Mystic Regimes

Sufism and the State in Iran, from the Late Qajar Era to the Islamic Republic
MYSTIC REGIMES
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA (S.E.P.S.M.E.A.)

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This study was conceived from an anthropological interest in contemporary Iranian society and culture and sympathy for Sufism, be it undefined and mediated through literature. I have remained a non-convert, however, which explains a distant perspective, seeking to chart long-term social and cultural change. Readers caring for the unbridled Sufi perspective are advised to consult Persian sources in the bibliography, or the ever-expanding Western forest of esoterica.

Sufis or sympathisers as well as enemies and opponents often conceive of Sufism as a unitary social phenomenon. Thus, the Ṣaffi-ʿalishāhī and Solṭānʿalishāhī-Nemātollahī orders reckon one fourteenth-century founder. But nineteenth-century Sufis caused their di-
vision and social autonomy. For this reason, there is no mention in my study of Sufi ‘branches’, but of different Nemātollahī ‘orders’.

The present book is a revision of my dissertation, defended at the University of Amsterdam in September 2000. Although my thesis was based on fieldwork in preceding years, I did not update the book to include the latest developments. Its main purpose remains exploring long-term social and cultural change, and a study of current Iranian Sufism would be better served with a separate publication. Re-
vising the thesis has mainly consisted of correcting errors that became evident to me upon rereading the manuscript and that var-
ious readers kindly brought to my notice. But it is necessary to state that any shortcomings in this work remain my responsibility alone.

I have transcribed Persian seeking to respect both sound and script and largely relied on Moʿīn’s Dictionary for pronunciation. The short vowels were rendered as ʿa, ʿe, and ʿo, the long vowels as ʿa, ʿi, and ʿu. ʿEy and ʿow have been used for the diphthongs. The consonants have been transliterated as follows: ʿa-؛ ʿe-ش؛ ʿo-ج؛ ʿi-ح؛ ʿu-خ؛ ʿa-ش؛ ʿe-ش؛ ʿo-ش؛ ʿi-ش؛ ʿu-ش. Names of persons, places and concepts that have their own cur-
rency in Western literature and that do not distort their object beyond recognition are the major exception. Thus, I refer to ʿKhomeyni instead of ʿKhomeyn, ʿTehran instead of ʿTehrān and ʿSufi instead of ʿṣūfī. Publications by Iranians in European languages that
employ alternative transliterations (‘gh’ is often used for گ) have been rendered in their versions, thus: چHazeghi instead of چHæeqi.

Three persons have been invaluable to me in course of writing the present book. For many years, my supervisors Bernd Radtke and Peter van der Veer have guided my work - each from a different scientific tradition, Islamic/Sufi Studies and Anthropology - and helped me keep it on the straight path. Yann Richard has done an admiringly profound close reading of my thesis, which has led me to rewrite it in a substantial way. I am indebted to all three of them.

From among the many other persons who have been of help and who do not need to remain anonymous, I wish to express my gratitude to Fariba Adelkhah; Mr Ardalan; Turaj Atabaki; چHojjat ol-Eslâm and Sa‘îd Bidâr; Anton Blok; Elena Boscolo; Martin van Bruinessen; Sean Chabot, Mirjam Coelen; Juan Cole; Kambiz Dinboli; چAli Dowlatshahî; Valî Dorosti; Mansûre Eftihâdie; my father Dick, mother Margo and sister Laurine; Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek; Michael Gilsenan; Johan Goudsblom; چAli Haşürî; Nima Hazini; Bahman Khodâyârî; Louise Jongejans; Ramîn Karimiyân; Jurgen Maas; Majzû‘alîshah; Mahbû‘arîshâh; Fatî Masjedi; Annelies Moors; M. H. Moshiri; Shahram Pâzûkî; Nasrollah Pourjavady; Herman and Nicole van Renselaar-Jurriëns; Siyâmak Rîyâhî; Mr. چ rdr; Daryush Shayegan; Margaret Sleeboom; Fred Spier; Naser ‘alî Tehranî Monavvar‘alîshah; Mehrdad Torkzade; Stefanie Verlage; VOC club members; Robert de Vries; André van Wiggen; Mohammad Yâvarî; Sepehr Yousefî, and Damîn Zaitch.

Lastly, many institutions have opened their doors and been of help before, during and after my stay in Iran from September 1996 to August 1997 and in September 1998. Among these institutions were the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research - where I wrote my PhD; the National Library (Ketâbkhâne-ye mellî); the Sultanali-shâhîs’ Saleh Library (Ketâbkhâne-ye چaleh); the Institute for Cultural Studies and Research (Mósasese-ye pâzihesh va motâla‘ate farhango); Tehran University’s Library of the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences (Ketâbkhâne-ye dâneskhade-ye adabiyât va چolâm-e ensânî); and the Parliament Library (Ketâbkhâne-ye majîles).

Amsterdam, March 2002
Gate of the Šaff alishāhī convent in Tehran
(courtesy Moḥammad Yāvari)
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INTRODUCTION

This is a study of two Iranian Sufi orders as they have developed socially over this century. They both claim to represent, exclusively, the Ne'matollahi order. The tensions contained within this competition for spiritual authority have been paralleled by challenges to internal cohesion in each order, and augmented by the need to relate to worldly regimes. Worldly regimes have often been hostile and sometimes lenient, but in always-different ways. Sufi performance upon these tensions has given shape to the orders' social development.

I will briefly discuss theoretical notions in my exploration of the modern Šafi' alishahi and Solṭar alishahi Ne'matollahi orders, which for reasons explained below I conceptualise as 'mystic regimes'.

Until fairly recently, the anthropology of religion was bifurcated into idealistic, culturalist approaches in religious anthropology on the one hand and a materialistic, power-centred political anthropology on the other. Either culture or politics remained residual categories in these studies (cf. Bax, 1987). Many great monographs in the anthropology of Islam exemplify the meaning-power bifurcation too.

In the study of Sufism, for example, Gellner's Saints of the Atlas (1969) did not deal with esoterism, but 'rural Moroccan political structure' (Geertz, 1971: 763). His study was "a transposition of Evans-Pritchard's analysis of the role of the Sanusi brotherhood in Libya" (Balick, 1989: 156), which dealt with the order "only in so far as deemed necessary to an understanding of the political development" (Evans-Pritchard, 1949: preface). Geertz's Islam Observed (1968), in contrast, ignored power and politics and explored the relations between worldview, ethos and religious perspectives (cf. Asad, 1983: 252). Concerns with meaning in individual fieldwork encounters, largely in isolation from politics, economics or class and "at the expense of [...] exhaustive recordings of detailed social activity" (Beal, 1995: 289), have also marked several reflexive approaches that developed from Geertz's symbolical anthropology (that is: Rabinow, 1977, Crapanzano, 1980, and Dwyer, 1982).

Without problematising the power-meaning divide, some studies nevertheless went beyond it in description. Gilman's Saint and Sufi
in Modern Egypt (1973) represented “an effort to articulate [...] economic, political and historical contexts with patterns of religious faith and experience” (EICKELMAN, 1984: 5), while the interrelations between class and religious patterns have since remained important in his work (cf. GILSENAN, 1982 (introduction), 1985, 1996). In a study of relations between Sufism and politics in Pakistan, EWING (1983: 253) showed that politicians allied themselves with Sufism not only because Sufi masters were politically and economically powerful, but also because they provided legitimisation as embodiments of spiritual authority. That is, relations had their rationale in an ‘ideational’ element intrinsic to Sufism. HAMMOUDI (1997), treating politics and Sufism in similar ways, identified ‘the cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism’ in the Sufi master-disciple relationship - both as a cultural template and as an organisational structure.

1.

The concept of ‘religious regime’ as conceived and developed by BAX (1987, 1988, 1990) and deployed by, for instance, SPIER (1991) and WOLF (1991) was devised to tackle the power-meaning divide in anthropology theoretically. One of the few theoretical antecedents in the field of religion was provided by Abner Cohen, who viewed power and symbolism as distinct variables in dialectical relationship with each other” (PARKIN, 1996: xv). BAX, more specifically, held religious phenomena incomprehensible outside human networks of interdependencies (1987: 1), and simultaneously stated that religious processes are relatively autonomous (1987: 2). By implication, reductionist determinisms are ruled out: neither can symbolic structures be conceived of as self-generating entities, nor can they be reduced to ideology in struggles for power and wealth. In the study of Sufism,

one of the advantages of studying Sufi cults as [...] viable and generative symbolic and ethical movements is that this enables us to explore the connections between Sufi cosmologies, ethical ideas, bodily ritual practices and organisational forms, which have been lost in earlier historical and anthropological studies (WERBNER and BASU, 1998: 4).

Religious regimes connote a “constellation of dependencies that is characterised by religious imagery and acts” (SPIER, 1991: 10; BAX, 1988: 10). The social dynamics of religious regimes are accounted for by relations with worldly (state) regimes, confrontations with other
religious regimes, and by internal tensions (Bax, 1987: 3). The second conceptual advantage in 'religious regimes', besides bridging the meaning-power divide, lies in this specification of levels. In his discussions of domination and resistance, Scott (1985, 1990) dichotomously opposed the dominant and the subordinate (cf. Gal, 1995: 417). However, there are two arguments why a specification of levels is preferable here to a dichotomous model in dealing with domination. Even when confronted with violent state oppression, Sufi orders also engaged in relations to lateral regimes and internal struggles for spiritual authority. That is to say, religious regimes always "have their own politics" (Ortner, 1995: 177) as well. Moreover, the dynamics of 'subordinate politics' itself affects the nature of domination.

Depending on the political context, the Ne'matollahi orders have managed to contain domination in different coalitions, with either the state or jurist regimes. Sufi leaders were able to negotiate their orders effectively, moreover, to the extent that they were able to establish internal control. Finally, there has often been deliberate differentiation of internal and external realms in Sufi orders. This explains a recurrent 'ambiguity of resistance' (cf. Ortner, 1995: 175) in the mystic regimes when faced with domination. While some disciples in the Islamic Republic conceived of their Sufi religiosity as a protest against state Islam, many of their leaders have simultaneously been eager (not to resist but) to accommodate Sufism to the jurist state. That is, the apparent 'resistance' of a few took place within a larger configuration, which had 'accommodation' as keyword.

The concept of religious regimes was legitimately conceived of as a heuristic instrument (Spier, 1991: 9, cf. Bax, 1987: 2). But its large scope is potentially problematic for ethnography, as the relation of an historical dependency constellation to the human acts that build and keep it in place - to 'acting' - may become obscure.

Bax (1990) and Spier (1991), for instance, conceived of the Roman Catholic church (as a whole) as a religious regime. It is not very easy, however, to realise the 'constellation of dependencies' metaphor in the case of the Church. It includes both such phenomena as Opus Dei - with its own substructure, largely independent from and in competition to the Curia - and liberation theology - autonomously
entering into ecumenical coalitions with Protestants and Jews against establishment/orthodoxy in general. These structures rather leave the Roman Catholic church as a nominal collection of difference; unified mainly by the prevalence of Christian competition.

The relations to the Vatican of both Opus Dei and liberation theologians are like the external relations of hierarchically situated competitor regimes, whose courses only sporadically collide with the spiritual centre. Being significantly self-contained, the contexts for the growth of Opus Dei and liberation theology were exterior to the Vatican, i.e. post-war Spain and Marxist revolutionary ideology in the 1960s in Latin America, respectively. Monsignor Escrivá resisted and acted upon leftist secularisation in Spain and Archbishop Romero fought poverty and government violence in El Salvador. As real dependencies do exist within these competitor groups, they are the more legitimate objects for the concept of religious regimes. More important as an argument for studying real dependencies, however, they bring into focus the human acts that build, manipulate, overthrow or keep dependencies in place.

Weber wrote that “the most irrational form of religious behaviour, the mystic experience, is in its innermost being not only alien but hostile to all form” (1977: 342). Judging and inferring from its outward representations, however, Sufi experience bears the marks of, and leaves its marks on, time. Private and public relations, and liturgical practice in speech and writing, have shaped Sufi experience in particular, historical balances of religious need and constraint (cf. Spier, 1991: 10-12, 1994: 20). In the Islamic Republic and the Pahlavi period, Sufi experience differed because (different) religious urge was subject to different constraint. State-led modernisation under Reza Shah, for instance, was contemporaneous with Sufi instruction that related spiritual progress to education and national development. Masters, disciples, poets and war volunteers alike equated Sufi experience with mystical martyrdom, while the Islamic Republic appealed to the Islamic, Iranian nation to sacrifice itself.

Addressing internal and external audiences, these instances of Sufi speech and writing allow for a conceptualisation as ‘performance’: that which in a particular period gives ‘form to experience’ (cf. Fabian, 1990: 13; Barber, 1992: 284). I find myself in agreement with Fabian that one ought to abandon the view that sees performance (primarily) as ‘enactment’ (of texts), and treat it instead as ‘event’ and
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‘action’ (pp. 9, 12, 13). However, while FABIAN epistemologically favoured ‘creating’ in action (p. 13), this study strongly emphasises performance’s multiple regime dependencies. In a related sense, PARKIN (1996: xix) saw in cultural performance a “methodological metaphor for exploring issues of conflict [...] in wider society.”

A second, more conventional series of connotations surrounding performance, concerns the embodiment of emotion (WERBNER and BASU, 1998: 7-8) and “symbolic’ or ‘aesthetic’ activities [...] enacted as intentional expressive productions in established [...] genres” (SCHIEFFELIN, 1998: 194). Performance touches upon ‘agency’ here to the extent that “agency is not an entity that exists apart from cultural construction” (ORTNER, 1995: 186, cf. TORAB, 1996: 237).

Emotion is central to the ritual life of Iranian, Shi’ite Sufism, both as a desired religious effect and because of the religious significance of Imamic martyrdom. In conceiving of genres such as Sufi ‘instruction’, one has to account not only for a flow of emotion or symbolic information between knowledgeable and ignorant persons, however, but also for the establishment, in performance, of their respective roles as masters and disciples.

As performance is about ‘embodying’, ‘expressing’, and ‘establishing’, there may also be “failures in engaging a group into an ‘audience’ role” (FINNIGAN, 1992: 110, cf. SCHIEFFELIN, 1998: 198), which in the present analysis means that acting could be out of tune with the hierarchical setting. One sheikh whom I met in the process of establishing himself as an independent religious specialist nearly depleted his spiritual authority through insecure generic searching in the face of his flock. Commencing and interrupting meditative sessions on an established religious occasion several times, he did not convincingly establish master-disciple roles. Exceptional narrative skills and command over poetry and the Qur’án among Soltân’alishāhī leaders, inversely, have been crucial in organisational hierarchy and Soltân’alishāhī ‘order’. Internal Sufi order, then, bears a particular relation to the masters’ virtuosity; their mastery of styles, genres and settings in performance.

Thirdly, in an overarching sense performance relates to reproduction and survival. Each performance effects cultural reproduction, but as performers, genres, settings and occasions are never similar through time, each reproduction always engenders cultural innovation as well (cf. SAHLINS, 1981). Particularly “transformations in the
larger political arena in which the performance takes place result in changes in what that performance means” (Van der Veer, 1994: 82). It has been during such transformations that Sufi identity was most vulnerable, because it was made liminal.

Goffman (1956, 1974) thoroughly analysed the maintenance of the self through performance in his studies of the 'presentation of self in everyday life' and, more relevant to Sufism, of 'stigma management'. One important reason for the ongoing conversation upheld by Sufis towards their opponents, is that “as long as [...] individuals are in communication with each other - as long as they are joined in an encounter - whatever they are doing is not occult, however esoteric and opaque it may appear to be” (Goffman, 1963: 178). ‘Occult’ here carries Goffman’s sociological meaning, i.e. a disturbing mental absence from rule-led interactions in which legitimacy lies (cf. 1963: 76), but it also bears a literal relation to Shi’ism’s religious universe: legitimate performance contains accusations of magic and heresy.

Not only accusations, reputations or spoiled identities were at stake in the authoritarian political contexts of this study, however. Everyday life Sufi performance had to survive the threat of suppression and violence that came, for instance, with the nationalist regime of Reza Shah and with the Islamic revolution. ‘State drama’ is part of Victor Turner’s dramaturgical performance theory (Palmer and Jankowiak, 1996: 237). He stressed performance’s reproductive functions, in the realm of the state and social reality at large, by treating it as (a four phased) ‘social drama with conflict and conflict resolution’ (p. 231), thus assigning to it an intrinsic developmental logic. In spite of intrinsic relations between Sufi performance and religious regime dependencies, however, “performance may be relative process rather than absolute unit and may emerge not from some prior plan but also in and through the event itself” (Finnigan, 1992: 110).

These three levels and functions of performance - giving shape to experience; embodying emotion and symbolic or aesthetic action in established genres; and socio-political and cultural reproduction and survival - define the crucial features of acting in religious regimes.

3.

Performance upon internal tensions, relations with other regimes and relations with the state account for social dynamics in religious re-
regimes. BAX conceived of the relation between religious and state regimes as an essentially ‘antagonistic interdependency’ (1987: 3). The pattern surely holds in many cases, but not always. There has been antagonism but no material interdependence, for instance, between Sufism and the state in the Islamic Republic. More interestingly, there has in other eras been a pattern of confluence, as much as antagonism, between state and Sufi regimes.

In his study of the Egyptian Hamidiya Shadhiliya Sufi order’s social development GILSENAN (1973) attributed its growth in particular to detailed, internal regulations which gave it the power of modern bureaucratic organisations. DE JONG (1974) contested Gilsenan’s view and claimed that growth had primarily been due to government assistance (cf. discussion in BALDICK, 1989: 158). It strikes an outsider to the debate as obvious that both explanations are not only valid but also interconnected, as part of the same historical, socio-cultural and political reality. Insiders’ and outsiders’ concerns similarly coincided in early twentieth-century Iran, when the Shah requested of the Solṭān-‘alīshāhī masters a rulebook for legitimate behaviour, while they themselves attempted to keep beggars and addicts at a distance.

An important reason for counter-examples to the proposed pattern of antagonistic interdependency lies in the nature of the parties and the relations involved. For Shi‘ite or Sunni Sufis in the Islamic world, the two major parties to relate to have been religious jurists and rulers. To the extent that rulers and jurists engaged in mutual antagonism, coalitions between rulers and Sufis were facilitated. Either in coalition with or antagonism to rulers, jurists have often constituted competitor regimes for Sufism, where Sufism was seen as an obstacle to spiritual authority monopolisation.

Lateral and vertical relations have also left their marks on internal structures in Sufi orders. To the extent that rulers were sympathetic, the orders could safely ignore their laterals, while in a patronage limbo they were pressed to accommodate jurist orthodoxy. The Ne‘matollāhī orders’ internal tensions, then, have often reflected (variable) answers to the question of how to relate to power-holders. Many Sufi affiliates in the Islamic Republic have, for instance, been less than happy with the restraints that their masters imposed for reasons of self-preservation. Performance upon these tensions has, in turn, significantly determined social developments in the Sufi orders. While the Ṣafī‘alīshāhī order disintegrated and remained an arena for
competition in the Islamic Republic, centralised control in the Sołtan'alişahî order allowed for prominent jurists to visit their religious sessions. Thus, the three (internal, lateral and vertical) regime dynamics are not isolated, but inextricably interrelated. Furthermore, changing triangular relations between Sufis, jurists and rulers - which in different personnel varieties are perhaps descriptive of all religious regimes - rule out dichotomous generalisations of relations between states, lateral and mystic regimes.

I address these changing interrelations diachronically, juxtaposing the Pahlavi era and the Islamic Republic, and favouring performance in the Sufi orders as a vista to account for their social development. There is thus a double comparison - of orders and eras - which makes for the description of four mystic regimes. I refer to my study as an ‘exploration’ because contemporary Iranian, Shi'ite Sufism is largely an unknown research field. Furthermore, ‘exploration’ stresses openness of the history under consideration. This study considers patterns and constraints - the notion of ‘development’ refers to patterned change in a certain direction (Elias, in Goudsblom and Mennell, 1998: 102) - but it is not claimed that Sufi performance could not potentially have been otherwise, nor that actual performance has been reducible to internal or external constraints. In this limited sense, in the stress on empirical and interpretative openness, my study resembles what Marcus and Cushman (1982: 25, 45) described as experimental ethnographies, as opposed to ethnographic realism.

Fieldwork has given a definite direction to and thus also imposed limitations on the material that this study is constructed from. The most important changes since my initial research design concern its scope. I prepared to study all Shi'ite orders in Iran since 1979, with special reference to the Ne'matollâhîs. I ended up with two Ne'matollâhî orders and their comparative development over this century.

There were practical but also substantial reasons for this. It soon turned out that the idea of studying a range of orders simultaneously was excessively ambitious, because of the time, patience and energy involved in establishing productive relations. Once I became involved with the Ne'matollâhî orders on a regular basis, I soon decided to ignore the Khâksâr, the least accessible, least organised and least visible of the Shi'ite orders (only some references to their sessions remain in this study). As concerns the Zâhâbiya and the Zo'r-Reyâsateyn-Ne'matollâhî order, I found the only option for in-depth
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relations was trying to become a convert and devoting all of my time to them. An additional reason for ignoring the Žo‘r-Reyāsatayn is the development of their spiritual path in a unique, non-Iranian direction after the Islamic revolution. The narrowing of my research scope had an overall positive effect, however. Studying two orders that trace their descent to a common fourteenth-century founder but derive much of their contemporary identities from nineteenth and twentieth-century conflicts over succession, enabled a unique perspective on the microcosm of mystic regimes that facilitated their comparison.

The widening of historical scope occurred during fieldwork, when I realised that the Islamic revolution had only been one of the great caesuras that gave identity to the mystic regimes. An understanding of post-revolution Sufism in Iran cannot do without reckoning the particular identities that Sufi orders assumed in the Pahlavi era. It was mainly in the Pahlavi dynasty that the Iranian nation became an important frame of reference, that one Ne‘matollāh ‘order integrated deeply into the elite circles of state power and another consolidated its bonds with the clerical elite. The key, synchronical concept that I set out with - survival - gave way to a diachronical search for historical regime relations - cultural performance and social development.

My conception of fieldwork aimed at a detailed study of religious practice. As thematic interest shifted towards comparative social development, however, this focus of fieldwork changed as well. The scrutiny of religious practices gave way to ethnographic explorations of interaction at the thresholds of internal and external relations.

Apart from personal limitations, it is due in large measure to the authoritarian (political) contexts of twentieth-century Iran, inducing meticulously regulated economies of information in speech and writing in persons as much as in institutions, that much of the material in this study is open to replenishment. I tried to diminish the effects of such economies, however, by comparing both oral and written sources, in addition to personal observations and just ‘being there’. Oral sources have been indispensable for this study, mainly because of the historical memory that Sufis shared with me and that is not duplicated in written sources. Written sources have been particularly useful for detecting public discourse about Sufism, by partisans and enemies of Sufism alike, and for the major historical reconstructions.

In most cases, oral information was produced within informal settings. This is reflected in my text by their reference as ‘conversation.’
‘Interview’ reflects formal settings (of the semi-structured kind). Generally speaking, conversations were conducted with grass-roots informants, while interviews concerned Sufi masters. Irrespective of the particular source, interviews would often render ideal types, official views or historical justifications, while conversations would bring up the material that anthropologists are traditionally more interested in: failures, contradictions, covert meanings or allegedly irrelevant details. These sets of representations are socially interrelated (see chapter 7.3). This fact, in addition to the historical memory they contain, has been an elementary reason for their usage in this study.

