South Lebanon. Ayatollah Fadlallah's father studied in Najaf until he reached the level of *mujtahid*. He was born in Najaf and

studied first with his father and uncle. Later he joined such famous clerics as Muhammad Bâqir al-Sadr and Sayyid Abû al-Qâsim al-Khû'î (al-Surûr 1992, 33-44). After short visits to his home country in the 1950s and 1960s, Ayatollah Fadlallah returned to Beirut in 1966 and settled in Naba', a poor neighborhood in East Beirut (al-Surûr 1992, 54-6). He taught and worked there without attracting much attention. After the Israeli invasion in Lebanon of 1982 he was forced to leave East Beirut. Finally he settled in Bir 'Abed, a southern suburb of Beirut where he taught and preached in a small mosque. After a spectacular bomb attack, which almost cost him his life, he moved for security reasons to a neighboring area called Harat Hraik. There he built a huge mosque complex that included the Bahmân hospital, a foreign relations office, a cultural center, and a library. His interpretation of Twelver Shi'i Islam as a "theology of liberation" in a political and theological sense, his critical political analysis of Israeli, United States, and European politics in the Middle East, and his charismatic appeal made him the most influential religious figure in the Twelver Shi'i community in Lebanon and abroad. His political analysis and fatwas are the cornerstone of Hizballah's religious and political legitimization. He strongly supports the Lebanese-Syrian-Iranian triangle. During his Friday sermons on 26 January 2001, he said:

I would also like to welcome the strategic relations between Syria and Iran that have become well established as they serve both Arab and Muslim interests, especially those of the Lebanese. The two countries stand together to support the Lebanese people's struggle against occupation. In addition, Iran supports Syria in liberating their occupied lands (the Golan Heights) and the Palestinian Intifada that aims at liberating the occupied Palestinian lands and the sacred shrines that belong to all Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

Like Hizballah Ayatollah Fadlallah is very cautious when it comes to criticizing Syrian policies. Many members of Hizballah flock into his mosque in Harat Hraik in the south of Beirut to attend his lessons and sermons. His office and the headquarters of his social and religious network are also not far from the mosque. The secretary-general of Hizballah, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, is his next-door neighbor. Like many other activists in Hizballah, Sayyid Nasrallah studied with the ayatollah during the 1970s. Until recently the deputy secretary-general of Hizballah, Shaykh Na'im al-Qâsim, attended the *dars al-khârij*, which takes place five days a week in the early morning hours in the private house of the ayatollah. It is reserved for the most advanced among the shaykhs and shaykhas and deals with highly specialized matters of Twelver Shi'i Islamic jurisprudence.

Ayatollah Fadlallah's discipline and his uncompromising attitude towards money and political power gained him a large following in Lebanon and abroad. Every year at least one book is published by him or his students; his books are widely read and have gained him a reputation as an open-minded Twelver Shi'i

scholar. The publication of his *Risâla 'Âmiliyya* earned him an undisputed religious legitimization as a top-level cleric (*marja'*). A *marja'*'s judgment in questions pertaining to the application of Shi'i law is considered trustworthy by millions of Shi'is around the world (Fadlallah 2001). At the same time, his rank represented a threat to the political elites in power in Iran, who would prefer to have the *marja'iyya* conferred on an Iranian ayatollah under their control rather than an Arab dignitary from Lebanon. For some time Ayatollah Fadlallah's relations with certain influential currents among the Iranian clerics have been deteriorating and subsequently his relations with Hizballah (Ranstorp 1997, 43). Even though Ayatollah Fadlallah is the spiritual guide of Hizballah, the party cannot risk losing Iranian support, which is so vital to its political and military survival. Anyone claiming to have attained the *marja'* level and representing the *marja'iyya* deprives other *marja's* of a their share of Shi'i alms, among them the *huqûq shar'iyya* and the *khums*. The more followers a *marja'* has, the larger the sum he receives to finance his projects and network. It amounts to millions of dollars. Ayatollah Fadlallah's reputation as an open-minded *marja'* makes him very popular among Twelver Shi'is especially businessmen, who donate large sums of money for his projects. Since the reelection of Sayyid Khâtamî in June 2001, relations between Ayatollah Fadlallah and the Iranian government have improved.

The ayatollah spends two and half days a week in Sayyida Zaynab where he takes a rest from his stressful daily routine in Beirut and teaches his students. His presence in Syria is perceived as politically motivated by Western political analysts because of his relations with Hizballah (Kramer 1987a, 11-16) and his staunch support of the strategic triangle of Syria, Iran, and Lebanon.

To analyze Ayatollah Fadlallah's presence in Syria solely as a component of a military and political alliance would not do justice to the heritage of a long tradition of Arab Twelver Shi'i culture and religion in the region previously called Bilâd al-Shâm. Ayatollah Fadlallah feels the responsibility of continuing the educational work of Muhsin al-Amîn (1867-1952), one of the most outstanding scholars and reformers of the Lebanese Shi'i community. Muhsin al-Amîn studied in Najaf and later lived in Damascus for over fifty years (Mervin 2000, 161-75; Ajami 1986, 76-84).