In addition to Richard Gramlich’s three-volume *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens* (1965, 1976, 1981), on which any research on Iranian, Shi‘ite Sufism must of necessity be based (being the best and most detailed account available), and Henry Corbin’s four-volume *En Islam iranien* (1971/2) (that contains unrivalled analyses of Iranian Shi‘ism’s ‘spiritual universe’), I have relied heavily upon the Solṭān‘alishāhī order’s corpus of primary and secondary sources.

Owing to the Solṭān‘alishāhī’s unique interest in historical documentation (partly as a means of proselytising), the corpus provides one with an exceptional opportunity to scratch the surface of generally a-historical Sufi images of the self and to identify cultural, social and political developments. For the Pahlavi period, Mahbūb‘Alī Shāh’s *Khvorshid-e Ṭābande* (1373/1994-5) has been particularly helpful, especially given the fact that useful sources on Sufism in the Pahlavi era remain rather scarce. Parīshānzāde’s *Goshāyesh-e rāż* (1377/1998) and Nāser‘Alī’s *Resāla-ye javābiya* (1362/1983) are clear and fierce defences of the Solṭān‘alishāhī order that reflect several ongoing conflicts as well as its survival in the Islamic Republic.

Sa‘fā‘alishāhī written sources are more problematic: one finds relevant worldly information only in the margins of the master’s literary heritage (for instance: 1361/1973). Two exceptionally fruitful primary sources consists of his pupil Ḥājjī Dādāsh’s *Majalle-ye okhovvat* (1307/1928) - reflecting ideological developments in the Reza Shah era - and a pamphlet written by sheikh Tavāngar (1345/1966) - reflecting ideological and organisational strife during the late Pahlavi era. Secondary sources such as Zangane-pūr (1343/1964) and Barq (1352/1973) mainly focus upon the personality of Sa‘fā‘alishāhī or, as in Afshār (1367/1988) and Ḥoseynī (1377/1988), upon the Society of Brotherhood within the order. The latter category of writings, in ad-
dition to (often repetitive) overview descriptions such as VAHIDNIYÁ (1352/1973) and HOMAYUNI (1371/1992) - does provide outlines of socio-historical development. However, even these writings would have been insufficient in the absence of oral sources.

Lastly, there is an important category of negative secondary sources. Nüreddin Modarres CHAHRDÁHI’s writings on Sufism (particularly his magnum opus, Seyri dar tasawwuf) provides a useful and indispensable counterbalance to Sufi hagiography. Chahärdañá departed from the world of traditional Iranian Sufism, but despite (or perhaps because) of this, has sought consistently to reconstruct historical facts. Outrageously hostile secondary sources from the Islamic Republic such as ELEISH (1375/1996) are unreliable historical accounts but do explore silence in hagiographies and therefore shed light on the terms of battle between Sufis and their enemies.

There is a definite urban bias in this study, to the neglect of rural and/or tribal Sufism. The importance of such distinctions is indicated by the fact that the Soltanâlîshâh order became involved in semi-feudal class conflict in Eastern Iran in the early Pahlavi era, while in Tehran (its second centre), it has rather been networks, crosscutting class divisions, which were important in external relations. Nevertheless, the numerical and historical importance of the Ne-matollâh orders and the fact that jurist and state views and policies have often been constructed on the basis of generalised ideas on Sufism in Iran (whether or not rural and/or urban), justify extrapolations from my urban Ne-matollahí cases to Iranian, Shi‘ite Sufism at large.

Three issues, finally, define in more detail the ways in which I conceive of the religious regimes of Iranian, Shi‘ite Sufism as ›mystic regimes‹. What particularises Sufi orders in this study has to do with meaning-power relations, the (religious) status of strategies, and, most generally, the conceptualisation of religion and mysticism.

**Meaning and power**

The concept of religious regime was put forward to tackle reductionism in the anthropology of religion and to explore ‘the mutual conditioning of power and meaning’ (BAX, 1987: 1). However, explicit and convincing treatments of (the uses of) symbols, ideas, or beliefs in shaping religious power (exceptions such as SCHNEIDEMANN, 1992 aside) remain rare. Nevertheless, meaning-power relations touch
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upon a paradox that lies to the heart of mystic regimes: how are order, development and survival possible among large groups of people who explicitly and publicly loathe worldliness? In a reflection on fieldwork with the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, Mir-Hosseini felt puzzled by the force with which informants appeared to reject the relevance of any zâhir (political) interpretation of [their] stories. On reflection, these [...] were not so much rejected as taken for granted. But they insisted on the overriding importance of the bātin [esoterical], and the stories seemed to show less the connections between the two worlds than their separation. I suggest that such a conceptual segregation [...] is necessary to sustain another central dogma of the sect, a dogma shared by all sectarians, that they alone are the ‘followers of Haqīqa’ (Ultimate Truth) (1994, (1): 281).

Taking this observation as a lead generates the hypothesis that such segregation - and the obfuscation of worldly existence - is a premise for the worldly, social and political prevalence of religious regimes. In his study of reification in the thought of Alfred Schutz, Thoma-son (1982: 7) observed of ‘successful communities’ that they “seemed almost always to involve patterns of daily life which members perceived as somehow independent of their own will and authority. The more firmly such patterns were backed by ‘god given’ [...] beliefs, the more stable and persistent they were.”

Mystic regimes transform tacit reification, “the way people deny, forget or ignore the constructedness of their social worlds,” (Thoma-son, 1982) into explicit religious ideology and practice. Spiritual progress means getting away from the “I” and the “here and now”, and analogically, monotheistic mystics (according to Armstrong, 1993: 243) have essentially “made their God transcend the personal category.” The ‘overriding importance of the esoterical’ that Mir-Hosseini referred to invests Sufi leaders with authority and power. The Sufi path which leads towards unity and Truth and away from the shattered world of seductions, has been paved with spiritual authority, embodied in the masters who are uniquely equipped to guide the travellers. In the end, Sufis hold spiritual authority to derive itself from the transhistorical realm that produces initiatory dreams, illuminating visions, miracles and missionary orders. The success or failure of such ideas largely depends on exterior forces - the pragmatics of interaction, the quality of performance - but acting is nevertheless oriented towards such ‘meaning’, which - through the mediation
of acting - conditions 'power'.

Internal relations are only one level, however, on which meaning conditions power in the constitution of order. At the crossroads of their external relations, mystic and competitor regimes forward legitimations and delegitimizations that are oriented towards a transhistorical Ursprung. Without exception, Iranian orders trace their (ultimate) descent to Imam 'Ali, whose existence many mystics hold to have preceded creation. A recurrent strategy of enemies, in turn (whether internal or external) has consisted of contesting these continuities. Legitimacy lies in the past, which figures transhistorically in mystic regimes, but it becomes abruptly grounded and materialised in the contestation-and-defense genre. A related genre of legitimisation and delegitimisation in which transhistorical claims become grounded, concerns 'heresiology'. In heresiology, “polemics sets itself the task of determining the intangible point of dogma, the fundamental and necessary principle that the adversary has neglected, ignored or transgressed” and it “denounces this negligence as a moral failing; at the root of the error, it finds passion, desire, interest, a whole series of weaknesses and inadmissible attachments that establish it as culpable” (a formulation I borrow from Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991: 382, see chapter three).

It is only to the background of these meaning-power complexes that one could make sense of a 'historical commission' in one order - positivistically concerned with facts in a way that few contemporary Western historians would now favour - that denies history a material existence of its own. The uses of transhistorical idealism and its closure thus enter the equation in meaningfully shaping lateral regime relations. Similar processes operate in the external relations between Sufi orders and the state.

Spier (1991: 27) mentioned general Pinochet’s choosing the company of evangelists who claimed non-involvement in politics. In the previous monarchy, Iranian Sufis similarly denied worldliness. 'Ali 'Anqâl nevertheless occupied a parliament seat, while his father stated that rebellion was the greatest danger to cosmic harmony. In the Qajar era, conversely, a Sufi who was [only] “talking to men of spiritual discernment” (Pourjavadi and Wilson, 1978: 117) (i.e. similarly distancing himself from worldly claims) warned the king that neglect of his spiritual authority would ruin his reign. This scenario of mystic power - it is claimed by Sufis - subsequently unfolded.
Irrespective of the order, many Sufis hold Sufism to be a *sophia perennis* without temporal and spatial co-ordinates. But transhistorical and non-political definitions of mysticism made Sufism temporarily and politically attractive to the Shah, when faced with militant Islamic opposition (see chapter one). Religious obfuscations and political uses such as these indicate that “the position of religious regimes in political arenas is [...] effected by the type of ideology and by the nature of the collective fantasy espoused” (Thoden van velzen, 1992: 203). It has been royal receptivity towards Sufism that in turn came to figure in Sufi representations of the self (see chapter four). Power, then, “need not [always] be seen as either a cause or a first principle [...]” [my insertion] (Dirks, 1994: 502). These cases - in which prevailing political interest converges with otherworldly religious doctrine - provide instances where Sufi ‘meaning’ conditions ‘power’ in both state and mystic regimes.

**Strategies**

While all regimes are concerned with questions of external confrontation and internal cohesion (Bax, 1987: 3), they are also defined through strategy-led performance. But in Scott’s analyses, such performance has been related to a unilateral power dualism of dominant and subordinate, and opposed to ‘authenticity’ (Gal, 1995: 411).

Gal (1995: 419) pointed out that strategies are ill-conceived as straightforward responses to unambiguous domination. Political function is mediated through language, which is embedded within what she calls ‘linguistic ideology’ or culture. From this conception, it becomes plausible to conceive of strategic acts as cultural performance: ‘strategic’ Sufi acting departs from and is embedded within ‘authentic’ genres, doctrine and discourse. Strategic and authentic acting applies, first of all, to the signs that distinguish Sufis from others: stigmata, and to their management (Goffman, 1974). Sufi stigmata - in both the Greek sense of bodily markers of moral inferiority and the Christian sense of “bodily signs of holy grace” (1974: 11) - have divided into the loose signs of stigma that are easily managed, such as clothing and bodily movements, and institutionalised ones that stick, such as the Sufi lodge.

The two aspects which have proved manageable in Sufi lodges, concern naming and adornment. Many lodges have changed their
names from khānaqāh into hoseyniyya in the Islamic Republic, and they often included portraits of Khomeyni and Khamene’i. This ‘strategically’ facilitated accommodation in the Islamic Republic, but also ‘authentically’ defused conceptualisations of Sufi centres in opposition to the mosque. In the Qajar era, the king named the Solṭān’alishāhī leader Sa’ādat’alishāh ‘peacock of the gnostics’, in reflection of his expensive taste in clothing. In the Pahlavi era, customary civilian clothes became mandatory in many orders. Surely, these had Pahlavi modernisation projects as their context, but they also fitted an established shred of Sufi doctrine, which held social adaptation to be a religious duty. One has to do in these cases with multiple levels in one act - like in any other social drama but falling within the range of explicit religious doctrine in mystic, religious regimes - in which performance inextricably interweaves authenticity and strategy.

Apart from scientific reporters, many believers oppose strategy to authenticity as well. DIGARD (1978: 512) justly remarked, however, that Contrairement à ce que beaucoup de musulmans (et d'autres croyants) pensent, il n'y a rien d'insultant pour eux ou de blasphématoire à se demander si la conception qu'ils ont ou la pratique qu'ils font de leur religion répond à une «stratégie».” While in response to an outsider’s questioning the sheer suggestion may be indignantly brushed aside, religious (including mystic, Sufi) regimes have often been very explicit about the strategic nature of (religious) performance in unprovoked representations of the self.

In his historical sociology of Opus Dei ESTRUCH (1995) elaborated upon the sect’s modern concept of a saint, which included a this-worldly asceticism that prescribed ‘scheming’, for which affiliates were prepared in open educational institutions. While many Sufis would deny anything like scheming, ‘dissimulation’ has doctrinal status in the Solṭān’alishāhī order (Pand-e Šāleḥ, 1372/1993: 35), as among Shi’ites generally. An impeccably dressed affiliate once undressed in the lodge in one Ṣaff’alishāhī branch. Underneath his civilian clothes appeared a long white robe (kafan). He saw me watch him and explained: “I couldn’t do this in the street.” Yet, there was no notion of insincerity in strategy here, let alone of fooling the jurists. It had to do with survival but also religiously prescribed prudence, and authentic distinctions between inner and outer realms. Strategic acts do not exhaust the range of religious performance, but one may turn the allegedly inimical relationship between strategy and
authenticity on its head as authenticity is often accomplished through strategy.

Moreover, strategies vis-à-vis internal tensions and lateral and state regimes have taken on distinctive features in the Sufi regimes. To argue this point it is necessary to make another conceptual distinction. Touwen-Bouwsma (1992: 126) criticised the definition of religious regimes for its formality bias. She described a regime that was weakly institutionalised and made up of informal relations. A second, underdeveloped variable for Sufi regimes is proximity. To account for strategies in mystic regimes is to conceive of Sufi performance, ideal-typically and with these variations in mind, as a differentiation of acting into levels of formality and proximity. These variables distribute internal-formal, internal-informal, external-formal, and external-informal elements (cf. Gilsonan, 1973).

Sufi orders are voluntary associations into which one is not born or integrated from an early age. Internally, therefore, and informally (i.e. not on temporally marked occasions or in specific ritual expressions) masters have had to rely heavily on qualitative guidance to keep their ‘clients’ faithful. Their positions are at stake with performance, and they often strive to minimize the orientation alternatives to zero (cf. Bax 1988: 20). It is simultaneously because of their dependence on public recognition, however, that one could hardly conceive of the dependencies between religious specialists and ‘laymen’ as patron and client relations, whereby specialists monopolise an immaterial scarce good (as Bax, 1988: 10, summerises their interaction).

The particularity of the internal/informal realm comes to the fore most strongly in its special relation to the esoteric (and Qur’anic) core (concept) of ‘friendship with God’ (valāyat) - also connoting ‘guidance’. Stigmatic proofs of friendship with God/guidance are not carried outside the lodge for public display. Having “been conveyed from heart to heart [while it] has not been written in books and its principles cannot be expressed in words” (Pand-e Šāleḥ, 1372/1993: 35), valāyat belongs to the innermost, divine realm of experience that ultimately breaches any form(ality).

Formally, spiritual authority bears a relation to the quality of mental counselling, financial charity towards the flock and Sufi meditation (zekr). When performed impeccably, meditations have integrated affiliates, reproduced hierarchy and respectability, and contained dissent. When these performances fail in containing dissent, compet-
ing claims for spiritual authority are always incongruous - given the sacred nature of Sufi leadership - and exclusive. Internal authority challenges have often been settled through either the challenger’s formal separation or his formal expulsion.

Differentiation between formal and informal, internal realms enables Sufi institutions such as initiation, presupposing grades of knowledge and their shielding. Where external constraints are heavy, the inner life becomes more important (religiously).

Only in extreme circumstances would the mystic regimes’ external relations be void of strategies, and unilaterally dictated by domination. An inversely exceptional situation prevailed in the period 1836-1848, when one Ne‘matollâhî Sufi (Hâjjî Mirzâ Âqâsî) wielded tremendous power in Iran through his influence on Moḥammad Shâh Qâjâr - participating himself in state domination. In all other cases, that this study is mainly concerned with, there have been rather more delicate and moderate balances of power and performance. Twentieth-century patterns in relations to state and societal competitor regimes have included strategies to accommodate to and integrate into the prevailing worldly regimes. These strategies were matched by policies of patronage, co-optation, rejection and (ideological) suppression, vis-à-vis Sufism.

Despite the fact that Sufis have generally defined their mystical Path on a par with the holy law - being a prerequisite for higher knowledge - external relations to Iranian jurist regimes have generally been tense. Besides doctrinal reasons, this tension resulted mainly from competition for spiritual authority. From the eighteenth century to the present, one can nevertheless discern a gradual lessening of Sufi hostility towards jurists, which coincided with the jurists’ slow ascent to power. In the late Pahlavi period, most importantly, the Šoltân‘alîshâhî leaders strategically balanced jurist and royalist loyalties, which proved useful to them after the revolution.

As regards state relations, Sufi orders accommodated to and were to some extent co-opted by the nationalist, modernising state during the regime of Reza Shâh (1921-1941). During the regime of Mohammedi Reza Shâh (1941-1979) the orders’ integration into elite circles was aided by the state’s ideological and material royal patronage. In the Islamic Republic state ties were largely cut, but Sufis nevertheless managed to attract important clerics with state ties to their sessions, and accommodate Sufi spirituality to regime religiosity. The
component of reproduction in mystic regimes which was external and informal (i.e. not circumscribed in Sufi rules) has consisted, therefore, of public or private relations to people in high places.

Formal and external strategy and ‘authentic’ religiosity in the Islamic Republic has involved charitable donations during the Iran-Iraq war, announcements of public gatherings, ‘open houses’ on Shi‘ite occasions, and cheap medical services. The mystic regimes’ persistent denial of any relevance in informal relations to people in high places has in turn credited the voluntary and disinterested nature of formal-external acts. In these strategies, Sufi performance managed to establish religious authenticity as much as the Ahl-e Haqq did through conceptual segregation (Mir-Hosseini, 1994, (1): 281).

The most important conceptual segregation, and its practical implementation, has concerned the internal and external Sufi realms. It has particularly been on the ‘outside’ that conformity was required in Sufi relations towards the orders that be, while the ‘inside’ was reserved for Sufi spirituality (see chapter seven). In different political regimes and across the orders, there has been patterned variation in these ‘authentic strategies’, vis-à-vis internal tensions, and external relations to lateral and state regimes. In other words, these historical patterns were given shape to by the cultural performances that have distinguished one mystic regime from the other.

Religion and mysticism

Only separate elements in Geertz’s universalist definition of religion (1973 [1966]) have retained their descriptive value since the original publication. Paraphrasing, these elements include 1) a system of symbols [which establish] 2) long-lasting moods and motivations [by formulating] 3) conceptions of a general order of existence [and clothing these] 4) conceptions with [such] an aura of factuality [that] 5) moods and motivations [result] which seem uniquely realistic.

Ignoring the text between brackets, it can be easily demonstrated that in a superficial sense these elements are descriptive of Shi‘ism in Iran: 1) the colour black, the sword, the rosary and saintly shrines are among many symbols that refer to central themes and conceptions in Shi‘ism; 2) collective emotion involved in mourning ceremonies testifies to long-lasting moods - the ‘memory’ of Karbala - and motivations - a sense of injustice and militancy; 3) the Imamate -
Shi‘ism’s theological core - is a cosmology; 4) During ‘Ashūrā, Imam Hoseyn’s transhistorical battle between good/ truth and evil/falsehood is narrated and depicted in a manner as concrete and historically detailed as possible, and 5) the smooth effectiveness with which the above cosmological event was transferred to contemporary circumstances in the Islamic revolution illustrates the uniquely realistic semblance of these moods and motivations.

However, ASAD (1993) convincingly contested the central tenet of the universalist definition that connects these elements in Geertz’s theory - that “religious symbols are sui generis, marking out an independent religious domain” (op. cit., p. 52, cf. BAX, 1987). ASAD’s critiques centre around the argument that (religious) symbols do not by themselves produce and define moods, motivations or cosmology, but only through the power of the institutions, disciplines, discourses and practices with which they are intrinsically connected (cf. op. cit., pp. 33, 35, 37). Moreover, the power and the authority of particular symbols, and that which makes these symbols possible in the first place and simultaneously rules out others, are definitely “to be explained as products of historically distinctive […] forces” (op. cit., p. 54, my emphasis).

Religious symbols, then, are not central to this study, while the Sufi orders that produce these, in historically distinctive relations to other regimes, are. The cognitive centrality of ‘belief’ in Geertz’s definition - a distinctly modern and Christian one (ASAD, 1993: 47) - is a similar point of divergence. Sufi orders embody a heterogeneity of beliefs, but some are more powerful than others. Spiritual progress has been dependent upon guidance, and it is the authority structures that define assemblies of Sufis as orders, which provide powerful symbols, beliefs with a heavy fundament.

As concerns the study of Islam, TAPPER usefully proposed its anthropology to chart “how Muslims (individuals, groups […] present/construct themselves [and others] as Muslims [and non-Muslims]” [my insertions] (1995: 192). However, to avoid this nominalism from turning into an Empty Vessel Theory of Islam that ignores persistent social and ideational patterns, the anthropology of Islam ought to chart, in addition, how presentations and constructions are shaped by and result in figurations: structured and changing patterns of interdependent people (ELIAS, 1970). In other words: one would study regimes by relating constructions and dependencies in a
Secondly, “Among the conclusions [of] the anthropological study of religion [is] that certain religious ideas are universal and seem as old as human society” (Stevens, 1996: 1088). Mysticism has been one persistent social and ideational pattern that defies a plain nominalism.

Mysticism in monotheistic religions has often been in juxtaposition to orthodoxy - now as a complement, then as a hostile adversary (cf. Armstrong’s comparisons, 1993), or to intellectualist varieties of religious experience (Auden, 1965). Mystic and orthodox regimes not only constitute different ways of life, however, but also competing parties for scarce spiritual authority. Weber’s sociology of religion (1977 [1922]) offers surprisingly little on these this-worldly conflicts beyond psychological, Jamesian (1963) ‘varieties of religious experience’. In Christianity, contestations of the nature of resurrection and monotheism have from an early day defined spiritual authority - dyadic in hierarchy, church-like, or dual, master-disciple like - among communities of believers. Religious debate bore social and political implications from the outset: “When gnostic and orthodox Christians were debating the nature of God, they were at the same time debating [...] spiritual authority” (Pagels, 1985: 59).

The challenge to spiritual authority was never far off in mystic imagery. Despite the fact that early Jewish mystics “were anxious not to antagonise” the rabbis, their ‘throne mysticism’ ‘imagined God as a mighty king who could only be approached in a perilous journey through the seven heavens” (Armstrong, 1993: 245). The thirteenth-century Persian, Islamic equivalent is ‘Atar’s ‘Discourse of the Birds’ (Manṭeq al-tayr), in which thirty birds undertake a similarly perilous journey, many dying along the way, to be (re)united with a mystical king who turns out to be ‘thirty birds’ (Simorgh). Such images of power might be symbolical, of inner states, but could also have their bearing on outer states, and embody claims to worldly power.

Of Islamic spiritual authority it was observed that “Muslims highlight continuous genealogies as guarantors of authority [in, for instance,] chains of Sufi teaching [...] that link practitioners to the founder of a Sufi order” (Bowen, 1993: 186). The living Sufi centre of authority is the sheikh, pir or qoṭb. As disciples invest spiritual authority in his person to the extent that cosmic balances are thought dependent upon his being, “l’histoire des saints n’est que l’histoire de leur autorité” (Kerrou, 1998: 32).
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Here mystic regimes stand out as particular religious regimes. Charismatic leadership is characteristic of all religious organisation, which often establishes spiritual authority as a mediation of sacred texts and personalities. Mystic regimes, however, more strikingly so than religious regimes in general, are characterised by personalised charismatic leadership, in the sense that Sufi masters embody authority. Sufi authority has thus resembled royal authority - kingship’s ‘divine splendour’ in Iran, more than God-ordained, mainly derived from this-worldly values of force and might. Jurist authority, to the contrary, built largely on ethical or spiritual brokerage - representation - of the Prophetic and Imamic messages (see chapter seven). Although few Sufis would publicly juxtapose themselves to jurists, there are three potential challenges in mysticism to orthodoxy: competing mystic readings of scripture and holy men (Prophet and Imams), particular competence claims for such readings, and the autonomous source of spiritual authority in the figure of the sheikh. It is when these challenges materialise in conflict, that continuous genealogies are often contested.

In both Ne'matollahi regimes, stories abound of affluent leaders in other orders, and wealth was in some cases visible in the orders’ real estate property. Despite this, my fieldwork has not produced uncontestable facts concerning property relations, financial administration, stipends, etc. An important reason is that Sufi spiritual authority has often depended upon a master’s ability to dissociate himself from concerns with worldly gain. Thus, the economic conditions which enable Sufi organisation belong to the realm of secret knowledge as much as spiritual instruction during initiation. In competition for spiritual authority, however, financial morality enters the equation. “To accept money is to destroy the morality of the act,” a Sufi related of the behaviour of a competitor, who in his turn had accused the former of embezzlements. Economic resources thus figure in my research not primarily as economic infrastructure, but as narrative devices in competitions for spiritual authority.

Military power has been ruled out for Sufis since the Iranian state monopolised the legitimate use of force - which fits an evolutionary pattern in the relations between states and religious regimes (cf. BAX, 1987: 3). Beyond military and economic concerns, however, spiritual authority is a scarce good and an end in itself. Whether or not spoils are its produce, spiritual authority has remained a desirable asset
because of its intrinsic religious value.

Although Sufi spiritual authority has seen attempts at monopolisation of the means of orientation in internal and external strife, this has not effectively outdone alternatives. The orders have had no means at their disposal - this reflects Shi'ite organisation in general - to prevent affiliates from changing spiritual masters. In this respect, Eickelman's observation that “there is an ‘essential looseness’ [...] about Islamic religious organisation” (1981: 293) is particularly to the point for modern Iranian Sufism. But most important as an impediment to violent conflict, few Sufis have ever presented the Sufi Path (tarīqat) as an alternative to the holy Islamic Law (sharī'at). This study thus discusses indigenously Islamic, mystic regimes.

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Part One addresses academic regimes - research paradigms - in the study of Sufism, and it explores the long-term developmental history of the Ne'matollahi Sufi order.

Chapter one depicts a wondrous episode in which a range of transnational interests colluded in transhistorical and mystical explorations of Iranian Shi'ism. After 1945, Henry Corbin and several Iranian colleagues set out to reconstruct Shi'ism, to arrive at ‘the origin of any perspective’. They reached their destination through a quietist definition of Shi'ism in the midst of political turmoil, and by then paradoxically becoming, after Corbin's death and after the Islamic revolution, a token of respectability for political Islam. This episode is illustrative of a crucial mechanism in mystic regimes: non-political and transhistorical definitions of religiosity serve exterior and temporal political purposes. But it also bears testimony of excessive idealism in Corbin’s ‘hermeneutical phenomenology’ of Shi'ism, which was epistemologically bound to miss the real social dynamics. Corbin was himself part of this dynamics, which resulted in the esoterically inconceivable Islamic revolution.

Chapter two seeks to ground the exploration of Ne'matollahi history in a different analysis. It begins by addressing Corbin's unitary conceptualisation of Shi'ism, underlying which were neglected histories of conflict about spiritual authority that have been constitutive of Sufism. In Weberian ideal-types, these conflicts were conceptualised in a dichotomy of law and ‘experience’ in Islam. The dichotomy’s use
as a tool of analysis is limited, however, because of a pattern of overlap between Sufis and jurists, antinomian traditions that dissolve Sufism as a unitary object, and the centrality of the state in shaping Sufi-jurist relations. The centrality of the state remains similarly unaccounted for in several exemplary studies in the historical anthropology of Islam, which complemented the law-and-experience dichotomy with an equally Weberian duality of modernity and tradition. Beyond the grid of these too rigid notions, it is argued, the social development of Shi’ite Sufism in Iran has taken shape through contingent factors such as state centralisation and royal patronage.

The eighteenth-century reestablishment of the Ne‘matollāhī regime in Iran developed through two figurations. Initially, the relations of Sufis derived mainly from local rulers’ competition for power in the absence of a central state. The internal dynamics which enhanced Sufi power, consisted of a massive growth in the number of converts, which could not be checked by either rulers or jurists. Rulers often feared jurists in the second figuration, which had the reunified state at its centre. Rulers’ Sufi patronage strengthened Sufi challenges of jurist authority. Nineteenth-century Iran did not witness the disappearance of ‘traditional’ Sufis through the ascent of jurist-led, ‘modern’ religiosity, but, instead, Sufism’s socio-political renaissance.

Part Two deals with the Ne‘matollāhī regimes in the Pahlavi Dynasty (1921-1979). In 1976, a French Ahl-e Haqq convert observed that “le champ du soufisme iranien est encore à explorer” (DURING, 1976: 124). Gramlich’s studies of Iranian Shi’ite Sufi orders (1965, 1976, 1981) provided unique material and hitherto unparalleled analyses of Sufi religiosity and ritual life in the Pahlavi period. However, these detailed analyses lacked a generalising treatment of Sufism’s socio-political development, while it may be generalised for oriental studies that “academic treatments of Sufism [...] rarely enter the modern period” (McGregor, 1997: 255).

Chapter three describes Sufism’s transformation in the context of the nation-state. The Ne‘matollāhī orders lost much of their exterior power through the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and in the period 1921-1941, under Reza Khan/Reza Shah, because their intimate state ties were cut. Sufism transformed with the new regimes, as the nation(-state) became a prime marker of legitimate identity. Internally, nationalistic modernisation and the dismantling of traditional power bases that occurred in their name, were paralleled by
Sufi struggles for spiritual authority. Master-disciple relations changed shape as Ne‘matollahi Sufis took issue with self-explanatory rule, and implicitly asked for relevance to the nation-state in Sufi spiritual authority. Nationalistic modernisation similarly provided external contexts for lateral and state relations. In their external representations, too, the Ne‘matollahi Sufi regimes redirected their focus to the particular audience of the Iranian nation.

Chapter four examines contrary Sufi regimes in the face of political polarisation. The nation-state remained an important frame of reference for the late twentieth-century Ne‘matollahi orders. Its representation by the late Pahlavi regime, however, became a ground for political contestation. Iranian Sufism in the period 1941-1979 had royal patronage as an important context, in the face of growing opposition. Different degrees of royal patronage - from personal sponsoring to ideological incorporation - relate to both the Şafi‘alishahi order’s social prominence and to the Solţan‘alishahi order’s sudden religious opposition. Internally, the Şafi‘alishahi order remained a theatre of conflict, which now involved religious and political contestation of the aristocratic Freemasonry leadership. The Solţan‘alishahis, in contrast, established conspicuous unitary order. Externally, the Şafi‘alishahi elite integrated deeply into the stately regime, while the Solţan‘alishahis developed relations to the clerical regime that came to represent the Iranian nation more successfully. Their relative independence provided crucial room for manoeuvre when the balance of religious power shifted and the political tide swept away the Shah’s regime.

Part Three explores the Ne‘matollahi regimes’ comparative social development and cultural performance in the Islamic Republic. Until 1996, the history of the Republic divided into three periods, in which the state ideology successively emphasised the supremacy of Islam alone (‘Islam-Islam’), then blended it with patriotism (‘Islam-Iran’), and finally, from 1989, with full blown nationalism (‘Iran-Iran’).

Chapter five treats the Sufi regimes in the ‘decade of war and revolution’ (Menashri, 1990). Initially, the Solţan‘alishahis were confronted with oppression, but switching sides before the revolution paid off for them. They sought legitimacy in mourning sessions for deceased notables and acted as a national patron of caritas. The Şafi‘alishahis, to the contrary, were haunted by their Freemasonry reputation. Their lodge was occupied, and once it was recovered, they in-
involved themselves in slander concerning financial morality. While the Sołtan'alishâhis enhanced their reputation through religious nationalism (externally), the Šaff'alishâhîs' public, Shi'ite mourning ceremonies were deliberately kept apart from the lodge's Sufi activities. They did not, therefore, improve on Šaff'alishâhî legitimacy. While the Sołtan'alishâhîs retained unquestioned and hereditary leadership (internally), the Šaff'alishâhîs dissolved into small rival groups, over which the central leadership retained only marginal leverage. In spite of multi-faceted adversity, however, Šaff'alishâhî (hi)stories tell one not of jurist-led state persecution, but of accommodation.

Chapter six probes an ideological rapprochement between Sufism and the state from 1989, through Sufism's continuous ethical réveil and the emergence of 'state mysticism'. To some extent the state itself engaged in a revolutionary variety of mysticism, and it was observed that many lodges embarked on a 'second life' (Hasüri, 1375/1997: 8). The Šaff'alishâhî leadership saw itself devoid of spiritual authority and focused, neutrally, on the image of Šaff'alishâh. External, public performances pointed to the politicised context of mystical martyrdom, under the surface of traditional Sufi/Shi'ite laments. Among the Sołtan'alishâhîs, internal order remained uncontested. The leadership of Maüb'alishâh had been authorised by divine sanction and by his father's meticulous preparation for it. His death presented itself in an historical continuity of saintly Islamic martyrdom, which in turn credited Maüb'alishâh's visionary letters of appointment (and vice versa). Maj'üb'alishâh's subsequent new proclamation of allegedly old rules - for external as much as internal consumption - outlined a meticulously detailed socio-political modesty, but - as if in exchange for it - it also circumscribed an exclusive realm of Sufi spiritual authority. The formality of these assertive Sołtan'alishâhî rules revealed strength and confidence. The order argued the legitimacy of its spiritual realm by referring to relations with Khomeyni. Its success, and the effects of state mysticism, became apparent in 1997 when several mollahs and prominent clerics paid their respect.

Part Four and chapter seven bring the explorations of comparative social development and cultural performance on a broader theoretical plane, by confronting them with discussions concerning civil society. Observers spotted an emergent civil society in Iran after Khomeyni's demise, in a revival of associational life and civil thought. However,
civil thought has remained confined, while many associations are to be conceived of as ideological state institutions at best. Regarding the classical definition of civil society - civility and associational life beyond primordial attachments, significantly independent from the state - the Sufi regimes have not been a clear referent either.

Modern Iranian Sufism as represented by the Ne'matollahi orders has been characterised by internal and external relations that constitute a mirror image of the classical civil society. Internally, relations have been primordial - in the sense of exclusive and hidden face-to-face interaction, not meaningfully extending beyond the proximity of direct communication. Externally, relations have been characterised by either ideological or material state affiliations. Two arguments which apply in particular to the Islamic Republic, add to the qualification. Sufism’s relations to socio-political aims have now been largely severed, while the orders’ and the state’s authority structures, both of which stress exclusive spiritual authority, are analogous.

Once one takes the historical emergence of Western civil societies as a comparison, however, various parallels become evident. There are two instances in which Sufism meaningfully relates to the civil society - though in paradoxical ways. Western civil societies originated from literary and artistic circles and debating clubs, not from politically assertive mutual interest groups (HABERMAS, 1990). An important new strain in Iranian intellectual discourse in which Sufism figures passively as a recurrent reference, provides a parallel. Secondly, Western public space, in advance of any full-fledged civil public sphere, was first established within societies which were not only mute and inward looking, but also closed and secretive, confined to selective memberships. The Ne’matollahi regimes have been the bearers of a shielded religiosity of their own - which by implication means non-state religiosity, no matter to what extent they accommodated to the public transcript. Thus they confronted, if largely willy-nilly, the state’s ‘colonisation of the lifeworld’.

* * *

My fieldwork in Iran in 1996, 1997 and 1998 has nearly covered one year. It has been the sort of cursory project - no initiation - that Sufis would certainly consider a worldly vanity and dangerous enterprise. After all, “one ought not to jump into the ocean when one cannot
INTRODUCTION

swim” (that is, without the guidance of a spiritual master). One Sufi, filled with laughter, mentioned ‘one university professor’ who was ‘his own pupil’ (ye ostād-e dāneshgāhī morīd-e khvād būd), while others added that if I wanted to learn anything, I had no choice but to ‘go (all) the way’ (bāyad rāh raft). There are no claims in this study of knowledge ‘from the inside’ in the Sufi sense of the term, but the esteemed company of the Sufis (and the literature I collected during my stay) nevertheless produced some essential ingredients for a broad outline of historical development. These ingredients included glimpses of an emerging pattern.

During my last visit in September 1998, I was led into an informal gathering by Sufis whom I had previously known, which - to my great surprise - turned out to be a ‘class of mysticism’ (kelās-e ‘erfān). In the gatherings I had previously visited, which were ranging from very formal, lodge-based congregations to almost spontaneous meetings, hierarchical master-disciple relations had always been among the defining features. Here, the relations of master and disciples had been transformed into teacher (ostād) - pupil (shāgerd) relations. While average Sufi gatherings had been decisively monological, the class of mysticism featured dialogue, which began by the teacher asking what passages in Rumi’s Maṣnavī his audience would like to read. It ended with him - as far as I could judge, sincerely - inquiring whether or not his evocations and explanations of mystic matters had been to the satisfaction of his audience.

The authoritative words spoken in average Sufi gatherings were not usually subject to verbal exchanges, but here, the pupils subjected their teacher’s discourse to questions, and, where his answers were not deemed sufficient, friendly but deliberate discussion. The new class of mysticism included a widely varied audience, which similarly contrasted with Sufi gatherings I had previously witnessed. There were some fifteen people, young children among them, women with and without the ḥejāb, a teacher of yoga who held a low opinion of Islam, and Sufis dedicated to traditional Islamic exegesis. In response to one particular ‘pointe’ (nokte) in the teacher’s Maṣnavī-exegesis, and as if generally reflecting the structure of the gathering, one pupil raised an issue which reminded of the fundamental debates that currently rage within the world of Iranian Shi‘ism:

Religion is similar to taste. One experiences it not with the head but with the soul (jān). If one tries only to ‘understand’ religion, it be-
comes cliché. One must enjoy it! Once, I even heard someone say:
‘Thank God that this prayer is over (khodā-ye shokr īn namāz tamām shodī). Such a person does not enjoy religion!

The implicit reference was to the Islamists who are held to be ‘dry by religion’ (khoshk-e mażhab). The teacher of the flock, finally, was brought at one point to the statement that “Anyone who grows takes his environment into consideration; only people with a closed mind want to dominate anything and everything. If one takes everything, one engages in the relations of hell. One must welcome life.”

The mystic regimes of the past - my exposé ends with the presidency of Mohammad Khatami - will now, with the current changes in Iran, possibly give way to an emerging civil society. The new political regime may lead Iranian Sufis to celebrate again “Celui qui manifesta son humanité, Comme mystère de gloire de sa divinité radieuse, et qui ensuite se montre à découvert dans sa créature, Sous la forme de quelqu’un qui mange et qui boit” (Corbin, 1972 (1): 146, referring to Massignon, 1955: 39-40, who in his turn cited al-Ḥallāj).
PART ONE

Mystic Regimes
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A pervasive tradition attributes the origins of Iranian Sufism to national resistance. Driving back home after a Sufi congregation, Moḥammad spoke in a secretive voice: “Now I will tell you something. Pay attention.” He sadly proclaimed: “The Arabs came by the sword, subjecting neighbouring peoples and violating their ways of life.” Only the Iranians (it is often heard) had retained their language and culture. “But we saw the virtue of the Message, and saved it from them.” An inverse account has Sufism as a stronghold of alien or repressive power in Iran, from the outset. Enemies associate Sufism with Zoroastrian despotism, Greek philosophical pollution of Islamic theology, or illegitimate Christian monasticism.

For many who are involved in either its propagation or denunciation, Sufism equals its origins. These origins may be alluded to in historical contexts such as the Arab invasion, but they are not often thought to occupy an historical locus, i.e. one restricted by temporal and spatial dimensions. They are rather seen as the manifestation of an essence. ‘Iran’, ‘Shiʿism’ and ‘Sufism’ are conceived as preordained qualities rather than decipherable units in this perspective, manifest to the surface of their appearance. Explaining history, a Neʿmatollāhī Sufi told me that his order had ‘always just been there’.

Sufis resist historical objectivation more sharply when it comes to what Sufism actually does. They either describe spiritual experience as a transcendence of time, as reaching the place where time is no longer, or as the point in consciousness where one drowns in the state of the ‘now’ that shatters past and future by absorbing all. A quest for the referent in time (x) of a particular event (y) remains pointlessly grounded where a sheikh is honoured for his spiritual ascent or simultaneous presence in different places. Objective geography meets the denial of the Sufis who head for ‘nowhere place’ (nā-kojā-ābād).

As much as Iranian Sufis resist secular, historical chronologies,
they often abhor sociological categories.\footnote{“La mission des ‘orafâ [mystics] […] opère une désocialisation” (CORBIN, 1971, (1): 185).} Although consciousness of violent persecution pervades their reflections on self, this awareness does not often lead to objectivations that might structurally juxtapose them to rulers or jurists. Sufism’s enemies are rather understood as a geographically and historically indistinct, universal type of ‘spiritually lesser endowed creatures’. Transhistorical essentialism, then, which enemies and participants alike employ in Sufism’s discussion, is a defining feature of the discursive universe of Iranian Sufism.

If not abhorred, ‘the social’ is often deemed irrelevant: there was no response from the Solṭān’alishāhī order when the nationalist historian Ahmad Kasravi publicly castigated Sufism as a whole for all of Iran’s social ills in the 1940s. But its relevance shows in the wars of words that have been waged between Ne‘matollāh Sufis and orders with competitive, mutually exclusive claims for spiritual leadership.

Since 1945, an authoritative account of Iranian, Shi‘ite spirituality by Henry Corbin mirrored the essentialist Sufi vision of the self\footnote{The Sufi image of has been influenced by Neo-Platonism (as was Corbin) (TRIMINGHAM, 1971: 134; AHMADI and AHMADI, 1998) Plotinus’ Emanation doctrine involves ‘descent’ and ‘procession’, analogous to Shi‘ite Sufi nozûl and so‘ūd. Like Iranian Sufis, Plotinus ‘located’ Emanation outside time and space in a mystical ‘nowhere’ (DE GANDILLAC, 1952: 19). In 1941/2 a Solṭān’alishāhī leader wrote a laudation on Plotinus (Falsafa-ye Falāṭin: Ra‘īs-e aflātūniyān-e akhīr).} and its negation of social historicity. Corbin and a group of Iranian friends and colleagues defined Shi‘ism as an essentially ‘immanent’ and transhistorical esoteric tradition, far removed from any worldly, material and political concerns. A major context for this late twentieth century configuration was a state interest in Sufism, which was in some ways beneficial to the definition of a national identity and as a counterweight to political Islam. The Shah and the Empress Farah had Sufis in their entourage, as religious teachers and advisors. ‘Corbinism’ also marked an esoterical shift in the definition of Sufism,\footnote{“Il fut [...] à l’origine d’un mouvement spirituel qui aspirait à établir un pont entre l’Iran traditionnel et la modernité” (SHAYEGAN, 1990: 25).} which had previously become worldly in the context of the nation-state. Corbin’s views were in turn overrun by the Iranian revolution, an ‘exterior’ and historical sociological event that bore witness to a different Islamism. His esoterism and the construction of a quietist Shi‘ism thus came full circle with his death in 1978. The point of its
description here is to take issue with an excessively idealistic hermeneutics in the interpretation of Shi’ite religiosity.

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Corbin, while demonstrating the originality of the intuitive method, says: “Western anthropology, sidetracked by the fables of the positivist ideology of objectivity, has quite recently discovered the notion of understanding (Verstehen) whereas the Muslim gnostic from the very beginning, and especially since the XVIIth century with Molla Sadra, has placed this existential internalization in the forefront of the sociological or historical event.”

Henry Corbin was a French philosopher, orientalist and an ecumenical Protestant theologian who was to become ‘the foremost Western student of Shi’ism’. He went on a French state mission to Turkey in 1939, on behalf of the Bibliothèque Nationale, to search for manuscripts of the mystic Sohrawardi in the libraries of Istanbul. His teacher Louis Massignon had presented Corbin with one of Sohrawardi’s texts in 1928, which had marked the beginning of his interest in Islamic mysticism. The plan was for Corbin to stay three months, but his stay lasted until 1945 because of the war. In August 1944, the Bibliothèque Nationale issued another ‘ordre de mission’, for Persia this time, and on 14 September 1945, Corbin arrived in Tehran.

In Tehran, Corbin set out to study Iranian Shi’ism, which he felt

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4 Naraghi, 1976: 96. Of Corbin’s colleague Seyyed Hossein Nasr it has been remarked that he, after an ‘occidental exile’ and upon reappropriating the Iranian Islamic tradition, could now “relate to Molla Sadra’s metaphysical verstehen” after which he “came to view mysticism as the main axis of his thinking and worldview” (Boroujerdi, 1996: 122-3).

5 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in Tabâtabâî, 1982: 9. “Writers on Sufism have fought shy of dealing with the question of the relationship of Sufism and Shi’ism. L. Massignon was concerned with the relations of Shi’is with al-Hallâj; but otherwise the only scholars who have attempted to deal with it have approached it from the Shi’i viewpoint - we may mention Henri Corbin, W. Ivanov, and Sayyid Husain Nasr” (Trimingham, 1971: 135).

6 In 1954, Corbin would succeed Massignon at the religious sciences section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Shayegan, 1990: 14-22). Corbin acquired his text editing skills in Istanbul through Helmut Ritter (verbatim Bernd Radtke).

was Islam’s strongest living, esoterical tradition. One result of his studies has been the monumental, four-volume *En Islam iranien* (1971/2), which had as its mission to document Shi’ite spirituality from its literary canon. From the 1960s, a circle of Shi’ite scholars and friends assembled around Corbin in Tehran, among whom were professor of Islam and court-intimate Seyyed Hossein Nasr, diplomat Hūshang Beshārat, and philosopher-theologian ‘Alāme Ṭabātabā’ī.  

Many literate Sufis in Tehran are familiar with Corbin, whose work had significantly helped define their spirituality. In so far as a Sufi sentiment against historical sociology (or more specifically historicism and historical materialism) is formulated in an explicit theory of transcendental history, it often directly derives from him. One Tehrani sheikh I spoke with even referred to ‘la gnose’ rather than to ‘erfān or taṣawvof in an explanation of Sufi mysticism. More than Michel Foucault’s short excursion into Iranian spirituality in 1978, which remained firmly rooted in French post-structuralist concerns (and ended in a public apology), Corbin’s exploration of Shi’ism became a laudatory definition of it, blurring boundaries between sympathetic scholarship and exegetic participation.  

Corbin’s exegetic participation involved hermeneutical phenomenology. Hermeneutics meant ‘reconduire une chose à sa source’, where ‘source’ has the meaning of an essence, of ‘the origin of any perspective’. To establish that which must be relocated required phenomenology, which meant ‘sauver les phénomènes’, or reconstructing phenomena as they are conceived by the subject. To write history

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8 CORBIN repeatedly referred to Shi’ism as “la tradition ininterrompue de la gnose (silsilat al-‘urfān) (En Islam iranien, 1971, (1): 110).


10 The relations between Corbin and Foucault, intellectual and other, have remained largely unexplored. It seems obvious though, inferring from the similarity of their theme (Iranian spirituality) and from Corbin’s fame in France at the time, that Foucault was partly inspired by the former. Perhaps the fact that FOUCAULT had already spoken out strongly against transcendental history (1972) and afterwards never gave up this position, is the reason for his exploration not to have developed into the kind of willed blending of ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ perspectives that is so striking in Corbin’s project (cf. STAUTH, 1991). Corbin’s pupil Daryush Shayegan, “who like [...] Foucault, had come to express his admiration for the spiritual dimension of the Iranian revolution,” again like Foucault engaged “in a theoretical autocritique” after the Islamic revolution (in 1982) (BOROUJERDI, 1996: 153-4).