Over the years the ayatollah has established his own infrastructure in Sayyida Zaynab. In 1992 he founded the institute for higher theological studies for male students, the *Hawzat Murtada*. Four years later a branch for female students was inaugurated. The institute hosts 90 male students from all over the Islamic world and 150 female students from Syria, Lebanon, and Iran. In 1996 the institutes moved into their own building, a modest two-story cement building behind the mosque complex of Sayyida Zaynab, financed by the



private donation of a rich Kuwaiti Shi‘i. Monthly expenses are covered by the Beirut-based Mabarrât welfare organization of the ayatollah.<sup>13</sup> Neither the Syrian Ministry of Islamic Endowments nor the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education has a say in the institute’s organization or teaching curricula. During Ayatollah Fadlallah’s weekly visits to Syria, he also gives lectures throughout the country. These are well received, especially among high-ranking Alawi military officers. Sons of leading Alawi families from Lattakia study in the ayatollah’s institutes of Shi‘i jurisprudence and theology in Beirut and thus continue a tradition of Alawi learning in Twelver Shi‘i institutions of higher studies in these subjects (Kramer 1987b, 243).

## CONCLUSION

The Syrian regime has given tightly controlled spaces to a chosen few, to whom it entrusted the management of official Islam. Under Hafiz al-Asad the regime was confronted by a boycott by the Sunni religious establishment and had to find support among the Kurds. A number of Kurdish shaykhs and networks were coopted to propagate their version of Sunni Sufi and Salafi Islam in Syria and abroad: the Kaftâriyya headed by Shaykh Ahmad Kaftârû, the Khaznawiyya led by Shaykh Muhammad al-Khaznawî and Shaykh Muhammad Sa‘îd Ramadân al-Bûtî.

The political involvement in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon, opened new horizons for cooperation with the Lebanese Twelver Shi‘is. Based on a successful political and military cooperation between Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, Twelver Shi‘i Islam was given more and more room to expand in Syria. For religious cooperation the Syrian regime relies mainly on the Iranian Embassy and the Iranian Cultural Center in Damascus and Ayatollah Fadlallah in Lebanon. The strong emphasis on Sufi and Twelver Shi‘i Islam shows that Syria's official Islam does not meet the demands of the majority of its Sunni population and that it has little to contribute to the regime's Islamic legitimization. Even Bashar al-Asad who seems to encourage more political, economic, and social participation in decision-making processes has not succeeded in defining a politics of Islam for his own population. If these persuasive policies of official Islam were not complemented by very effective repressive measures there would be no political stability in Syria.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Naqshbandiyya see Hamid Algar, "The Naqshbandī Order: A Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance." In *Studia Islamica* 44 (1976), 123-52; Bruinessen and Blau, 1998; Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic, and Thierry Zarcone, eds., *Naqshbandis* (Istanbul: Isis, 1990); Elizabeth Özdalga, ed., *Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity* (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Alawis consider themselves to be Shi'is. The Shi'i imams are highly venerated in Alawi esoteric teaching. For more details, see Heinz Halm, *Die Schia* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 186-92; Heinz Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: die extreme Schia und die Alawiten* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1982), 284-355; Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Alasdair Drysdale, "The Asad Regime and its Troubles." In *MERIP* 110 (November/December 1982), 3. For a perception of this "reality," see Mahmud A. Faksh, "The Alawi Community in Syria: A New Dominant Political Force." In *Middle Eastern Studies* 20:2 (1984), 133-53; Itamar Rabinovich, "Problems of Confessionalism in Syria." In *The Contemporary Middle Eastern Scene*, eds. Gustav Stein and Udo Steinbach (Opladen: Leske and Budrich, 1979), 128-32.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent account of these polemics see: Gregor Voss, "'Alawîya oder Nusairîya?'" *Schiitische Machtelite und sunnitische Opposition in der Syrischen Arabischen Republik* (dissertation, University of Hamburg, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> For Nigeria, see Roman Loimeier, *Islamische Erneuerung und politischer Wandel in Nordnigeria* (Muenster, Hamburg: Lit. Verlag, 1993); for Central Asia, Jo-Ann Cross, "The Polemics of 'Official' and 'Unofficial' Islam: Sufism in Soviet Central Asia." In *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 520-40; for Turkey, see Begim Agai, "Neue Organisationsformen islamischen Gemeindelebens: Das Bildungsnetzwerk des tuerkischen Predigers Fethulla Guelen." Paper presented at the Deutsche Orientalistentag in Bamberg, March 2001.

<sup>7</sup> This section relies mainly on my previous research. See Annabelle Böttcher, *Syrische Religionspolitik unter Asad* (Freiburg: Arnold-Bergstraesser Institut, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> This tiny little institution is located in West Beirut near the Lebanese University. It was founded by *al-Markaz al-Islâmî li-al-Tarbiyya* (Islamic center for education) in 1976 "to meet the need of a university in the Islamic and Arab world that takes care of Islam and its implementation in various fields of life." Surprisingly, the headquarters in Beirut trains some of the most radical Sufi and Wahhabi Islamist leaders in Lebanon, including some Palestinian shaykhs connected to the 'Usbat al-Ansâr group (Rougier 2001).

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.collegeofmaqasid.org/summerprogram>

<sup>10</sup> One of his students is the prominent Palestinian Naqshbandi Shaykh Ibrâhîm Ghunaym, who has a large following in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

<sup>11</sup> In June 2001 in an interview with French television he mistakenly used the Shi'i formula "salla Allahu 'alayhi wa-âlihi", which is used by practicing Shi'is when they mention the name of the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>12</sup> Friday sermon 26 January 2001, Beirut; see: online <http://www.bayynat.org>

<sup>13</sup> Informal talk with Sayyid Sharîf Sayyid al-'Amilî in south Beirut, June 1999.