11 CORBIN, 1971, (1): XIX, XX: 143; xix. He defined hermeneutical phenomenology in accordance with tāvīl, meaning esoteric or allegorical, Qur’ānic exegesis.
from such concerns is to blend with one’s subject, and Corbin (mentioning seventeenth century Persian Neo-Platonists who did not distinguish between knowledge and revelation) conceived of the project as an initiation. \(^{12}\) His search for ‘le fait religieux’ ignored discontinuous political incursions, which were lacking in eternal essence - one would search in vain for public statements by Corbin on the coup d’état in Iran in 1953 or the student revolt in Paris in 1969, both of which influenced Iranian Shi‘ism. But En Islam iranien, intended to be a timeless understanding of Iranian Shi‘ism, would develop a life of its own, and attain temporally distinct political meanings that were exterior to the intentions of its author.

Exteriority

‘Exteriority’ is a term coined by Michel Foucault, which marked a position contrary to hermeneutics and phenomenology. \(^{13}\) It refers to the quality of autonomy in historical phenomena - beyond the scope of an actor’s intentionality or subjectivity - and thus it stands opposed to Corbin’s initiatory comprehension. The most effective way to argue the relevance of exteriority for Sufism’s interpretation, is to explore the space from which Corbin’s project of initiation was itself exterior to the Shi‘ite ‘spiritual universe’ it sought to comprehend.

In ‘Nietzsche, history, genealogy’ Foucault explained the ironical meaning of Ursprung for Nietzsche. \(^{14}\) It is the myth of those who cannot reconcile themselves with their historicity, or discontinuous presence (which cannot be subsumed in an all-embracing ‘origin’). In his treatment of this vision’s implications, Foucault again followed Nietzsche in his definition of alternative historiography. One of its concepts is ‘emergence’ (Entstehung), which connotes synchronous power relations that influence an historical manifestation. To expli-

\(^{12}\) Corbin, 1971, (1): xiii, 7. Shayegan (1990: 286) cited Ricoeur’s distinction between ‘herménéutique amplifiante’ (the Corbinian mode) and ‘réductrice’ in this respect.


cate exteriority in Corbin’s project is, first, to describe the emergence of *En Islam iranien* in France and Iran after the second world war. Secondly, I explore exteriority in the forward direction through the notion of its ‘unintended consequences’: after Corbin’s demise, *En Islam iranien* was used for contemporary political purposes.

1. There was an historical dissatisfaction with the Western here and now in Corbin’s work. Western universities and Western society, he felt, and wrote, were conquered by positivism and Marxism. Corbin conceived of transhistorical spirituality as universal religiosity, but the predominance in Western academia and society of historicism had eroded the possibility of relating meaningfully to it. *En Islam iranien* was an attempt to restore lost spirituality, and explicitly a critique of modernity that in some ways resembled the views and writings of his friend and source of inspiration Martin Heidegger.

Corbin’s contact with Heidegger dated back to 1931, when the two met in Freiburg. The context for the encounter was a series of German travels (1930-1936), in which Corbin discovered various Christian thinkers and mystics (such as Karl Barth). Heidegger entrusted the French translation of *Was ist Metaphysik?* (1929) to Corbin, which was published - with fragments of *Sein und Zeit* (1927) - in 1938. One observes Heidegger’s intellectual influence on Corbin in three interrelated themes: the fate of the West (that nowadays also mutilated the East), in the face of the alienating hegemony of a technological mode of life, which destroyed the authentic life. After the war, Corbin brought Heidegger’s hermeneutics to Iran with him, and the Western criticism of self in turn made a lasting impact on Iranian Shi’ites. More directly, Corbin’s and Heidegger’s Western views affected spiritual perspectives in Corbin’s Iranian circle.

Historicism for Corbin did not connote Popper’s critique of History as Prediction, but referred to the explication of mental phenomena in terms of their temporal and social contexts. Cf. 1971, (1): 22-38, for Corbin’s critique of Marxism and of positivism.

“Corbin pose des questions sous lesquelles on sent percer une certaine inquiétude. L’Orient risque de perdre son âme par suite d’une technologie envahissante et d’une occidentalisation [...] Cependant [...] fleurissent en Occident de pseudo- ésotérismes [...] qui tourment le dos à la Tradition dont ils se croient les représentants” (Brun, 1981: 77).

In the beginning of the 1960s, Corbin met with the Sanscritist Daryush Shayegan, whom he supervised for his dissertation on Hinduism and Sufism at the Sorbonne. From 1977, Shayegan led the Iranian Centre for the Study of Civilisations, which was preoccupied with the identities of and relations between East and West, modernity and tradition. But beyond the French and German intellectual influences, Shayegan’s *Markaz-e Irānī-ye Moţāle'e-ye Farhang-hā* was materially enabled by and established under the Iranian supervision of the Farah Pahlavi Foundation. In 1974, “upon securing the Queen’s patronage”, Corbin’s colleague Seyyed Hossein Nasr founded the Imperial Academy of Philosophy, which collaborated closely with Corbin’s Institut Franco-Iranien. Nasr defined as his aim to present “Shi‘ism to the Western world from the point of view of Shi‘ism itself.” Obviously with a similar Western audience in mind, ‘Allāme Ţabātabā’i defined Shi‘ism as an ‘Islamic science’, and more specifically as a ‘spiritual anthropology’. Corbin’s *En Islam iranien*, and both Nasr’s and Ţabātabā’i’s definitions of Shi‘ism, excluded any contemporary political definitions.

Following in the footsteps of Massignon, Corbin conceived of Shi‘ism as a ‘christiologie’, and it was perhaps due to this analogy that he ignored revolutionary potential in Shi‘ite concepts of martyrdom. Instead Corbin, Nasr, Ţabātabā’i and their Tehran circle rewrote Shi‘ism into otherworldly gnosis, as is seen in an anecdote, reported by Nasr, of a conversation between Corbin and Ţabātabā’i:

Corbin, who himself was as far removed from ‘historicism’ as possible, once said to ‘Allāmah Ţabātabā’i during the regular discussions they


19 In the 1970s, Iranian sociologist and court-intimate Ehsān Naraqi (who had ‘matrilineal ties to the queen’) brought ‘Eastern and Western civilisation’ into his analytical focus as well: “The ‘reality’ he spoke of was of Western science and technology, whereas the ‘truth’ alluded to oriental faith, mysticism, and esoteric philosophy” (BOROUJERDI, 1996: 136, 139).


had together in Tehran [...], “Western scholars claim that ‘Ali is not the author of the Nahj al-balāghah. What is your view and whom do you consider to be the author of this work?” ’Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī raised his head and answered in his usual gentle and calm manner, “For us whoever wrote the Nahj al-balāghah is ‘Ali, even if he lived [only] a century ago” [insertion mine].

The highest authority in Shi‘ism (marja‘-e taqlīd), ayatollah Borújerdi, remained at a distance from Corbin’s circle. There had been a clash with Ṭabāṭabā’ī, whom he felt was too philosophical and distant from jurisprudence (feqh) to be respectable, and one imagines that Corbin’s ecumenicalism was, for Borújerdi, another universe altogether. But the gap between the jurists’ exoteric Shi‘ism and Corbinian esoterism would widen still further, as twenty years of traditional quietism had come to an end too with Borújerdi, in 1961.

Iranian Shi‘ism rapidly politicised from the 1960s onwards, and in the 1970s the religious world was flooded with Khomeyni’s taped comments on world political events. But more than these, ‘Alī Shar‘atī’s ‘Sociology of Islam’ caught the national attention. Shar‘atī had studied in the Western here and now, in Paris, and had been deeply moved by the personality of Louis Massignon, both as an orientalist teacher of mysticism and as a political publicist. Contrary to his quietist pupil (Corbin), Massignon was very explicit (left-wing and anti-colonialist) politically. As a consequence of Massignon’s and other French and German, Marxist influences, Shar‘atī endeavoured both to objectify and to revolutionise Shi‘ism.

Sufism was, for Shar‘atī, “[...] a central element in that obscurantism which represented a retreat from the [...] struggle to establish an Islamic Order.” His own views, however, were not void of mysticism. Only, “Shar‘atī’s new strain of [...] Mysticism, if it can be so-called, [was] communal as much as [...] individual.”


27 SIRRIYEH, 1998: 164, 167. “When Shar‘atī spoke in negative terms about Sufism, and he did so frequently, it was not that he denied the virtue of mysticism completely, but rather that he associated the way it had developed with reactionary clericalism” (op. cit., pp. 166-7, cf. op. cit., p. 165). The paradox is further seen in
(1993: 107) observed: “it is as if the mystical truth of the Sufi masters, the stuff of Massillon’s scholarship […] is […] transfused into the ideological truth of Shari‘ati’s […] political agenda.” From an alienating West to an imaginary East, En Islam iranien had emerged from and developed in the opposite direction. As “[o]thers have spoken about the necessity of a ‘permanent revolution’,” stated Corbin in 1976, possibly in a late recognition of the Shi‘ite likes of Shari‘ati, “I will pronounce the necessity of a ‘permanent hermeneutics’.”

2.

On the eve of the Islamic revolution (7 October 1978) Corbin passed away. In an obituary essay one reads doubt as to whether the prophetic teacher had succeeded, after all, in grasping Shi‘ism’s timeless essence. “‘Ultime symbole:’” Charnay wrote, “Henry Corbin est mort alors que s’exaltait la Révolution islamique.” Ever since, he suggested, the politics of Shi‘ism caught the eye. Surely, political Shi‘ism was nothing of a novelty, but Corbin’s demise did close off a chapter in Iranian history in which leading intellectuals such as he himself, Tabataba‘í and Nasr had been in a position to both represent and construct Shi‘ism as a spiritual project (with the help of the French and Iranian states), in the midst of ever present political in-

that “his voice [was] influential not only in progressive religious circles in Iran […], but would also be heard by Sunni as well as Shi‘i revivalists […], among the radical Sufis of Turkey and Central Asia as well as among Muslim activists disposed to share his critical perspective on Sufism” (op. cit., p. 167). Boroujerdi (1996: 114) judged that “his disdain of the West was not that of an Islamic mystic unaware of the West but that of a disillusioned Western-educated intellectual”. There is one report of a clash between the Corbinians and the revolutionaries: “Nasr’s status as a cultural figure of the Pahlavi regime was in total opposition to Shari‘ati’s antistatist views, leading to the exchange of such mutual accusations as a ‘reactionary armchair intellectual’ and a ‘subversive Islamic-Marxist attempting to infiltrate the ranks of religious forces’. The culminating point in the parting of ways of Nasr and Shari‘ati happened around 1970 when upon hearing a lecture in which Shari‘ati compared Imam Hosein to Che Guevara, Nasr resigned from the Hoseyniyye-ye Ershad” (Boroujerdi, 1996: 126-7).


interpretations which had conquered the stage during their lifetimes.

Since the revolution, fieldwork-based Western studies of Iranian Shi'ism from a hermeneutic perspective have been rare. Exceptionally, Loeffler (1988) wrote an empirically valuable account of 'religious beliefs in a Persian village'. It shared in some of the views of symbolic anthropology - which, through Geertz, reached back to the German hermeneutic tradition. Like Corbin, symbolic anthropology has generally approached religion as a self-contained system of meaning. In Islam Observed (1968) Geertz accounted for a 'religious perspective' by triangular relations with 'worldview' and 'ethos'. Explaining challenges to 'religious hypotheses' (pp. 276-9), Loeffler employed a similarly idealist scheme. There were challenges from within the religious system - new experiences, mystical insights, meanings discovered in texts - and external ones - disconfirming evidence from thought systems outside religion - but none of these incorporated the socio-political factors that determine religious regimes.

Loeffler convincingly charted a series of religious types, but they seemed devoid of mutual relations and always to have been 'just there'. From his text it is not difficult to reconstruct his religious typology, however, in more exterior, temporal terms. The 'fundamentalist' lamented the 'decline of morality in modern education and lifestyles'. Loeffler summarised: “His version turns out to be in many respects just about the opposite of what the modernist Craftsman considers to be the pure Islam” (p. 286). Thus, the context of religiosity for both was state-induced modernisation in the Pahlavi era. This context also applied to the Mystic's praise of “Westeners, who take great pains in developing industry so that people can live in ease, [and who] will discover the [Way] sooner than most of us” (p. 131). Within the same temporal frame, the 'representative of the people' lamented American 'oppressors in Vietnam' and 'injustice' in the United States (p. 96). Loeffler may have been right to contend that the revolution had virtually no effect on these variant religiousities (p. 226), but he ignored the relevant dynamics in a prior course of collision: a

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31 To be accurate: Loeffler felt his study contributed to Bourdieu’s practice theory (op. cit., p. 3). But as it is more about internally consistent, symbolic belief systems than ‘practice’, I interpret it (despite Loeffler’s criticisms of Geertz) as a work inspired by symbolic anthropology.

32 ASAD (1983) has painstakingly criticised symbolic anthropology for its neglect of ‘power’.
clash of incompatible notions of Islam in the Pahlavi era that culminated in the revolution. Spooner justly concluded that *Islam in Practice* undervalued social dynamics and historical trends (1996: 403; 406) - a practice that Corbin had made into a research methodology.

After the revolution, Corbin’s studies have not sunk into oblivion in Iran, nor have they fallen into disrepute. Given Corbin’s quietist representations of Shi‘ism, receptivity towards them in the Islamic Republic strikes one as an ironic fate; an unintended consequence. French copies and Persian translations of his work (and that of Ṭabāṭabā’ī, as well as that of Nasr, who explicitly favoured the Shah) are found in many bookstores in Tehran. And paradoxically, the mystical prose, devoid of any politics, is considered politically correct.33

Islamists and Sufis alike - beyond historical conflicts on the social plane - often argue their relevance in the modern world in reference to ‘the spiritual crisis of the West’, of which Corbin had provided them with an ‘authentic’ account.34 Corbin has remained a figure of authority not only for mystical representations of self, but also for the political legitimacy of statist, republican Islam. This comes to the fore unambiguously in a report by *Iran News* on April 27, 1997:

[Ayatollah] Kashani said ‘velayat al-mutlaqa’, or the absolute leadership of mankind, was not the belief of Muslims alone, [as] even Christians, philosophers and gnostics shared the belief that it was ‘velayat’ which guaranteed the objectives of religion and human life [...] Kashani, quoting [...] Professor Henri Corbin, said that in the same way God sends prophets to guide humanity, there should be some divinely-

33 The occidentalisation of Iranian political Islam was convincingly analysed by Shayegan (1997). Corbin’s post-revolutionary reception was paralleled in the Pahlavi period: “even in the midst of a rampant antiorientalist campaign in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s warm testimonies to certain types of orientalists never fell out of fashion with the higher echelons of the Iranian academic establishment. For example, in 1963 and 1977 Tehran University published two books in honor of French orientalists Henri Massé [...] and Henry Corbin” (Boroujerdi, 1996: 143).

34 Corbin had developed close ties to - among many influential Iranians - various Sufi masters (Nasr, 1977: 25). The Solṭān’alishāhī order began invocations of ‘the spiritual crisis of the West’ from the 1960s. (See analysis in chapter 4 of (Solṭān’hoseyn) Tabandeh’s treatise *A Muslim Commentary on The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights*). The Solṭān’alishāhī leader had spoken rather dismissively of Corbin as a seeker who had not quite seen the light, but Corbin’s influence is nevertheless felt in the Sufi leader’s rather ecumenical definitions of mysticism. He for instance held Theosophy and Sufism to be one and the same school (Chahardahī, 1361/1982-3: 358).
CHAPTER ONE

Heideggerian philosophy had come to figure in Iranian discussions of Shi'ite spirituality, and it had been introduced to Iran by Corbin. But some in his audience employed it in unforeseen ways. Ahmad Fardid \(^{35}\) coined 'westoxication' (gharbzadegi), which was to become a token of revolution from the 1960s, and a rumour in Tehran had him as the real inventor of Khomeyni's 'rule of the jurist' (velâyat-e faqih). Furthermore, "his theories have been adopted by some intellectuals who claim that the policies of the current Islamic regime are manifestations of Eastern spirituality." \(^{35}\) Fardid, for some time a disciple of the reformist ayatollah Sangelaj who had been on good terms with elite personalities in Reza Shah's monarchy (chapter 3) - led his own intellectual circle from the late 1960s. Paradoxically, he

\(^{35}\) Iran News, 27 April 1997.

"The uneasy relationship between Persia and the West has encouraged intellectuals like Ahmad Fardid [...] to adopt theories of conspiracy." Gharbzadegi "was coined by Fardid, who claimed that Freemasons and Jews are engaged in a great conspiracy to 'hellenize' the entire world [...] 'Westoxication' appears to be derived from a recurring theme in Martin Heidegger's works, the 'darkening of the world.' The [...] decadence of the West had already begun, according to Fardid, with the development of Greek philosophy, in which human beings (vojud) were separated from the unity of consciousness (delagahi) [...]" (ASHRAF, 1996. Conspiracy theories and the Persian Mind. http://www.iranian.com/May96/Opinion/Conspiracy.html, p. 3). Similarly, "il y a chez Corbin [...] une évaluation plutôt négative à l'égard de l'évolution [...] de la pensée occidentale" (SHAYEGAN, 1990: 21). Before the Islamic revolution, Shayegan's views - although infinitely more subtle and less confrontational - were in much of the above views: "If occidental philosophy is a question of existence and being and if philosophy answers 'why' questions, in Islamic mysticism the questioner is God, and humankind only answers" (cf. BOROUJERDI, 1996: 149).

ASHRAF, 1996. Conspiracy theories and the Persian Mind. http://www.iranian.com/May96/Opinion/Conspiracy.html, p. 4. Likewise, during the twentieth celebration of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, February 1999 in Isfahan, Hojjat ol-Eslam Taqavi, a conservative member of parliament, told his audience that there was no need for cultural exchange - a key notion in Khatami's government - as Iran already had [the mystical traditions of] Mollâ Sa'dâr and Mir Dâmand. ABRAHAMIAN (1993: 23) held Âl-e Ahmad - who attained fame by a essay named Gharbzadegi - to have inspired Khomeyni's velâyat-e faqih-doctrine. In Âl-e Ahmad's work, too, the influence of Heidegger has been detected (cf. BOROUJERDI, 1996: 71). AHMADI and AHMADI (1998: 105) spoke of an "escalation of the popularity of Sufi ideas in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution", which were officially transmitted through schoolbooks. They failed to recognize, however, that Sufism does not simply equate 'traditionality' (see chapter 2). What goes in its name in contemporary Iran is very often rather a (modern) construction of it in the face of Western modernity.
had also helped translate Corbin’s *Les Motifs Zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Sohrawardi* (1946), which could be easily read as a celebration of royalist, Iranian glory. Elite cultural nationalism had been transformed, in Fardid’s thought, into revolutionary ideology.

Another student of Corbin’s, the philosopher Reżâ Dâvari, repeatedly referred to Heidegger’s lament of the West in order to argue the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic in the face of its critics, such as ‘Abdolkarim Sorūsh (who preferred Popper). Particularly legendary, Dâvari and other ideologues of the Islamic Republic have often quoted *Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*, one of Heidegger’s last, prophetic communications (published in *Der Spiegel*, May 1976). Bitterly perceptive, *Shayegan* (1997: 115-7) analysed the newest phase in transnational Orientalism thus:

**A twentieth-century German philosopher had to devote some attention to the ‘historical’ stages of Western philosophy, and had to interpret it in terms of Occultation of Being, and had to unveil in his own way the variation of its discourses over time, so that an Iranian, situated as far from that world as it is possible to be, could read it in French translation and believe himself involved in a problem which had nothing to do with him; and, as an ultimate illusion, imagine that the messianic assertions of a German somehow contain the spiritual truth of Islamic renewal [...] our perception is mutilated.**

Possibly unrecognisable to an outsider, Corbin’s representations have now become ‘Shī‘ism from the viewpoint of Shī‘ism itself’, that is, Shī‘ism even from the politicised perception of the Islamic Republic.

The transnational project that set out to reconstruct Shī‘ism to arrive at ‘the origin of any perspective’ reached its destination through a quietist, elite definition of Shī‘ism in the midst of political turmoil, and by then becoming, after the author’s death, a token of respectability for a populist, political Islam. Ironically, Shari‘atī’s contribu-
tions fell out of official favour soon after the revolution.

But the hermeneutical phenomenology of Shi‘ism’s ‘spiritual universe’ would, because of exteriority denied, ‘restore’ Iranian Sufism to what it socially and historically never had been. After all, *En Islam iranien* was more than anything else a beautiful work of art, and an initiation - for believers - into *Islam Corbanien.*

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41 This was a standing joke among some of the French academic community in Tehran. Others have preceded my evaluation, in a similar mixture of respect and epistemological unease. This is what Hodgson (1974, 3: 45), for instance, had to say about some of Corbin’s work: "Henry Corbin has beautifully set forth the devotional meaning of the ‘âalâm al-mithâl in several works, and especially in *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection: de l’Iran mazdéen à l’Iran shî’ite* (Paris, 1960), in which he attempts incidentally to show such continuities as can be surmised between the old Mazdean angelology and that of Islam (flavoured his description with a romantic Iranian nationalism not really borne out by his data). Corbin’s ‘The Visionary Dream in Islamic Society’, in *The Dream and Human Societies*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois (University of California Press, 1960), pp. 381-408, deals with the ‘âalâm al-mithâl [....] Corbin’s magnificent perceptiveness has made us aware of the importance of both Mullâ Sadrâ and Mir Dâmâd [.....] Unfortunately, in pursuit of his romanticism Corbin can be historically inexact. Thus he sometimes translates as if the text contrasted an Oriental ‘theosophy’ to a Peripatetic (and implicitly Western) ‘philosophy’, where the text refers simply to Ishrâqis and Peripatetics, as names of schools, without either geographical or disciplinary specification. This is an instance of his frequent overdetermination in translating technical terms: for instance, he renders ‘âalâm al-mithâl as world of archetypes, rather than something simpler like images, making his texts’ inclusion of mirror images seem absurd.” As concerns ‘romantic Iranian nationalism’, Corbin wrote within a well-established French tradition: “Le Chisme offrit une expression à cette nationalité qui s’obstinait à survivre [...] l’idée persane se réincarna sous une forme religieuse [...] Le Chiisme préserva les Persans” (Aubin, 1908: 458). In pre-revolution Iran itself there were critical voices too. In 1972, the political scientist Hamid ‘Enâyat had “criticized the French Islamist Henry Corbin for [...] divorcing Shi‘ism from its social and political context” (Boroujerdi, 1996: 142).
CHAPTER TWO
TRILATERAL FIGURATIONS
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRANIAN SUFISM

*En Islam iranien* divided ‘the spiritual situation of Iranian Islam’ into four intellectual traditions: scholastic theology (*kalâm*), Sufism (*tasâvvof*), Oriental illumination (*eshrâq*), and metaphysical philosophy (*falsafa*). In Corbin’s experience, the Shi’ite universe incorporated tension: “à l’Université théologique traditionelle de Qomm […] l’emploi des mots *tasavwof* et *soufi* fait passer une ombre sur les visages.” As a solution, he adopted authoritative Iranian distinctions between ‘true’ and ‘false’ Sufis, which restored Shi’ism’s transhistorical unity. Righteous ones were unambiguously involved with gnostic mysticism (*‘erfân*), while tricksters, impostors and clowns were counteracting the *shari‘a*.

The underlying reality was an enduring collision of epistemic orders that constitutes a point of departure for the interpretation of conflict. Confrontations between Shi’ite Sufis and other Muslims have been, more than anything else, about spiritual authority (discourse about which Corbin, too, considered as among Shi’ism’s unifying themes). Contestations of spiritual authority, in the realm of the state, the seminary or within the confines of the lodge, point to political economy. With spiritual authority have come power and wealth, and the enemies of Sufism still reproach the fourteenth century Shâh Ne‘matollâh Valî for both. Moreover, spiritual authority has often been a scarcity in itself, as much as power and wealth, because of its largely exclusive definitions, and because the competing parties have striven after monopoly.

The shadow that Corbin witnessed over the clergy’s faces in Qom undoubtedly derived from a challenge of their - and particularly the Jurists’ - conception of spiritual authority in terms of ‘guardianship’

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2 The circular movement of Corbin’s analysis - defining, searching for and internalising a preconceived Shi’ite spirituality - involved an implicit interpretative choice that made for a category of people to fall ‘out’ that thought itself ‘in’, and, thus, what Foucault called a ‘play of dominations’ (ibid Rabinow, 1991: 85). Foucault used the term in the context of his analysis of ‘emergence’ (Nietzsche, Genealogy, History), to argue that classifications embody (previous) acts of power.
(velāyat). Shi'ite Imamate doctrine holds that the prophecy was followed by an Imamic ‘cycle of guidance’ (dā‘erat ol-valāyat). After the (‘larger’) occultation of the twelfth Imam (in 941), Imamic authority came to be represented by Jurists. From the sixteenth century onward, their powers increased through high positions in the Safavid state and in the eighteenth century, when their state ties were cut, they attained virtual independence. Since then, Khomeyni’s velāyat-e faqīḥ doctrine has identified the Jurists with the Qur’ānic category of ‘those who rule’ (ula‘l-amr), Juristic authority attaining an activist political meaning.

For Shi'ite Sufis, velāyat similarly refers to Imamic authority, but also to their spiritual leaders, to mystical states, or ‘sainthood’. Sufism’s enemies often stress the incompatibility of the two definitions, in reference to harsh criticism of Sufis by the sixth, eighth and other Imams. Nevertheless, Shi'ite Sufis have often considered their historical leaders as representatives of the Imam on earth, or the Supreme (Sufi) Pole (qoṭb ol-aqtāb) and the Hidden Imam to be one and the same person.

An esoterical reading of the Imamate in which Shi'ite Sufis share, considers the ‘cycle of guidance’ in terms of a spiritual ‘intitiation’ (be‘yat) and as ‘friendship with God’ (valāyat). This doctrine holds Imam ‘Ali to be the ‘Friend of God’ (vall-Allāh), who has been chosen by God as his friend and, through this divine friendship, to be the patron of the community of believers. The eleven Imams who came after ‘Ali were considered Friends of God as well, but Sunni as well as Shi'ite Sufis have also used this designation to refer, instead or in addition, to themselves. Some daring, Shi'ite Sufis have considered themselves to be depositories of the Real/Truth (ḥaqīqat) - that is contained in valāyat - and thus to represent, during the occultation, the Imamic authority.5


5 For an authoritative discussion of valāyat, “the most important article of Shi‘i faith” (FARSAKH, 1969: 132) see CORBIN (1971/1972). Several Iranian authors hold that early historical relations between Sufis and Shi‘ites had been intimate (see, for example, NASR (1972) and TABATABA’I (1360/1981, 1982)). The ultimate synthesis between Sufism and Shi‘ism was formulated in the fourteenth century by Sayyed Heydar Ḵāmiri. Then, Shi‘ite Sufis also played a role in the establishment of the Sarbedār dynasty in Sabzavār (MEIER, 1976, (2): 301). In mediaeval Iran and Turkey the Youngmanliness (fotovvat) tradition provided a linkage between Sufism and organised professional groups (RAHMAN, 1966: 151). Sufis were the patron saints of guilds and crafts, and craftsmen engaged in the associational life of Sufi orders. Guilds acted as “a
There are, however, three compelling arguments against turning tension between Shi‘ite Jurists and Sufis into a Weberian dichotomy of religious types that juxtaposes ‘law’ and ‘experience’. The dichotomy derives from Weber’s *Religionssoziologie*, which contrasts exclusively the religiosity of the ‘Ulema’ and that of the ‘dervishes’ and associates Experiential Islam, or ‘dervish religion’, with orgiastic practices and irrationality. ‘The inner-worldly order of dervishes [...] cultivated a planned procedure for achieving salvation, but this [...] was oriented ultimately to the mystical quest for salvation of the Sufis.’ The notion is reinforced in the Typology of Asceticism and Mysticism, which juxtaposes other-worldly dervish mysticism and Occidental asceticism.

First, such a typology would neglect an historical pattern of overlap between Jurists and Sufis. Second, (if only) because of its antinomian traditions, Sufism is not a unitary social object. Authoritative classifications such as Hojvīr’s (and later Sohravardī’s) distinguished between praiseworthy and condemnable ones. Antinomians, who often comprised kind of bulwark against the state authority”, in particular since the eleventh century, when the Abbasid dynasty was on the decline. From the thirteenth century, they constituted centres of recruitment for rebellion against it. Usually, these groups were “heavily tinged with Shi‘i-sectarian ideas, as in the case of the Sufis who bucked the rise of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties” in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Keddie, 1963: 50). Before attaining state power, the Safavids were called ‘Sufi warriors’ (*Ghōzāt-e sūfīya*). For modern relations between Iranian Sufis and Shi‘ites, see below.

For historical critique of Weber’s Sufi types, see Ahmadi and Ahmadi, 1998: 60. For general critique of Weber’s views on Islam and their logical coherence, see Turner, 1974; for critique of their empirical validity, see Rodin, 1974. These strains of analysis indicate that ‘Islam’ is not in itself a suitable social unit of analysis. Even ‘fundamentalism’ is not by inherent mechanisms opposed to Sufism, as is testified by fundamentalist Sufi orders (Peters, 1986: 44-5). For similar reasons, Gilson proposed an historisation of Weber’s ideal types (1973: 10-2). It has possibly been Weber’s dislike of German mysticism - which he saw as a flight from reality into still enchanted private realms (‘Science as a Vocation’, 1977 [1919]: 155) - that influenced his views on Islamic mysticism. It seems furthermore probable that his studies of Islam written at the beginning of the last century, when knowledge of Islam often consisted of essentialist generalisations (cf. Peters, 1986: 43) - were inspired by William James’ a-historical, and similarly social psychological approach to ‘Varieties of Religious Experience’ (1902). There is one reference of personal contact between Weber and James in ‘The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism’ (1977 [1922/3]: 308).


Cf. op. cit., pp. 278, 284, 326. See also the typology of asceticism and mysticism.


Religionssoziologie, 1977 [1922/3]: 325.
sed a “class of illiterate, crude, and sometimes even very nasty saints”,11 were persecuted by Rulers, Jurists and Sufis alike. Variation in such patterns and distinctions, thirdly, had exterior and extra-typological reasons. The shape of relations between Jurists and Sufis, and between Sufis and their antinomians, has not primarily derived from a typologically structured spiritual universe, but from one in which all had to relate to Rulers and state regimes,12 whether dynastic, regional, or local.13

Sufism emerged from the seventh and eighth century quest of individual ascetics, who later assembled in groups and attracted an audience

11 SCHIMMEL, 1975: 20. ‘Respectable’ Ne’matolláhis in seventeenth century Iran clashed with ‘libertine’ (antinomian) Heydari Sufis. Ne’matolláhis and Heydarí were assigned to separate wards in Iranian cities. In Tabriz, the inner-Sufism strife led to annual fights and killings. In Shiraz, these conflicts continued until the middle of the nineteenth century (cf. LAMBTON, 1954: 16; MIRJAFARI, 1979; and PERRY, 1999).

12 When Sufis ran into conflict, their antagonists were most often either Rulers (hokmíyân, salájíh), or Jurists (a rubric I freely employ to designate ‘religious scholars’ (‘olámá) in general, and more specifically ‘those whose field is jurisprudence’ (fuqáháh), and theologians (mustakallíyún). These socio-political categories are reproduced in other Islamic dichotomies such as ‘the turban’ and ‘the crown’ (ARJOMAND, 1988), or dín va dowlat (religion and state). The importance of conflicts with Jurists party derived from the fact that “as a class” they were, from the beginning of and throughout Islamic history, “intimately bound up with the state” (RAHMAN, 1966: 151). MEIER played down the importance of Rulers (“Die anstößige zum vorgehen gegen einzelne kamen aber nur in seltenen fällen vom fürsten selbst. Den anlass bilden meist auseinandersetzungen auf einer niedrigeren ebene, zwischen súfíyya und súfíyya, zwischen theologen oder juristen oder juristen und súfíyya”), but then listed various cases in which state functionaries (admittedly not ‘fürsten’ in the strict sense) were responsible for Sufi repression (1976, (2): 319-20). Jurists often provided Rulers with arguments for fighting Sufis, and as a basis for more specific charges, three legal categories were generally available for framing these arguments: heresy/polytheism (sherk), infidelityblasphemy (kofr), and illegitimate innovation (bedát). From the life-histories of Sufi martyrs, it appears that such doctrine was often subject to political usage. Commentaries indicate that beyond doctrinal concerns, accusations levelled against Hallíj (d.922) were related to groups that fought the Abbasid caliphate. The main charge, zandaqah, has been described as a “catch-all term for heresy deemed dangerous by the state” (ERNST, 1985: 99, cf. MASSIGNON, 1975: 425). Charges against ‘Ayn al-Quzát (d.1131), claims to prophethood and kingship, point to similar motives for persecution.

13 If one would incorporate the above three critiques of Weber into a refined typology of conflict, then actual options amount to 13. As typology generally seeks lowest common denominators, it would depict only forms of conflict, to the neglect of causes. It would generate a three-tiered universe of Sufis, Rulers, and Jurists that divides into Sufi and non-Sufi sub-types and dissolves Sufism into antinomians and non-antinomians. These parties obtain for conflict: 1) Sufi Ruler, 2) non-Sufi Ruler, 3) Sufi Jurist, 4) non-Sufi Jurist, 5) Sufi Ruler-Jurist, and 6) non-Sufi Ruler-Jurist. If the conflicts of antinomians (6) are distinguished from those of non-antinomians (6), and if conflict between Sufis and their antinomians (1) is included, then actual options amount to 13.
of pupils. As their mystic teachings spread over the Islamic world, schools, lodges and orders came into being. However, as early as the ninth century, Sufism was involved in political-military activity.¹⁴

Throughout Islamic history, alongside expanding military frontiers, Sufis have assisted in missionary conversion. From the tenth century, Sufi lodges had come into existence all over the Islamic world, and in the eleventh century, the Seljuqs used Sufi institutions to protect the state against their enemies.¹⁵ Beyond the mere faithful assistance to rulers, Sufi attempts at state foundation have been recorded from the twelfth century.¹⁶ In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Sufi orders emerged rapidly, which coincided with the usage of Sufis by the caliph during the restoration of the Abbasid caliphate. The socio-political importance of Sufism was reflected in the deification of Sufi sheikhs from the thirteenth century, as from then “they, in place of the scholar-jurists, became the most respected leaders of the population,” while engaging in intimate relations with Islamic state regimes.¹⁷ From the fourteenth century, (Sufi) mystics were labeled ‘king’ (shāh).¹⁸ In the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, most importantly, Turkish and Iranian Sufis “backed the rise of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties.”¹⁹ Since the end of the Middle Ages, Iranian Sufism has developed in a separate direction because of the specific character of the Shī‘ite state in Iran.²⁰

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¹⁴ MEIER, 1976, (1): 125; (2): 300. cf. TRIMINGHAM, 1971: 69. Seeking a Weberian explanation for Sufi power, LINDHOLM (1998) pointed to the paradox of an ‘emissary religion’ (active, moral and sober, i.e. non-charismatic) with a less than perfectly manifest revelation. Here, charismatic Sufi movements found their niche. In the end, however, Sufi movements gave way to ‘emissary’ religiosity, because of “the rise of modern ideals, and the heightened repressive power of the central state” (cf. op. cit., p. 209).


¹⁸ BUSSE, 1972: 40.


²⁰ The fact that Iran was never completely colonised also defines Iranian specificity. In many areas of the Islamic world, Western (including Russian) colonialism profoundly influenced Sufism. Orders in North and West Africa, for instance, either resisted or collaborated with Western colonial powers, but they all expanded under colonialism. In nineteenth century Senegal and Niger and twentieth century Libya, the Tijāniya (see ABUN-NASR, 1965) and the Šāniṣṭiya founded states. The Mahdiya state in late nineteenth century Sudan derived from a (former) Sufi master. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, there is a similar history of resistance to (Russian) colonial rule and subsequent expansion, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. The Emirs of Bukhara were dervish kings. In eighteenth and nineteenth century India, Sufism at-
In the sixteenth century, the Iranian Safavid Empire evolved from a tribal Sufi order of Turkish descent. The subsequent repression and the virtual disappearance of Sufism in seventeenth century Iran was caused by an historical inversion: a political and religious coalition of Rulers and Jurists. After the Safavids’ final defeat by the Afghan Afshar tribe in the eighteenth century (1722), many Jurists retreated to Iraqi centres where they would be virtually autonomous. In the nineteenth century, the new Qajar state extended royal patronage to Sufism, partially in an attempt to curb the Jurists’ growing powers. The reunification of the Iranian state and the Qajars’ issuing of royal patronage set the stage for the re-emergence of the Ne‘matolláh order’s mystic regime in Iran.

THE RENAISSANCE OF THE NE‘MATOLLÁH ORDER

Worldly rulers [...] are manifestations of only one of the divine attributes, but the True King is he who rules over all the manifestations of all the Names of the Absolute: the Perfect Man whose sayings are supreme. Worldly rulers must spread his word by the sword.

Sháh Ne‘matolláh Váli

When Shi‘ism became the state religion in 1501, Sufism was ruthlessly suppressed “because it was seen as a potential threat to political and religious authority.”22 The state set out to deplete the alternative, autonomous sources of spiritual authority in the figure of the Sufi sheikh - which had been crucial in the establishment of the Safavids: the first ruler, Sháh Ismá‘íl, reigned as Sufi qošt as well as Imamic descendant.23 The realistic threat posed to the state authority came from an organised Sufism of Safavid descent, and from differently affiliated groups, which had flourished in the wake of the Safavid ascent. Ne‘matolláh leaders, who had become related to the Safavids by blood and

21 Cited in Pourjavadi and Wilson, 1978: 21, cf. Zarrínkúb, 1369/1990, (2): 190. Throughout history, many Sufis had made claims to power, explicitly or implicitly, such as Najm al-Dín Rázi (d.1256), who states in the Míršád al-‘Ibád min al-Mabdar ilá‘l Ma‘ád that the highest good was obtained when the kingship of faith and [...] the world were united in one person” (Lambton, 1956: 138). During his fieldwork in Pahlavi Iran, Gramlich witnessed a Khálsár ceremony in which it was held that: “Der König der Könige ist der Qalandar der Epoche” (1981: 87).
23 See Algar, 1969: 27.
TRILATERAL FIGURATIONS

who were provincial governors, were aspiring for political power. However, a different Sufism flourished in his polity. ‘Erfân, mysticism or philosophically oriented and respected ‘gnostic wisdom’, was largely unrelated to ‘Sufi order Sufism’ (taṣawwuf). Mollâ Şadrâ, the main representative of the theosophical School of Isfahan, strongly lamented libertine and wandering dervishes. The criticism of antinomians within the community of the faithful in the name of ‘erfân (underlying Corbin’s construction) has since, however, also been adopted by many Iranian, Shi‘ite orders. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, when many Ne‘matollâhîs had fled Iran and Sufism had become politically impotent, Shâh ‘Abbâs II (1642-1666), ‘the dervish loving king’, financially supported ‘erfân and brought (remaining Sufi order) Sufism under royal patronage.

The ultimate conflict between Sufis and jurists erupted after Shâh ‘Abbâs II died and jurists initiated a course of confrontation. Even antinomian Sufis had attained power through royal patronage, but now the state reached out to the puritan jurist Mohammad Bâqer Majlesî of Isfahan (d.1700). Assisted by the last Safavid Shâh Solţânîhoseyn (d.1722), Majlesî wiped out much of organised Iranian Sufism, which included the Safavid Sufis who had by then “largely degenerated, it seems, to a corps of palace guards,” and the remainder of the Ne‘matollâhîs. The inquisition’s effect was Sufism’s virtual non-existence in Iran, for nearly a century. From the days of Majlesî, Shi‘ite jurists redefined their positions to match a reinvigorated ambition for power, and jurist authority attained a new doctrinal status through the Oşûli school. Their

28 BALDICK, 1981: 126; ARJOMAND, 1984: 148. An aspect of Ne‘matollâhî history from the Safavid period is the blending, up to the middle of this century, of the Ne‘matollâhîs with the Nizari Ismâ‘îlis. See POURJAVADI and WILSON (1975) for the authoritative account.
state support ended, however, with the collapse of the Safavid polity in 1722. The Safavids’ disintegration also ended the effective imposition of a unitary religious identity on the population, which was beneficial to Sufism. In the second part of the eighteenth century, Ne’matollâhi Sufis came back from their exile in India to carry their mission to Iran.³⁰

Modernity in the anthropology of Islam

There is an implicit consensus in the (historical) anthropology of Islam about the incongruity of Sufism and modernity.³¹ Whether authors have argued Sufism’s anti-modern essence³² or related its diminished appeal in the modern era³³ to the rise of nationalist movements, educational progress, industrialisation, or judicial reform - Sufism has been largely conceived of as a survival: an Islamic left-over³⁴ that lost its function.³⁵

³⁰ See Bayat, 1982: 27.
³¹ The notion of Sufism’s anti-modernity reflects many indigenous perspectives: “in short, the Sufi disagrees with the modernist” (Pouriavady and Wilson, 1978: 4).
³³ Geertz, in an otherwise very subtle comparison of Morocco and Indonesia (1968), constructed a dichotomy of religious development in both countries, the component parts of which were ‘classical’ and ‘scripturalist’ religious styles (op. cit., pp. 19-22). The historical process that linked the two was modernisation (variably described as ‘modernism’, op. cit., p. 20; ‘the industrial revolution’ or ‘Western intrusion and domination’, op. cit., pp. 56-7, etc.). It would be fair then, despite Geertz’s dislike of these concepts, to conclude that the dichotomy mirrored traditional and modern society. The classical style in both (traditional) countries was ‘mystical’ (op. cit., p. 24). Geertz’s typological depiction cannot be reduced to the particularities of two peripheral regions of the Islamic world, as the types were made to stand for the whole: “Sufism, as an historical reality, consists of a series of different and even contradictory experiments, most of them occurring between the ninth and nineteenth centuries” (op. cit., p. 48). He strongly suggested, then, that Sufism is a thing of the past, which had been bound to vanish with modernity. To name only one of many counterexamples, the twentieth century, Libyan Sanûsiya order expanded during the ‘Western intrusion and domination’.
³⁴ Not historical anthropology but reinforcing the Sufi traditionality view, Crapanzano’s moving ethnography of the Moroccan Ħamadsha (1973) related ritual practice in the shantytowns of Meknes to its therapeutic functions. In describing symptoms treated in therapy, he quoted a psychiatry scholar who took them as “expressions of [...] anxiety reaction found in many primitive societies” [italics mine] (op. cit., p. 5). What therapies did, was to explain, in terms of socially bounded symbols, the nature of specific illness. “Such explanations,” Crapanzano related, “are characteristic of many so-
Sufism’s decline is often construed on a par with jurist-led or ‘juristic’ reformism,\textsuperscript{36} eighteenth and nineteenth century Islamic movements that sought to redefine Islam, so that the Islamic world could withstand Western penetration and come up with an indigenous response to the West’s technological superiority.\textsuperscript{37} Many ethnographic treatments of Sufism, in the (historical) anthropology of Islam, have thus intersected the \textit{longue durée} duality of law and experience with a similarly Weberian dichotomy of traditional and modern types of religiosity (figure 1).\textsuperscript{38} The renaissance of the Ne’matollāhī order, however, occurred within

called \textit{primitive therapies}’ [italics mine] (op. cit., p. 6). It was AL-ZEIN’s conclusion from considerations such as these, that “Moroccan society is portrayed [...] as static and [...] within a predetermined universe of meaning” (1977: 243). But Crapanzano “emphasized that the practices [...] of the Hamadscha [...] are not characteristic of ‘Moroccans’ in general,” being ‘a fringe phenomenon’ (op. cit., p. 7). Not Moroccan society as a whole, but the Hamadscha were portrayed as primitive survivals of Islamic things past.

One notable exception in the anthropology of Islam, except for GILSENAN (1973), has been the first monograph on a Sufi order in anthropology. EVANS-PRITCHARD’s historical study of the Libyan San’s \textit{ya} (1949) described the expansion of the order throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and its successful rally for support of tribal populations of Cyrenaica in the liberation struggle against Italian occupation.

GELLNER (1981: 159-60), for instance, conceived of relations between the ‘associationist ideal’ (including mediation, propitiation, ritual and devotional excess) and ‘scripturalist’ (puritanical, unitarian, individualist) Islam as a pendulum that got ‘unhinged’ through reformism (with mystic religiosity as the victim). I distinguish between ‘jurist-led’ and ‘juristic’ because it was often lay Muslims who carried the reform.

In contrasting the previous period with eighteenth century reformism, Hodgson claimed that ‘since Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328), there had been few figures, even among the Hanbalis, to stand out with great intensity against the casting of all religious life into the mould of Sufī tariqāhs. Most reformers had accepted this pattern” (1974, 3: 160). But in the mid-eighteenth century Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb from Arabia (d.1792) endeavoured to regain Ibn Taymiya’s spirit. He promoted the cleansing of Islam of what he saw to be its alien, impure and otherwise undesirable elements, including Shi’ism and Sufism. Sufism, which for him represented a prime example of polytheism, especially stood out as an object of his hatred.

The above descriptions do not apply to a new generation of anthropological Sufi studies (such as EWING, 1990; GROSS, 1990; and MIR-HOSSEINI, 1994), in which questions of modernity and traditionality have made way for contemporary theoretical concerns such as the relations between (collective) representation, power, and history, and in which Sufism is not usually dealt with in long-term, diachronical perspectives.
the modern era,\(^{39}\) while nineteenth century Ne\textsuperscript{2}matoll\={a}h\ Sufis were among the carriers of modernity in Iran.\(^{40}\) Systematic Sufi persecutions, in the seventeenth century, had preceded their ascent. These Sufi persecutions were enabled through co-operation between jurists and rulers, and they were unrelated to reformism in the eighteenth or nineteenth century sense. Eighteenth century ruler-jurist co-operation was less effective in the absence of a central state,\(^{41}\) while the mutual relations between these parties gradually turned sour. The Ne\textsuperscript{2}matoll\={a}h\ order’s modern social development, in other words, eludes the prevalent analytical grid for Sufism as an historical object (as drawn in figure 1).

The reestablishment of the Ne\textsuperscript{2}matoll\={a}h\ regime in Iran developed through two figurations. In the first, the relations of Sufis derived, principally, from weak local rulers’ competition for power in the absence of a central state. Both Sufis and jurists at times achieved autonomous local influence, which coincided with intense mutual hatred.\(^{42}\) The internal dynamism among Sufis, which enabled their ascent, consisted of an enormous growth in their ranks. Their power of popular mobilisation brought local rulers to seek proximity to Sufis, and to persecute them - with the aid of jurists - where they were seen to threaten the state. The relations between Sufis, rulers and jurists thus derived not from jurist modernity or Sufi traditionality but from the absence of centralised rule. Secondly, they derived from an ideologically aggressive and rapidly

\(^{39}\) ARJOMAND stated that as a consequence of Sufism’s repression after the Safavid ascendency, “it has continued […] primarily in its highly cultivated form among the elite” (1984: 109, 244). The popular Ne\textsuperscript{2}matoll\={a}h\ revival, however, offers counter-evidence to this widely-held conception.

\(^{40}\) It will not be useful for the present discussion to problematise ‘modernity’. I use it in a loose sense, so that a variety of definitions can apply. It designates ‘rationalisation’ - the maximisation of efficiency between means and ends - in the economic, social and political spheres, and especially the willingness to explore new media to achieve these ends. For an exemplary analysis of contemporary, resilient Sufism (in Lebanon), see NIZAR HAMZEH and HRAIR DEKMEJIAN, 1996: 227. Nothing like a ban of Sufi orders, as in Turkey in 1925, ever occurred in modern Iran.

\(^{41}\) “In the short interregnum of the Afghan, Afsh\={a}r and Zand dynasties […] religious supervision of the jurists […] did not, because of […] the weakness of and the vacuum left by the state apparatus, have the same power and hegemony as during the late Safavid era […] Among the Zahabiya and Ne\textsuperscript{2}matoll\={a}h\is a new movement came into existence” (ZARRINK\={U}B, 1369/1990, (2): 309).

\(^{42}\) State formation starts with “a figuration made up of numerous relatively small social units […] in free competition with one another” (E\textsc{lias}, in GOUDSBLOM and MENNELL, 1988: 131).
expanding Sufism, and diminishing jurist chances for spiritual authority while their claims to it had greatly increased in the eighteenth century.⁴³

The reunified Iranian state was in the centre of the second, nineteenth century figuration, in which rulers often perceived jurists as threatening. Several rulers granted Sufism state patronage - which defined the feudalist nature of the Qajar political system⁴⁴ and facilitated the social renaissance of Iranian Sufism. From their newly found court positions, Sufis often continued to challenge jurist spiritual authority.

1.

The Neşmatollāh order had royal relations through Shāh Neşmatollāh, and through intermarriage with the Safavids. In spite of an uncharacteristic conflict in Transoxiana, the shāh-e velāyar had “enjoyed the favour of kings, and this partiality was continued by his descendants.”⁴⁵ Shāh Neşmatollāh had been invited to send his son to India by the local king Ahmad Shāh Bahman,⁴⁶ in whom the order found patronage after Kha-

⁴³The Akhbar revolt had been overcome by the Oṣūlis, who defined an actively representative role for the jurists in the absence of the twelfth Imam. It may be generalised that relations between (Shī‘ī) Sufis and Jurists had generally been good where there was a common dynastic, Sunni enemy (this situation often obtained prior to the sixteenth century establishment of the Safavid state), and that they had generally been bad where (Shī‘ī) rulers extended patronage to either jurists (as in the late Safavid era) or Sufis (as in the larger part of the Qajar era).


⁴⁵Trimingham, 1971: 101. Nūreddin b. ʿAbdollāh Valī (Shāh Neşmatollāh Valī Kermānī) was born in Aleppo in about 1331, of a mother who was born from a royal lineage in Fars province (Nurbakhsh, 1991: 145). At the age of about twenty-four he became a pupil of the Sufi master ʿAbdullāh Yāfī. After Yāfī’s death Shāh Neşmatollāh set out to travel. In Transoxiana he founded lodges, but was forced to leave because of the wrath of Timur Leng (a Naqshbandi affiliate) whom he met once (Nurbakhsh, 1980: 45). He ended up in Kerman at the request of local pupils, and founded a Sufi community (with a lodge, mosque, garden and lessons in various Islamic disciplines) in which ‘olamāʾ and foqahāʾ participated. He spent his last years in Mahan (where a lodge and a mosque were also built), and had by then gathered many thousands of disciples. He died in 1431 (Zarrānkūb, 1369/1990, (2): 189-95), after which “his body was carried by government officials” (Nurbakhsh, 1991: 146). According to present-day affiliates, he had originally been a Sunni and later converted to Shi‘ism (Mahbūbālīshāhī, 1373/1994-5: 43), but Algar stated (“Nīomat-Allāhiyya”, Encyclopaedia of Islam) that “there can be little doubt [he] remained a Sunni throughout his life.” For other authoritative studies of the history of the origins of the Neşmatollāh order, see Aubin (1956; 1970; 1984; 1988).

⁴⁶Nurbakhsh, 1990: 146.
lilollah I migrated to the Deccan in the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{47} Subsequently, there were Sufi migrations between the Indian and Iranian Ne‘matollahi centres. This situation lasted until the seventeenth century, when Sufism largely disappeared from Iran under Shâh Suleymân.\textsuperscript{48}

In the mid-eighteenth century, the order’s Axis was Sayyed Rezâ‘alishâh Dakkani (d.1799/1800). It was his initiative to ‘revive’ the order in Iran - after Iranian Ne‘matollahi had asked him for a spiritual guide and he himself had experienced a vision in which the eighth imam ‘Ali al-Ri‘â had told him to send one.\textsuperscript{49} He delegated his most entrusted Sufis, first Shâh Taher and later Ma‘shûm‘alishâh, “the king of all Sufi soldiers.”\textsuperscript{50} Travelling for some five years, through the Gulf of Oman, and from the Persian Gulf coast to Shiraz, Ma‘shûm‘alishâh encountered widespread hatred of Sufism. In a hostile origin myth that represents Sufism as a subversive stronghold of alien power from the outset, the event has been described - with obvious insinuations for a nationalistic audience - as “the coming to Iran [...] of a number of famous Sufis by means of a ship of the British East India Company.”\textsuperscript{51}

According to various Sufi accounts, notables and jurists in the Shirazi court of the local Zand dynasty (1750-1779) shared in the anti-Sufi sentiment. They convinced the ruler, Karîm Khân Zand (d.1779), that Ma‘shûm‘alishâh was ‘a fire-worshipper’, that is, a Zoroastrian heretic, who made claims to divinity and kingship\textsuperscript{52} and would be a threat to the state. Furthermore, in an account by Sir John Malcolm it is mentioned that the Sufis had managed (despite hostility) to attract about thirty thousand followers in Shiraz, which approximated the size of a local

\textsuperscript{47} Khalilollah I had migrated to Bidar because the large number of Iranian Ne‘matollahis and a patronage-like relation to Ahmad Shâh Bahman (who had also been on good terms with his father) had convinced the son and successor of Timur Leng, Shâh Rohk, that he was seeking (worldly) power (ZARRINKUB, 1369/1990, (2): 199).

\textsuperscript{48} POURJAVADY and WILSON, 1978: 27. Only some ~ahab’ and N´rbakhsh’ groups had remained.

\textsuperscript{49} POURJAVADI and WILSON, 1975: 118.

\textsuperscript{50} My paraphrase of ‘Ma‘shûm‘alishâh ast, shâh-e darvish, soltân-e hame sepâh-e darvish” (in ‘Ma‘shûm‘alishâh’, 1318Q/1900, (3): 170), cf. ROYCE, 1979: 86.

\textsuperscript{51} CHAHARDAHI, 1360/1981-2: 3. 4. The story is not corroborated in ZARRINKUB (1369/1990), POURJAVADY and WILSON (1978: 94), ROYCE (1979: 84-7) or GRAMLICH (1965: 30-1). Chahârdâhi did not mention ‘Ma‘shûm‘alishâh’, but as no other famous Sufis are known to have come from India in this period, ‘Ma‘shûm‘alishâh’ was most likely referred to. He misdated the event during Fatih‘alishâh’s rule (1797-1834) while ‘Ma‘shûm‘alishâh’ arrived in Iran in about 1776/7 (ROYCE, 1979: 90).

\textsuperscript{52} Cf. ‘Ma‘shûm‘alishâh’, 1318Q/1900, (3): 171.
Zand army. Beyond religious objections, the threat to the state posed by Maṣūm’alishāḥ seems therefore to have derived from the material reality of a numerically massive presence. A few years after his arrival, Maṣūm’alishāḥ was chased from Shiraz, and he and his followers fled to Isfahan, molested all along the way by supporters of the ruler.

The ruler of Isfahan, ʿAli Morād Khān Zand, was a relative of Karīm Khān Zand, but not on favourable terms with the latter. It was apparently for this reason that he initially patronised the Sufis, one of whom “in return, gave his Sufi blessing to the governor’s military campaigns, making special banners for his army.” When convinced of their private political aspirations, however, he turned against them. Maṣūm’alishāḥ’s lodge was wrecked and he and his followers were expelled from Isfahan. They were followed by the ruler’s servants, who cut off the ears of Maṣūm’alishāḥ and ʿNūr’alishāḥ, his favourite disciple and successor, and delivered them at the kingdom’s border, near Tehran. Tehran’s sovereign, Āqā Moḥammad Khān Qājār, had become the Zands’ main rival after having spent his childhood in their captivity. Like the ruler of Isfahan previously, he took the Sufis in his care. After recuperation in Tehran, they made a pilgrimage to Mashhad at his expense.

They eventually parted ways and Maṣūm’alishāḥ roamed for years. After setting out from Karbala for Mashhad on a second pilgrimage, he was arrested in Kermanshah at the orders of ʿAlī Moḥammad ʿAlī Behbūn, a jurist consumed by hatred for Sufism, who went by the name

53 Pourjavady and Wilson (1978: 109) and Gramlich (1965: 31) doubted Malcolm’s figure, but even if it were reduced to one third, then the Sufis would still have constituted a force to be reckoned with by the local dynasty. My claim of comparable numbers derives from a description by Ṣaʿd ibn Abd al-Muhsin ʿAlī (1318Q/1900, 3): 174 of ʿAli Morād Khān’s army of 40,000 men.


55 Lewisohn, 1998: 243; Pourjavady and Wilson, 1971: 114. Lewisohn (1998: 243) related that a pupil of ʿMaṣūm’alishāḥ, Ṭaḥā Ḥoseyn ʿAlī, always accompanied military campaigns of the Afghan ruler Timūr Shāh (to bless the troops), with whom he and other Sufis had found patronage.

56 Personal spite may also have motivated his hatred. When he was once chased away from Isfahan, Jalālī Sufis loudly celebrated the event (ʿMaṣūm’alishāḥ, 1318Q/1900, 3): 176).


of ‘Sufi killer’ (ṣūfī-kosh). The exceptional influence of Behbehānī was such that he “accomplished the complete power and victory of the jurists in matters related to the holy law, vis-à-vis actual and virtual rulers, in the struggle with the Sufis.” In the power vacuum that prevailed through the absence of a centralised state, Behbehānī had emerged virtually autonomous: as a ruler-jurist. Moreover, the jurists had been “newly invigorated by the triumph of the Uṣūlī doctrine, which assigned them supreme authority in all religious affairs”. In doctrinal terms, this immediately preceded the present-day concentration of authority in the figure of a single jurist. But the Neʿmatollāhī order, in the eighteenth century, “refused to validate the [jurists’] function, and often claimed that the Sufis were the true Shia.” In 1797/8, Maʿṣūmʾalishāh was charged with heresy and at the orders of Behbehānī he was put in a sack half filled with stones and drowned in the Qarasū river. Maʿṣūmʾalishāh had by then transferred the leadership of the order to Nūrʾalishāh, which was probably only later interpreted as a formal appointment.

After parting from Maʿṣūmʾalishāh, Nūrʾalishāh had travelled the land with Moshtaqʾalishāh, a Sufi musician. In 1785 they arrived in Mahan, where Shāh Neʿmatollāh was buried. The following they attracted was so large that not enough food could be found to feed it. For this reason they went to Kerman, from where they organised Thursday night pilgrimages to Shāh Neʿmatollāh’s shrine. Thousands participated, and Neʿmatollāh Sufi power led to a situation where “the application of the shariʿat seemed in danger.” After having converted members of the Kermāni ruling elite, “the more or less dominant role [in Kermāni political life came to be] played by Sufi masters […] whose worldly aspir-

59 BAYAT, 1981: 40. Maʿṣūmʾalishāh had been expelled from Karbala to Baghdad because of the enmity of jurists in the Shiʿite holy sites. From Baghdad, where he found the protection of the ruler Ahmad Pāshā, he travelled to Kermānshah (ZARRINKŪB, 1369/1990, (2): 321).
60 ZARRINKŪB, 1369/1990, (2): 316. A similar situation occurred in Isfahan, but ZARRINKŪB (1369/1990, (2): 317) judged Kermānshah to have been exceptional with respect to the jurists’ power.
61 ZARRINKŪB, 1369/1990, (2): 317
At the same time, remnants of the Zand dynasty tried to conquer Kerman from the hands of the emerging Qajar dynasty (1779-1925), whose first ruler had acted as a caring royal patron of the Ne'matollahis.

The Sufis’ power, it may be hypothesised, was an important motive for the Qajars to seek proximity to them, and for the hatred of the Zands. When in Kerman in 1792, the Qajar ally Moshtaq alishah entered a mosque to pray. The prayer leader, who was on the side of the Zands, called upon the crowd to stone him. He was declared an heretic and subsequently stoned outside the mosque. Moshtaq alishah’s persecution and death forced Nur alishah to flee. He went to Shiraz first and later, in Karbala, ran into conflict with jurists who declared him an infidel and sought for his execution. When Aqâ Mohammadm conquered Kerman in 1794, he inflicted a cruel massacre upon the population and only spared the remaining Sufis (and Nizârî Ismâ’îlis, who were related to them).

After the (fragile) reunification of Iran in the late 1790s, the second Qajar king Fatâl shah (1797-1834) dealt with the Sufis differently than Aqâ Mohammadm. He asked for Nûr alishah to be expelled, and “because of [the Sufis’] aim of founding a worldly reign [...] Fatâl alishah [...] aided the jurists [...] in their persecution.” Two of Nûr alishah’s devotees were delivered to Behbehâni, and Fatâl alishah acted against a concentration of Ne’matollahis, similar to the one in Kerman, in Gilan.

Although there is a panegyric, in a work in the name of Nûr alishah, that had probably been composed as a “political ploy to gain favour and support from the Qajar state”, Nûr alishah had also felt that “the Sufis exerted influence and status went beyond doctrinal considerations.”

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69 ZARRÎNKûB thus mentions “this reaching back to a former Sufism, like the return to centralised government, was not accomplished without many difficulties, especially sharp conflicts with jurists” [my italics] (1369/1990, (2): 310-11).
70 BAYAT (1982: 61) mentioned 1791, but I accept ROYCE’s dating (1979: 161) because it is more precise (‘ramażân 1792’).
71 Revenge for Kerman’s disobedience consisted of the blinding 20,000 inhabitants and the building of a pyramid of eyeballs in the public square (POURJAVADI and WILSON, 1975: 124).
72 Since the eclipse of the Safavids, only the ruler of the Afghan Afshar tribe, Nâder Shâh, had been able to temporarily reunify Iran politically in 1736 (ALGAR, 1969: 30).
73 ZARRÎNKûB, 1369/1990, (2): 324. “Most of the jurists [...] looked upon Sufism with a critical mind [...] and they reckoned its condemnation to be a religious necessity” (op. cit., p. 315).
74 ALGAR, 1969: 63, 64.
75 LEWISOHN, 1998: 443, in reference to Nûr alishah’s Paradise of the Lovers’ Union (Jannât ol-veşâl). The part referred to (the seventh) was written by to
master was the true deputy (nārīb) of the Hidden Imām.” A citation from Nūr’ālishāh after the Isfahan debacle amply illustrates the worldly ambitions that the king was up against:

The power of the Qub [Axis] is obviously greater than that of any ruler [...] Salvation in this world and the next depends on obedience to the Qub of the time, ‘who, in our era, is Sayyid Maššūm ‘Ali Shāh’. If a ruler attacks the Qub, he must come to ruin, not only because the cosmic balance has been threatened, but because the dervishes [...] will his ruin. Nūr’ālishāh, who had granted permission to spread the Ne’matollahi teachings to an exceptionally large number of disciples - which is likely to have doubled to about 60,000 - was probably poisoned in 1798 by Behbehānī (the killer of Maššūm’ālishāh). In Ne’matollahi hagiography, Nūr’ālishāh has the reputation of being the order’s ‘reviver’ (mohyi) in Iran. Despite their persecution and eventually martyrdom, Maššūm’ālishāh and Nūr’ālishāh had managed to convert large numbers of people to their variety of Sufism. In spite of the king’s resistance, and the jurists who “opposed the Sufis from the beginning of the Qajar dynasty”, therefore, (Ne’matollahi) Sufism revived under Fatū’ālishāh.

MIR-HOSSEINI (1994, (1)) has analysed Ahl-e îaqq legends in reflection of neglected or taken-for-granted ‘outer history’. ‘There is much to be inferred from these narratives about the dynamics [of their] communities’, she held, the narratives appearing in “forms common to those of Sufi orders.” Exteriority is similarly contained in the contrast between Rezā’ālishāh’s innocuous vision and the power ideology of Nūr-ālishāh. It also brings to the fore that the idea of a single powerful leader (qotb) had developed, while this idea had probably been absent

Nūr’ālishāh, whose teacher was Rownaq’ālishāh, a pupil of Nūr’ālishāh (Gramlich, 1965: 35. cf. De Miras, 1973: 23).

ALGAR (“Ne’mat-Allahiyya”, Encyclopaedia of Islam).

POURJAVADY and WILSON, 1978: 117, citing Nūr’ālishāh’s Book of Guidance (Hedāyat-nāme). The immediate reference was to the fate of the Zand kings of Shiraz and Isfahan.


NĀSIR, 1972: 119; ZARRĪNKŪB, 1369/1990, (2): 317. ZARRĪNKŪB stated that the ruler and jurists co-operated under Fatū’ālishāh in allegations of heresy (takfīr) towards the Sufis (op. cit., 324).


From the little that is known (POURJAVADY and WILSON, 1978: 93-5), it appears Rezā’ālishāh had foreseen the suffering and death of Maššūm’ālishāh, but not his socio-political power.
when the Sufis travelled to Persia. Various descriptions of Qajar Persia, moreover, bear witness of Sufism’s tremendous social power. Before nowrūz, dervishes from all over the country flocked into the cities, presented themselves at the houses of the wealthy, and expected to be taken in and to be taken care of financially. Few dared ignore them.

More precisely, these contrasts reflect figurational changes in the trilateral relations of Sufis, jurists and rulers that occurred along the paths that the Sufis travelled. Their persecution and patronage in Shiraz, Isfahan and Tehran (as well as in many other places) marked Sufism’s re-emergence as a socio-political force in Iran. It proved to be both an attraction, to local rulers who competed for state power, and a danger. Where rulers deemed Sufis dangerous, jurists, whose ambitions for power had greatly increased, enabled their persecution. The height of the jurists’ persecutions in Kermanshah, and of Sufi power in Kerman, reflected the absence of a central state, and even of strong, independent rulers in these localities. The context for renewed ruler-jurist co-operation in anti-Sufi purges, finally, was Fath‘alishāh’s territorial re-unification, which had no use for a politically assertive Sufism.

2.

After the Qajars had established national state power and Fath‘alishāh had done away with the Ne‘matollāhī Sufis that Āqā Mohammad had protected during the Qajars’ ascent, “Sufism as a popular force [...] ceased to be a serious threat to [the rulers’] authority.” But even Fath‘alishāh had not been able to prevent Ne‘matollāhī Sufis from ‘infiltrating’ into the royal court. The first Crown Prince and governor of Gilan had become a disciple of Majzū‘alishāh (d.1823), and his son was initiated in the Ne‘matollāhī order as well. The second Crown

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86 Pourjavady and Wilson, 1975: 125. Modernisation in Iran was carried out by enlightened individuals who were court officials, and it was intimately connected with ‘Abbās Mirzā. Measures to improve the efficiency of administration, the army, taxation, education and transport, modelled on the systems of Western European nations, were largely his initiative (see Hairi, 1977: 11). Crown Prince Mohammad Rezā Mirzā was also in touch with the next Axis ‘Mas‘alishāh (Pourjavadi and Wilson, 1975: 126). After patronage had degenerated, people spending “the money gained from the donations of the prince on pleasure”, the vizier to the prince was removed and a com-
Prince and Governor of Tabriz, ʿAbdās Mirzā, had similar sympathies for Sufism, and he allowed his retainers to join the Neʿmatollāhī order. These developments indicated the emergence of a second trilateral figuration. The potency of Sufi imagery - extroverted and aggressive - had been a reflection of the open field, the absence of terms of engagement, in the relations of Sufis, rulers and jurists. Through territorial reintegration and rulers who conceived of jurists as obstacles to their reign, Sufis now attained positions in court society. Mass adherence had turned Sufism into a popular religiosity, but court society made it salon-fāhīg. New Sufi religiosity was reflected in a moderated imagery, and in the fact that each of the order’s qotbs would now also be a mollah.

Under Fatḥalīshāh’s grandson Ṣomāḥmad Shāh (1834-1848), Neʿmatollāḥī Sufis were still found in the court, “recruiting members from among prominent government officials and royalty.” Ṣomāḥmad Shāh had been initiated into the Neʿmatollāḥī order in his youth, and remained anti-clerical ever since. “Sufis were given posts at court and entrusted with government missions: Mirzā Mihd Khūṭ, a murshid (spiritual guide) of the Neʿmatollāḥī order, was chief scribe to the Shah”, and the last leader of the semi-unified Neʿmatollāḥī order, before present-day divisions - (Rahmatʿalīshāh) (d.1861) - was appointed vice-

pany of Sufis and vagabonds, as well as the qotb (Alqūṣ) Maḏżʿalīshāh, were punished by the Shah, in 1821 (Busse/Fārs-nāme-ye Nāserī, 1972: 161-63).

Moreover, the Neʿmatollāhī pole (Kowṣarʿalīshāh) had taken refuge with Ṣabtās Mirzā “from the persecutions of the ulama” (Algar, 1969: 105).

In his sociology of game-types, Elias (1970: 75-109) outlined a simple model in which two parties compete for a scarce good in the absence of norms for engagement. More complex models concerned relations between unequal players, more than two (groups of) players, and players at different levels. None of the present cases sufficiently resembles the models for technical analysis, but enough to illustrate main mechanisms. In the first, simple figuration, there was unregulated competition for spiritual authority, with explicit Sufi power claims. State centralisation in the second, complex figuration (Elias’ model 3a), made for a moderated Sufism in the royal court.

Pourjavady and Wilson (1978: 139, 142). Early leaders in the Iranian Neʿmatollāḥī renaissance such as Nūrʿalīshāh had also received official Islamic religious training (Royce, 1979: 111). Pourjavady and Wilson (1978: 137) resisted the label ‘aristocratic’ for the Neʿmatollāḥī order - which they felt was an untenable political designation - unless it referred to individual Sufis being ‘noble’ (sharif). In my analysis, this mental characteristic derived from aristocracy in the political sense.


Pourjavady and Wilson, 1975: 125. (Masʿūmʿalīshāh) (1318Q/1900, (3): 469) referred to him - apparently with a Neʿmatollāḥī religious hierarchy in mind with Sufis on top - as the ‘Axis of the rulers’ (qotb os-salāṭin) (and as ‘dervish king’).

premier (نايب قصیر) of Fars. Upon Mohammad Sháh’s coronation, Rahmat’alisháh’s master Zeyn ol ‘Ábedín Shervání Mast’alisháh (d.1837/8) had “arranged a majlis [religious gathering] in the throne room, as if to put a Sufi seal on the new reign” [my emphasis].

93 ALGAR, 1969: 107, cf. CHAHÁRDAH’s alternative version (1352/1973, (3): 527). 94 POURJAVADI and WILSON, 1975: 126, 158. Ne’matolláh’s spiritual genealogy (GRAMLICH, 1965: 27-69; NURBAKHSH (1980); POURJAVADY and WILSON (1978); HOMÁYÔN (1992) reckons eight Imams to have been succeeded by a series of Sufi masters who culminated in Sháh Ne’matolláh. The eighth Imam appointed: Ma’rúf al-Karkhí (d.815/6), who was succeeded by Sarí al-Saqaí (d.867); Abu’l-Qásim al-Junayd (d.910); Abú ‘Ali al-Rúzabári (d.934); Abú ‘Ali b. al-Káthíb (d.951/2); Abú ʿUsmán al-Maghríbí (d.984); Abu’l-Qásim al-Jurjání (d.1076/7); Abú Bakr al-Nassáj (d.1094); Ahmad al-Ghazzáli (d.1126); Abu’l-Fázil al-Baghdádi (d.1155); Abu’l-Barakát (d.1174); Abu’l-Sa’úd al-Andalusí (d.1183); Abú Madyan Shu‘eyb al-Maghribí (d.1197); Abu’l-Fútúh al-Sháhí (d.1204); Abu’l-Barakáát (d.1204); Abú’l-Sa’úd >Abdulláh al-Yádí (d.1204); Najm al-Dín Kamúl al-Kárí (d.1204); Re’sáliuliú al-Barbarí (d.1204); Abu’l-Sa’úd >Abdulláh al-Yádí (d.1204); Shamséd d.1799); Ma’şúm al-Sháhí (d.1797/8); Mollá Loífolláh (d.?) (main affiliation). The successors of Sháh Ne’matolláh: Borháneddín Khalílolláh I (d.?) (main affiliation); Habibbeddín Mohábbolláh I (d.?) (main affiliation); Kamáleddín ‘Atiyatolláh I (d.?) (main affiliation); Habibbeddín Mohábbolláh II (d.?) (main affiliation); Khámeliddín ‘Atiyatolláh II (d.?) (main affiliation); Shamseddín Mohammad I (d.?) (main affiliation); Shamseddín Dákan (d.?) (main affiliation). After ‘Núr’alisháh the order split in two branches, while the main branch further split in three branches after ‘Majzúb’alisháh’:

Mollá Loífolláh (d.?)

袆íakhínd Mollá Hoseynqolí Hamadání (d.1894)

Mohámmad Bahárí Najaíí (d.1907)

‘Abdulláh ‘Abdol’Eyn (d.?)

Sayyed Mohammad Kážem ‘Assár (d.?)

Sayyed Hoseyn Astaráhádí (d.?) (Shamsíyya affiliation)

Sayyed Hoseyn Astaráhádí (d.?) (Shamsíyya affiliation)

‘Abdol’Eynat Balághi ‘Hojjat’alisháh (d.?) (main affiliation)

‘Mast’alisháh’ (d.1837/8) (main affiliation)

‘Hoseyn’alisháh’ Esfahání (d.1818) (main affiliation)

‘Magíl’alisháh’ (d.1823/4)

Hojjat’alisháh’ (d.1907)

‘Abdulláh >Abdul’Eyn (d.?)

Sayyed Hoseyn Astaráhádí (d.?) (Shamsíyya affiliation)

Sayyed Hoseyn Astaráhádí (d.?) (Shamsíyya affiliation)
if inspired, after many centuries, by Sháh Ne'mátolláh’s claim - that true royalty belonged to Sufism. But while Sháh Ne'mátolláh had sought the jurists’ respect and co-operation, Mast' alisháh was in a (court) position that allowed for him to confront them harshly: “The fogahá are the trusted ones of the Prophet, if they do not intervene in worldly affairs. The Prophet was asked, ‘And if they do?’ He replied, ‘They follow the king, and if they do that, then protect your faith from them.’”

Hostile, anti-Sufi tracts were written by many of the 'olamá in response to the Ne'mátolláhí challenges of their spiritual authority, and the Iranian state that tolerated these with apparent consent. In this way, “the precarious balance between the monarchy and the ulama preserved by Fáth 'Alí Sháh was virtually destroyed.”

Sufism’s royal patronage had figured, as in the previous century but now with a new, vigorous effectiveness, in a process “of strengthening the state [which] was [generally] one tending to restrict the prerogatives of the ulama.”

It had taken the Ne'mátolláhí order nearly one century to ‘conquer’ Iran - from the Bahmaní rulers’ patronage, through the legendary vision of Rezá' alisháh, and stormy relations to local rulers and jurists. Ne'ma-

95 ALGAR’s (1969: 37) citation from Mast' alisháh’s Bústún al-siýáha.
96 ALGAR, 1969: 38, 105. Mast' alisháh obtained a royal salary and the possession of a village (GRAMLICH, 1965: 52). “Devotion to Sufi adepts, especially Ni'matullahis, was not rare among the Qajar ruling elite of the early nineteenth century. Contrary to official state support for the ‘ulama, and in spite of recurring Sufi persecutions, der-}

ishes were occasionally admitted to service in provincial courts. Sufi scholars such as Mulla Riza Hamadani, Kawthar 'Ali Sháh, were prominent in Tabrîz” (AMANAT, 1997: 456). Mohammad Sháh’s sympathies for Sufism were related to two of his Sufi-minded advisors in the royal court, Mollá Nasrolláh Sadr ol-Manáleq and Haji Mírzá Āqási, who himself aspired for the Ne'mátolláhí leadership (cf. AMANAT, 1988: 109; 1997: 29-30, 60-1; POURJAVADI and WILSON, 1975: 128). Between 1836 and 1848, Haji Mírzá Āqási virtually controlled state affairs in Iran, and he used his control to intimidate and suppress the ‘olamá (cf. ALGAR, 1969: 106, 119).
97 ALGAR, 1969: 120.
tollāḩīs had found new royal patronage in a unified state under Moḥammad Shāh Qājār, whose initiation made him a Sufi-king as much as the Safavid Shāh Ismāʿīl. No Neʿmatollāḩī Sufi is known to have ever run into conflict with Islamic reform movements during the Iranian ascent, except for one pupil of Ḩoseynī alishāhī (d.1818). He was slaughtered in 1802, by Wahhabis, one year after their destruction of the tomb of Imam Ḥoseyn in Karbala. But the order’s expansion would continue, and its spread over Iran coincided with numerous splits.

Mohammad Shāh had bestowed the honorific title Peacock of Gnostics (fāvīs ol-ʿoraftū) upon the first Soljānī alishāhī-Neʿmatollāḩī axis, Ṣaʿīdaft alishāhī (d.1876). As Raḥmatʿalishāh’s succession led to an unparalleled disunity, he was fiercely attacked by Neʿmatollāḩīs who contested his claims to leadership. Among these were the followers of Ṣafīʾalishāhī (d.1899), who had managed to surround himself with members from the Tehran elite. Ẓahir od-Dowlé (1864-1924) was Nāṣer od-Dīn Shāh’s Minister of Public Ceremonies (vāzīr-e tashrīfāt) and his son-in-law. In 1885, possibly sent by the king, he joined the Ṣafīʾalishāhī lodge. He soon achieved prominence in the order and became Ṣafīʾalishāhī’s successor. Throughout his life as a noble Sufi he combined various gubernatorial appointments with activities in the order.

While there was a further “reduction in the power of the [official] religious classes”, Ṣafīʾalishāhī prominence and wealth were testified by the order’s founding of trading houses in India and China during the reign of Moḥammad Shāh and Nāṣer od-Dīn Shāh (1848-1896). According to a recent estimate, about “one-fifth of the [...] population of Qajar

98 The victim was a famous scholar, ʿAbdolṣamad Hamadānī (Gramlich, 1965: 40), and the master of Ḥājjī Mirzā Āqā, who was particularly powerful in Iran in 1836-1848 (see above).
99 In 1851, Lady Sheil considered the Neʿmatollāḩīs “the fraternity most prevalent in Persia” (1856: 194). The connection between splits and expansion is confirmed by Gramlich, who stated that “Wachstum, Zersplitterung und straffere Zusammenfas sung der Splintergruppen gingen im [...] 19. und 20. Jahrhundert mit der Ausbreitung des Ordens in Persien Hand in Hand” (1965: 27).
100 The Ẓoʿr-Reyāsateyn Neʿmatollāḩī order had similarly derived its name from a royal, Qajar designation (of Ḥājjī ʿAllī Āqā Ṣafīʾalishāhī at first, and later his son Ḥājj Mirzā ʿAbdolhoseyn ʿMūnesʾalishāhī, the master of Dr Nurbakhsh, cf. Chahardāhī, 1352/1973, 3: 528, 531).
101 Ṣafīʾalishāhī was a “confidant of Nasr al-Dīn Shāh’ himself (Frye, 1956: 10).
Persia were ‘either dervishes or followers of some dervish group’.\(^\text{103}\)
But as separate Ne’matollahi branches emerged - that would develop into separate orders, mutually independent in the social realm - the union of royalty and Sufism began to dissolve. Soltan‘alishahi sources have Sa‘da‘at‘alishah wishing for and predicting the death of the Shah, whom he reportedly considered ‘despotic’. One of these sources regards the king’s killer to have executed Sa‘da‘at‘alishah’s command.\(^\text{104}\) Possibly, this new attitude reflected the immanence of the Constitutional Revolution, which would shatter the increasingly resented Qajar polity.

Many of Zahir od-Dowle’s adherents consider him to have been, despite his royal relations, the ruler’s enemy, and a seeker of freedom on the side of revolutionaries who sought despotism’s political reform. In his capacity as governor of Hamadan he played a crucial role in 1906 in the establishment of Iran’s first regional parliament, in Hamadan.\(^\text{105}\) The transformation he brought about in the Saf‘alishahi order is moreover considered to have made it ‘a secret organisation that was a meeting place for democracy-minded Sufis’.\(^\text{106}\) But Zahir od-Dowle had obtained the permission for this organisation within the order by the king, his brother-in-law Mozaffar ed-Din Shâh (1896-1907),\(^\text{107}\) and contrary to the jurists, neither Zahir od-Dowle nor the Sufis collectively\(^\text{108}\) acted in a significant way during the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911).

\(^{103}\) LEWISOHN (1999: 48), citing Ja‘far Shahr’s Tebrâ‘n-e qadiîm (Tehran, 1371/1992 (ii): 287). Unfortunately, more reliable sources seem to be unavailable for this estimate.

\(^{104}\) SOLTânHOSEYN, 1350/1961: 115-6. CHAHîRDAHî (1361/1982-3: 163) moreover claims that Jamâ‘îddîn al-Afghânî, who had inspired Nâ‘er od-Dîn Shâh’s killer, was a pupil of ‘Saf‘alishah’ (without, however, presenting evidence, and despite the fact that Jamâ‘îddîn al-Afghânî is well-known for his reproaches against Sufism).

\(^{105}\) Cf. FRÄGNER, 1979: 121-80, and HAIRI, 1977: 130. Zahir od-Dowle’s importance in Hamadan and other places for Iranian democracy was also proudly hailed by the present sheikh in Zahir od-Dowle’s lodge in Tehran (conversation, 07/17/97).

\(^{106}\) It has even been claimed that Iranian Sufi orders in general were among the platforms on which ideas of political reform were discussed (see YAPP, 1978: 7).

\(^{107}\) CHAHîRDAHî, 1360/1981-2: 44; ALGAR (“Nî‘mat-Allîhî”, Encyclopaedia of Islam); and about any other serious source that deals with the Society of Brotherhood.

\(^{108}\) KASRAVÎ mentioned Zahir od-Dowle in the Târikh-e mashrí‘î as a person “who was counted among the supporters of the constitution” (op. cit., p. 627). KARTRAÎ, however, claims that there are no acts to match these sympathies and that Zahir od-Dowle continued to render his services to the Qajars (1355/1976: 108).

Sufi protagonists of the revolution were found in the Zor‘-Reyâsatî order, in Hâjj ‘Ali Zor‘-Reyâsatîn ‘Vaf‘alishâhî, who was reportedly, despite his royal laqab, “the first man among the clergy of the province of Fars to self-sacrificingly devote himself to [...] the Constitution.” He and his followers wore military clothes (CHAHîRDAHî, 1352/1973, (3): 530). The khânaqâh of his successor Şâdeq‘alishâhî, “was
When Moḥammad-alīšāh (1907-1909) bombarded the parliament and had the revolutionary ringleaders arrested in June 1908, one of them turned out to be a son of Zāhir od-Dowle.\footnote{CHAHARDSI, 1360/1981-2: 53.} In an incident that found its way into Persian poetry, the Shah subsequently ordered the destruction of Zāhir od-Dowle’s house,\footnote{CHAHARDSI, 1361/1982-3: 156. Three other Ṣaffā’alīshāhīs were killed as well, but the event does not, apparently, figure in contemporary repertoires of Sufi stories.} but then, full of remorse, wrote him a reconciliatory letter. In response, Zāhir od-Dowle proclaimed - in a variation on Nūr’alīšāh’s dark prediction of Sufi wrath and the ruin of royalty: “You have destroyed my house, [therefore] God will destroy yours.”\footnote{CHAHARDSI, 1360/1981-2: 54. Original text in AFSHĀR (1367/1988: 22-3).} Throughout the constitutional era and until the ascent of the Pahlavi dynasty, royal patronage nevertheless remained unimpaired. That is, royals retained their allegiance to Zāhir od-Dowle’s Sufi Society of Brotherhood, and his family retained a royal, Qajar, salary.\footnote{CHAHARDSI, 1360/1981-2: 54. Similarly, until ‘the very end of the Qājār era’, the leader of the Ahl-e Haqq, Shāh Ḥayāısı, received royal (state) patronage (MIRHOSSEINI, 1994, (2): 222).}
Figure 2. The mausoleum of Shāh Neʿmatollāh Valī in Mahan (courtesy Mehrdād Torkzāde)
Résumé

It has been argued in this chapter that the Neʿmatollāhī mystic regime’s reestablishment in Iran developed through two figurations. The internal dynamism among Sufis that enabled their ascent consisted of a massive growth in the number of their converts, which could not be checked by either rulers or jurists. The Sufis’ relations vis-à-vis state and societal (jurists’) regimes - the two other relational dimensions of mystic regimes - have been grasped in the notion of ‘trilateral figurations’.

I began arguing the relevance of trilateral figurations by addressing Corbin’s quaternary view of Shi‘ism - underlying which were neglected histories of conflict about spiritual authority that are constitutive of Sufism. In Weberian ideal-types, Islamic histories were conceptualised in a dichotomy of law and experience. Their use as a tool of social analysis is limited, however, because of a pattern of overlap between Sufis and jurists, antinomian traditions that dissolve Sufism as a unitary object, and the centrality of the state in shaping Sufi-jurist relations. The centrality of the state remains similarly unaccounted for in the historical anthropology of Islam, which complemented the law-and-experience dichotomy with an equally Weberian duality of modernity and tradition. Beyond the grid of these notions, Iranian Sufism’s social development has taken shape through the contingent factors of state centralisation and royal patronage.

In the first, eighteenth century figuration, the relations of Sufis derived mainly from local rulers’ competition for power in the absence of a central state. Both Sufis and jurists at times achieved autonomous local influence. Their power of popular mobilisation brought rulers to seek proximity to Sufis, and to persecute them where they were seen to threaten the state. Rulers often feared jurists in the second figuration, which had the reunified state at its centre. Their Sufi patronage, in turn, enhanced continuous Sufi challenges of jurist authority. Nineteenth century Iran did not, therefore, see the disappearance of ‘traditional’ Sufis through the ascent of jurist-led, ‘modern’ religiosity, but, instead, Sufism’s socio-political renaissance.

It was through another period of socio-political disorder and restoration in the early twentieth century, that new mystic regimes would again emerge. Royalty lost its autonomy as a worldly and spiritual centre in Iran. From then, Neʿmatollāhī Sufis came to identify more strongly with the imagined community of the Iranian nation.
PART TWO

In the Pahlavi Dynasty
The early twentieth century marks the redefinition of Sufism as a social institution in Iran. The context for this transformation was the genesis of the Iranian nation-state. Two political processes were involved: the Iranian nation first emerged as a powerful concept in the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), and Reza Khan/Shah Pahlavi subsequently moulded it to fit his statist ambitions (1921-1941).\(^1\)

The early Pahlavi state regained control over the national territory and in the process expanded further into society than the Qajar rulers had been able to. Legitimate social power in the early Pahlavi era came to be defined once more, but this time more effectively, in terms of one’s state-affiliation. Militant policies of nationalistic modernisation,\(^2\) which were initiated by the Shah, produced the nation-state as a new, virtually uncontested, cultural frame of reference.

Nationalistic modernisation has come to be associated with the repression of Sufism, as a component of anti-religious policy: “Under Reza Shah there was a concerted drive against religion by the government [and] dervishes were driven from the city streets.”\(^3\) He had sought to repress begging - the pacific antithesis of militant modernity - and this explained, according to a contemporary Sufi, the persecution of the Khâksâr order.\(^4\) An intimate from the royal

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\(^1\) Useful Persian sources regarding Sufism in the Pahlavi era, at least those readily available in public archives, are unfortunately rather scarce (cf. FARMAYAN (1974) for general observations on modern Iranian sources). The tendency nowadays of archives to open up collections to researchers, more so than under the Shah (cf., for example, EILERS’ account (1977: 322) of the Pahlavi Library), suggests that more relevant material will become available in the near future.

\(^2\) “The shah’s power was [among other bases] founded on the increasing wealth of the royal house, much of it accumulated [...] through force [...]. As a result [...] the strengthening of the state could be tied to nationalism, as had been impossible under the Qajars” (MCDANIEL, 1991: 27).


\(^4\) Interview Solţân'âlishâh Sufi. He further held that “the Shah was against the Sufis because he was ignorant of Sufism.” The Khâksâr had been related to the state through ‘lords’ (nuqabhâ); intermediaries who checked upon dervishes on behalf of the state, but who were appointed by the highest Khâksâr authority. This institution
court related that Reza Shah had “criticised the dervishes fiercely and considered the kashkāl [Sufi begging bowl] and tabarzīn [small Sufi axe] as means for collecting money and fooling the people.”5

However, there are also different, ambivalent accounts that defy the alleged incongruity of religion and nationalistic modernisation, or the idea that nationalistic modernisation in its very essence belongs to a secular order of things. A political scientist in the Islamic Republic observed that the “new regime [of Reza Shah] tried to implement an ideology of royal chauvinism [...] with the help of people like Ardashir Ripūtar and [...] his son Shāpūr, the Freemasons.”6 A similarly ‘deviating’ school of thought was “Sufi mysticism, which was revived and propagated through several westernised and Freemason intellectuals, and it even made its way into schoolbooks.”7

Reza Shah is reported to have been closely associated with the Sufi member of parliament Sheikh ol-Molk Owrang.8 Owrang is the courtier source for the Shah’s above-mentioned criticism of Sufism as well, but it must be noted that this critique explicitly concerned certain dervishes, certain dervish practices and the anti-modernism that they represented - not Sufi mysticism as a whole. The Shah’s measures and goals of cultural reform were specifically aimed at:

 [...] forbidding jugglery and deceitfulness [:] Qalandars with dervish names but far removed from the meaning of Dervishhood exhibited their jugglery on squares and crossroads, and with singing poetry they would gather people around them. Then they would release some was abolished by Reza Shah (Meier and Gramlich, 1992 (1): 314; Gramlich, 1976: 164). The order responded by organisational reforms, carried by Haji Motahhar, so that it would be better able to withstand repression, and survive (cf. Gramlich, 1965: 73).

5 Owrang, in Sāl-nāme-ye donyā, 22: 216-20
6 Foyūzāt, I375/1997: 55. But the insinuation of Freemasonry conspiracy is refuted by another report that cannot be reproached for sympathising with the king, which states that “during the reign of His Majesty Reza Shah the Great, on the basis of a decree of the before-mentioned, activities of parties of Freemasons came to a standstill” (Pānzah-e khordād, 1376/1997: 144-5). “Reza Shah was [...] highly suspicious of foreign missionary organizations, regarding mission schools and hospitals as focal points of sinister foreign influence and possible espionage. Both were brought increasingly under the scrutiny and control of the central government” (Hambly, 1991: 235). The ambiguous missionary activity of American Presbyterians indicates that the suspicions were not entirely unfounded.
snakes with clipped teeth from a box and would expose them to exhibition with indecent movements [...]. Or they would, by exhibiting various kinds of jugglery, gather unemployed people and idlers around them, and they would make people forget.⁹

Reza Shah’s coming to power was mystically foretold and allegedly caused by an Indian Sufi,¹⁰ while another, Iranian Sufi recollected that “many of the orderly [i.e. non-qalandar, non-Khâksâr] Sufis hailed their sovereign.” While the nationalist historian Ahmad Kasravi proclaimed that all books of the Sufis had to be thrown into the fire,¹¹ Sufism under Reza Shah, “though seldom publicly avowed, [continued to] have a strong hold upon the educated classes and [...] a great influence over them.”¹² But Sufism not only survived introverted in elite circuits under Reza Shah: it also radically changed.

Hammoudi has written of Morocco that “if the royal institution and its legitimacy function in and through sainthood [...] it seems logical to consider the master-disciple relationship [...] as the decisive schema for the construction of power-relations” (p. 85). This argument would make perfect sense for most of Qajar Iran as well, as widespread notions of kingship in this era were very much akin to conceptions of Sufi authority and its embodiment in Sufi masters.¹³

However, the sainthood model of master and disciple did not provide for equivalents when autocratic power relations were challenged in the name of the nation, during the Constitutional Revolution. Under Reza Shah, the legitimacy of monarchy was not constructed

⁹ Şafā, 1356/1977-8: 112.
¹⁰ “One of the Sufis from India named ʿShast Mehr Bābā related the coming to power of Reza Shah in Iran to himself and said it was because of his drive and will-power that he had become Shah” (Iranī, 1371/1992-3: 18), cf. Kasravi, 1342/1963-4: 71.
¹¹ “Bāyad ketābhuʾi ke az ṣuḥāyān dar miyān ast [...] be ātesh keshide shavad” (1342/1963-4: 12).
through royal sainthood, but mediated by nationalistic modernisation. This policy, in turn, established the context for new (Sufi) master-disciple relations in which legitimacy attained an abstract and external measure in the Iranian nation. Sufi ideology would increasingly argue its relevance vis-à-vis the Iranian nation, and it did not vest all authority in the person of the Sufi master anymore. Mystic religiosity, that is, transformed in the context of the nation-state.

EXPERIMENTS AND REFUTATIONS

The Ne’matollāhī path had disintegrated in the late Qajar era, and the experience of constitutionalism was therefore varied in the different branches. Various Ne’matollāhī masters had been politically active and influential in the Qajar period - often through royal patronage - but this exterior power was largely lost under Reza Shah’s regime, as intimate Sufi ties to the state were cut. Although explicit Sufi contributions to the nation-state were few, many were the changes in the Ne’matollāhī paths that had the new political regimes as a context.

The Şaf’alislāhī order experimented with and further developed its Freemasonry profile. Its main branch bureaucratised to the extent that the formerly unitary, exclusive and charismatic spiritual authority evolved into the leadership of a ‘first among equals’ who was selected through a restricted election. Analogies for these developments lay in the creation of an effective state bureaucracy, and the Shi’ite clerical reforms of ayatollah Sangelajī (see below). The

14 AHMADI and AHMADI (1998: 159-60) downplayed this development, but their formulations suggest it was crucial: “The idea of the divinity of the king [...] had lost much of its influence [...] The political and military shortcomings of the kings, who had brought bankruptcy and poverty upon the country and hindered its socio-economic development, can be considered as contributory factors in the weakening of the idea of the divinity of the king.”

15 I have left out discussions of Enlightenment and neo-Sufism here. Neo-Sufism was probably coined by Fazlur Rahman in 1966 (SIRRIYEH, 1998: 11), technically referring to eighteenth- (and nineteenth-) century reform movements (mainly in North Africa) that propagated a lessening of ecstatic practices and more conformity to holy law. The two concepts have been hotly debated by RADTKE (1992, 1994, 1996) and SCHULTZE (1990, 1996), cf. PETERS (1990). The debate mainly involves doctrinal changes until the twentieth century, while I focus on modern, mainly twentieth-century social (master-disciple and Sufi-nation) relations.

16 “Reza Shah was able to accomplish what had proved impossible for the Qajars, the creation of a relatively powerful state [with] an effective bureaucracy” (MCDAVID, 1991: 27).
breach of tradition was refuted by a seceding sheikh who himself, nevertheless, headed a modernist magazine that specifically targeted the Iranian nation, rather than fellow Sufis or the community of believers, as an audience. The opposite pattern emerged in the Solṭān-ālīshāhī order, where traditional spiritual authority was challenged by a single modernist affiliate. Causing a war of words, he went his own way to develop a ‘scientific’ Sufi religiosity that related spiritual maturity to educational progress.

The Solṭān-ālīshāhī order

Zeyn ol-Ābedīn Rahmaṭ-ālīshāh was Moḥammad Shāh’s governor of Fars, under whom “the Nimatullahi Order reached the apogee of its external power.”17 Upon his death in about 1861 there was no generally recognised successor. Eventually, two of the claimants were Moḥammad Shīrāzī (d. 1884), from whom the Mūneṣṭālīshāhī or Zōr-Reyāṣatayn ‘branch’ evolved, and Ṣaff-ālīshāhī (d. 1899), who created the Ṣaff-ālīshāhī order. The third claimant was Ḥājj Moḥammad Kāzem Esfahānī Sa’dat-ālīshāh (d. 1876), who founded the Gonābādī, or Tāvūsiyya, or Solṭān-ālīshāhī (Nīmatollāhī) order.

A testimony to Sufism’s unabated socio-political significance in the late Qajar era - even after the Nīmatollāhī order’s disintegration - Sa’dat-ālīshāh was named Peacock of the Gnostics (tāvūs ol-ʿorafā) by Moḥammad Shāh, reportedly because he thought Sa’dat-ālīshāh ‘well-dressed’.18 Because of this legend, the Solṭān-ālīshāhīs are sometimes referred to as the ‘Tāvūsiyya’.

As the order was most distinctly moulded by Sa’dat-ālīshāh’s successor Ḥājj Mollā Solṭānmoḥammad Solṭān-ālīshāh, it has been more commonly designated as ‘Solṭān-ālīshāhī’. ‘Gonābādī’ refers to the order’s main residence since Solṭān-ālīshāh.19 Solṭān-ālīshāh figures in another tradition of Sufi power: Nāṣer od-Dīn Shāh had wished to meet with the Sufi master, but the latter dared to decline

17 NURBAKHSH, 1980: 111.
19 “By means of Mollā Solṭān and his successors Beydokht and Jūymand (Gonabad) became proverbial, to such an extent that this selsele became known as the Gonābādī” (CHAHĀDAHĪ, 1361/1982-3: 230-1). ALGAR’s claim (“Nīmat-Allāhiyya”, Encyclopaedia of Islam) that “Gonābādīs generally eschew the designation Nīmat-Allāhī and cannot therefore be regarded as representing the main line of the [...] order” is false, if only because of continuous conflicts over this matter.
the invitation and (for unclear reasons) to ‘ignore’ the king.\textsuperscript{20} The order grew in social and numerical importance under Solṭān’alishāh’s leadership, and he himself grew increasingly wealthy.\textsuperscript{21} Solṭān’alishāh was, possibly because of his conspicuous outward success, accused of various heresies. In 1909 he was murdered, under unclear circumstances, and thus made a martyr for Gonabadi Sufis.\textsuperscript{22}

Complex and contradictory histories of religious and personal strife surround the death of Solṭān’alishāh. There are several indications, however, that beyond these, socio-political reasons motivated his death. “It is said that at a time of famine [Solṭān’alishāh] refused to give people grain from his storehouses, and [then] became so unpopular that he was killed.”\textsuperscript{23} Among the strenuous events which preceded his death was another conflict, during the Constitutional Revolution, with villagers in Beydokht who confronted him and demanded an explication of his political position.

Solṭān’alishāh, whose predecessor had allegedly wished Nāṣer od-Din Shāh dead and his ‘despotism’ to end, defended himself by proclaiming: “I am only a village farmer and a dervish, and I do not know what ‘constitutionalism’ or ‘despotism’ mean. We have nothing to do with these matters and we obey the government, whether it be constitutional or not.”\textsuperscript{24} But one of the conspirators had acted in the name of the constitution,\textsuperscript{25} and Solṭān’alishāh, a wealthy and resented landlord rather than a simple village farmer, had been on good terms with various local authorities - state representatives - among whom was the governor of Khorasan, Nayyer od-Dowle.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{20} “Mr Tābande has written in the introduction to the second print of the Tafsir-e bayan os-saʿdat that Nāṣer od-Din Shāh intended to meet Mollā Solṭān during the days of his stay in Tehran, but Mollā Solṭān ignored him and left for Mashhad. After a while he travelled to Beydokht and found a place to stay there” (CHAHĀRAHĪ, 1361/1982-3: 230-1).


\textsuperscript{22} Official literature relates: “The shrine [for Solṭān’alishāh] is built on the spot where the Qutb was murdered by a mob of fanatic bigots whose consciences were unable to bear the sense of guilt produced by the spirituality and moral edge of his preaching. They sacrilegiously slew him while he was at his ablutions in preparation for his morning prayer” (HAZEGHI, 1970: vii). Cf. GRAMLICH, 1965: 65; SOLTĀNESEYN, 1350/1971: 149.

\textsuperscript{23} MILLER, 1923: 345.

\textsuperscript{24} In SOLTĀNESEYN, 1350/1971: 122.

\textsuperscript{25} JAZBĪ-ESFAHĀNĪ, 1372/1993: 175.

NEW MYSTIC REGIMES

Hājj Mollā ‘Alī Nūr‘alīshāh II

Nūr‘alīshāh, Solṭān‘alīshāh’s son, initially disliked the Sufism of his family in his youth. He disappeared after conflicts with his father, travelled the Islamic world for years and became a jurist. Later in life, however, he changed his views and in the end (after the murder of his father in 1909) became the order’s Pole. He “was to be martyred in his turn by the opponents of such piety.” In 1918, on the run for clergymen now turned enemies, he was poisoned in Kashan, and then buried in Rey. ‘Gonābād’ became ‘Gūnābād’, ‘place of blood’.27

After having taken over the order’s leadership from his father, Nūr‘alīshāh fell victim to the local strongman Sālār Khān Balūch. Before his clash with the Sufi leader, the latter had killed a local ruler in the village of Torbat in the name of the Constitutional Revolution and behaved as a warlord in Khorasan province.28 “At the instigation of enemies” Sālār Khān Balūch had grabbed and abducted Nūr‘alīshāh and “held him prisoner for some time, after which he [...] destroyed the houses of Nūr‘alīshāh and his relatives.” Nūr‘alīshāh was eventually freed through the intercession of various persons, among whom the ayatollah Mollā Moḥammad Kāẓem Kho-

28 HEYĀT-E TAHIRĪ-YE KETĀBKHĀNE-YE AMĪR SOLEYMĀNĪ, 1367/1988-9: 35. ‘Nūr‘alīshāh’ had ordered for the construction of a library in Beydokht that the foqarā could consult under the sheikh’s guidance, while the lodge was open to pilgrims who were allowed to stay as long as they wanted, free of charge (HAZEGHI, 1970: vii). He had issued a fatwā that somewhat contested the Islamic legitimacy of slavery. His grandson related: “My grandfather […], an inspired Mujtahed, issued his Fatva […] in […] 1912 - and that was 36 years before the United Nations issued their Universal Declaration of Human Rights - in which he pronounced that ‘the purchase and sale of human beings is contrary to the dictates of religion and the practice of civilisation; […] in our eyes any persons […] who are claimed as slaves, are in legal fact completely free, and the equals of all other Muslims of their community’. But ‘should the legal condition for the enslavement of anyone be proven (because he had been taken prisoner fighting against Islam with a view to its extermination and persisted in invincible ignorance in his […] infidel convictions, or because there did exist legal proof that all his ancestors without exception had been slaves descended from a person taken prisoner conducting a warfare of such invincible ignorance) Islam would be bound to recognise such slavery as legal […] The article is thus acceptable to us with this one proviso’ (TABANDEH, 1970: 26, 27).

When harassments continued, “the state of the era prevented [the enemies’ further] aggression and imprisoned a few of them.”

But in the second part of the First World War, when Russian troops controlled most of the northern provinces in Iran, Nūr-ʻalīshāh was again abducted. This time, it was carried out by Tzarist forces. The abduction had once more, according to Solţān-ʻalīshāhī sources, been accomplished by plotting opponents “who had stated political accusations against Nūr-ʻalīshāh.” Although much remains unclear, it is possibly the friendly relations between Solţān-ʻalīshāh and Khorasan’s governor, whose position the Russians had undermined, which provide context for the second abduction. Nūr-ʻalīshāh was honourably escorted back after a few days, however, when interrogations ran dry on his repeated denial of involvement in politics.

What appears from circumstances leading up to the Russian abduction as much as from the continuous harassment of the Gonabadi Sufis, is the conflictuous nature of local and, beyond that, provincial relations, which surpassed outright religious strife. That is, class conflict presented itself in the vocabulary of political reform. On the eve of the Pahlavi dynasty, the Solţān-ʻalīshāhī order constituted a considerable socio-political power in Khorasan, if only because it was perceived as one and many enemies acted upon this perception.

Possibly more strenuous than outsiders’ harassment, Nūr-ʻalīshāh had become involved in conflicts over succession after his father died and disobedience by one of the latter’s pupils, the self-willed Keyvān Qazvīnī. To support his leadership claim, Nūr-ʻalīshāh had “issued a proclamation which he is said to have published all over Persia, in which he called upon the nation to accept him as its head” [italics mine]. But even after his ascent, Qazvīnī initiated affiliates

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32 Yapp, 1978: 15-16. The Russians had a Northern sphere of influence from 1907 (and the British a Southern one) and invaded Iran in 1911. By 1920, remaining (Bolshevik) troops were chased away by Reza Khan (Reza Shah, from 1925). In 1940 they, as well as the British, invaded again.
36 Discontent over Nūr-ʻalīshāh’s succession of his father was not limited to Qazvīnī, but shared by many of the Sufis (Gramlich, 1976: 178, cf. 1965: 68).
37 Miller, 1923: 353. Defending Sufism, in response to accusations by Šālār Khān, 〈Nūr-ʻalīshāh〉 had proclaimed: “We do not need the crown of kings / but kings
without Nūr‘alishāh’s approval. Although according to his opponents, Qazvīnī’s permission to teach was only granted in 1910 by Nūr‘alishāh, Qazvīnī maintained it derived from Solṭān‘alishāh.

The real / true Sufism

‘From all the sayings of the Sufis it appears that the institution of the Pole (qotbiyat) occupies the highest position and that a higher rank is inconceivable’. Riyyā‘ali [replied]: ‘Yes!’ [...] ‘There exists no position of greater importance’.

Keyvān Qazvīnī (1861-1938) was born in Qazvin. After having served several other Sufi masters, he “entered in the circle of the novices of Šaffālīshāh”, succeeded in becoming his ‘itinerant sheikh’ (sheyk̄-e sayyār), and received his ejāce-ye ershād. In the Iraqi holy places he then entered into the service of various Sources of Emulation, one of whom, Rashī (according to one of Qazvīnī’s pupils), conveyed the title of ‘ayatollah’ upon him. After six years in the service of Šaffālīshāh and many travels he reached Beydokht, and on 28 December 1894 he re-entered the Sufi path under Solṭān‘alīshāh. He was then, reportedly, once more appointed itinerant sheikh, received the cognomen 9 Manṣūr‘alī, became one of the favourite and most fanatic Gonābādī affiliates, “worked for the propagation of Sufism on behalf of Mollāsolṭān, and went to India, Iraq, Turkestan, the Caucasus and Arabia.” But in 1926, he departed from the path of Sufism as it was predominantly known in Iran.

need our crowns instead” (Mā na mohtāj-e tāj-e shāhān-im / balke shāhān be tāj-e mā mohtāj) (Jazbī-efahānī, 1372/1993: 193).


43 CHAHARDAHĪ, 1370/1991: 108. Qazvīnī wrote about twenty books (Gramlich (1965: 68)). Besides two tafsīrs and a ‘Book of Mysticism’ (see below), these included Rāz-goshā (Revealing of Secrets), Behin sokhan (The Best Words), the two-volume Keyvān-nāme (Book of Kevvān) and Ostovār (Keeper of Secrets).


45 Gramlich, 1965: 68.
While Qazvînî lived through Reza Shah’s demolition of the traditional Shi'ite clergy’s religious institutions, it is unlikely to have eluded him that “some audacious thinkers attempted to reconcile [...] intellectual modernism with a renewal of religion.”\textsuperscript{46}

Ayatollah Sangelâji, who was trained in mysticism (\textit{\textit{erfân}}, but developed a distinct dislike of esoterism, retained, throughout his life, “confident relations with the new regime.”\textsuperscript{47} The Shah’s Justice Minister, for example, was his disciple. Central among the modernist ayatollah’s ideas was the need for a more rigorous monotheism that would do away with the belief in sacred intermediaries, i.e. the Imams, and their ‘intercession’ (\textit{shef¿>at}). In his view, the ‘emulation’ (\textit{taqlîd}) of mojtaheds ought to be replaced by everyman’s direct ‘interpretation’ (\textit{ejteh¿d}) of the sacred sources.

Similar arguments against jurist emulation had been stated earlier by the Akhbaris and the Sheikhis. However, Sangelâji was not the founder of a religious school or sect and neither did his message remain largely confined to the clerical community. He lectured in public while the emerging nation-state was heading towards mass-education,\textsuperscript{48} and he attracted a broad audience as “workers, traders, merchants, teachers, students, members of parliament, journalists and preachers were all seated at the foot of his pulpit.”\textsuperscript{49} (Reportedly, Qazvînî had an equally impressive audience, consisting of some 3000 pupils, among whom were well-known literati).\textsuperscript{50} An inverse example to his modernising religiosity, Sangelâji felt that “the Sufis [have] so developed the principle of authority that for them the faithful [...] are to the shaykh ‘as cadavers are to the washers of the dead’:

\textsuperscript{46} RICHARD, 1988: 159.
\textsuperscript{47} RICHARD, 1988: 162, 168, 162. Even of Reza Shah’s main clerical opponent, Modarres - hailed in the Islamic Republic as an uncompromising star of the Islamic movement - it has been observed that he “spoke a secular, rather than a religious, language” (ABRAHAMIAN, 1993: 103).
\textsuperscript{48} The number of schools increased from 612 in 1922 to 8237 in 1940 (BANANI, 1961: 108).
\textsuperscript{49} CHAH¿RDAH, 1352/1973-4: 518.
\textsuperscript{50} These included, for instance, Sa¿id Nafisi, Ghol¿mre¿ Sam¿m Kerm¿nsh¿h, ‘Ali Dashi, and ‘Abdoll¿h Kh¿n Ma¿¿m (CHAH¿RDAH, 1370/1991: 109). In the 1950s Nafisi gave a course in Sufi history at Tehran University (cf. BARQ, one of his pupils, in a treatise under his supervision on the life and works of ‘Sa¿f¿alish¿h, 1352/1973-4: 2), DASHTI (d.1982), was a senator and publicist, and the author of \textit{Dar diy¿r-e s¿fiy¿n}, a generally sympathetic account of Sufism (1354/1975-6).
utterly without will.”51 The clerical Shi’ite struggle was not, however, lost on Sufism. Sangelaj’s affront was paralleled by Qazvini’s Sufi (self-) critique and his many outlines of a program for reform.

Nureeddin Modarresi Chahardahi, Qazvini’s faithful disciple, wrote in relation to his master’s conflicts that “the [Solṭān’alisahāh] Poles have never indulged in speaking badly about him, but a number of their Sufis have out of foolishness and without comprehending the issues of the books, engaged in nonsensical, idle talk.”52 Although it is doubtful whether privately opinions were so civil, it was only in 1982 that ‘The Cutting Edge’ (Tiq-e boranda) was published,53 followed in 1983 by the equally vigilant ‘Treatise of the Response’ (Resāla-ye javābiya).54 Both of these pamphlets, in defence of the Solṭān’alisahāh order, were assaults on Qazvini.55

As Sangelaj attacked Shi’ite taqlīd, Qazvini had “objected to Sufism in its outer structure, with poles, sheikhs and disciples. He developed his own teaching of ‘real/true’ (haqiqī) Sufism, against the ‘formalist’ (rasmī) Sufism of Sufi orders”,56 which had as its core the

51 Richard, 1988: 163, 166-9, 169. Sangelaj’s ideas were anathema to most of the ‘olamā. Khomeyni was fiercely opposed to Sangelaj (of which evidence is found in his Kashf al-asrār).
53 The writer of Tiq-e boranda was Abdosaleh Ne’matollahi.
54 The writer of the Javābiya was Asadollah Golpayegani Izād-Goshāb Ñāserali (d.1947; see Solṭānhoseyn, 1350/1971: 363 (Nābegha-ye ‘elm va ‘erfān)).
55 ‘The Cutting Edge’ in addition attempted to tackle Kasravi’s attack against Sufism. Reṣāla’alisahāh Tābede (then named Solṭānhoseyn) had only once publicly, mildly criticised Qazvini in Sāl-nāme-ye keshvar-e Iran (1338/1959-60: 4), and protested to Kasravi in a personal letter dated Mehr 17, 1321/October 9, 1942 (Mehrbuah’alisahāh, 1373/1994-5: 221). The present master, his brother Maḥmod ‘Abbāsi, told me there could possibly have been a meeting between Solṭānhoseyn and Kasravi, as Kasravi was a professor at Tehran University and Solṭānhoseyn one of his students. A reason for the order’s previous silence was that “the ‘olamā were opposed to Sufism to a far greater extent than Kasravi was.” Reṣāla’alisahāh, who despised Qazvini’s pupil Chahardahi, had nevertheless quoted the latter in stating that Qazvini had ‘found nothing’ with Ṣaffalishāh, to whom the Solṭān’alisahāhīs related ‘as water to fire’ (interview, 04/19/97). Recently, a new series of affronts and defences has been inaugurated. Maḥmod ‘Abbāsi provided a new edition of Qazvini’s Rāz-goshā (1376/1997) - a very ill-concealed attempt to render Sufism illegitimate as a whole - to which the order responded with Parishān Zāde’s Goshāyesh-e rāz (1377/1998), which sought to discredit both Qazvini and his editor.
56 Gramlich, 1965: 68-9. Ñāserali held Qazvini opposed to any reyāsat (1362/1983-4: 28). Among the Zāhābiya, there was a somewhat similar discussion
idea that mysticism could be a modern scientific enterprise. The 1930 version of his ‘Book of Mysticism’ (Erfân-nâme) used the measure of the modern age; the Gregorian calendar. In line with his modern pose as a ‘thinker’, Chahârdâhî referred to his master not as ‘sheikh’ but as ‘the great philosopher’. Admirers had addressed Kasravi, the nationalist enemy of Sufism, in the same way.

Qazvînî’s real/true Sufism was strongly condemned in the Resâla. As Sangelâjî allegedly took his inspiration from Saudi revivalists, it was protested against Qazvînî that “sometimes he exhibits a special interest for the Wahhabî religion,” and that “like the Sunnis, he did not recognise ‘being divinely appointed’ (naṣṣ) and ‘authorisation’ (ejâze) as necessary conditions.”57 Furthermore, the Response indignantly rejected Qazvînî’s reproach that Soltân’alishâh had secretly made a claim to the Imamate. Qazvînî’s most sacrilegious allegation even had Soltân’alishâh secretly pretend to prophetic revelation (vahy), that is: being the ultimate prophet, beyond Mohammad.

The Resâla-ye javâbiya explained: “Because [Qazvînî] was himself opposed to, and an enemy of all the [...] leaders of the religious strata, so he thought that Sufism would be against them as well.”58 Having cited many of Qazvînî’s alleged misconceptions of Shi‘ite and Sufi history and deviations from established points of doctrine, it concluded that “the honourable sheikh reckons Shi‘ism and Sufism [as a whole] outside Islam.”59 In other words: in attacking all traditional bases of spiritual authority, Qazvînî had not only lost his wits but was also, through these illicit innovations, an heretic unbeliever.

on the Pole-ship from 1913 (which primarily had to do with its hereditary nature among the Zahabiya (LeWISoHN, 1999: 42).

57 ÑâSER‘ãLã, 1362/1983: 26, 38. This point was elaborated by Hojat Balâghi, another adversary of Qazvînî’s who led a smaller Ne’matollâhî branch and stated in a polemic that one was simply born a qoṭb – like one was born a mojâhâd – there being no human elements of election or selection involved (see GRAMLICH, 1976: 179). Qazvînî, in reference to (‘heretic’) Bahaism, held of Soltân’alishâh mysticism that “one cannot count this as Islamic Sufism anymore: it was a new religion, like the claims of Mirzâ Hoseyn’alî Bahâ” (ÑâSER‘ãLã, 1362/1983: 67).


These Solṭān'ālīshāhī exchanges present one with a distinctly modernist struggle. Not only personal claims to spiritual authority were questioned, but also the nature of Sufi authority itself. The struggle has nevertheless been framed, on both sides, in the traditional Sufi genre of ‘heresiology’, which sought ‘the intangible point of dogma’ to establish the adversary’s failings, and to associate them with inadmissible passions and moral culpability. These passions were often related to financial malpractice, which flew in the face of the Sufi ideal of disinterestedness. Doctrinal deviations and heretic passions together established the opponent’s moral failings and bankruptcy.

In addition, Qazvini’s questioning of traditional Sufi authority had the nation-state as an implicit, organising motif. In the ‘Revealing of Secrets’ (Rāz-goshā) he identified elements in Iranian culture that were foreign to either Islam or Iran. In this respect, his ‘heresiology’ was analogous to Kasravi’s modernist and nationalist critique. In the Book of Mysticism, Qazvini outlined a corporate vision of “classes

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60 My paraphrase of Foucault’s definition (in Rabinow, 1984: 382).
61 One comes across this genre of contestation among many Iranian Sufis. For the Solṭān'ālīshāhī conflict, see: Nāṣer'ālī, 1362/1983: 79; Qazvini, in Abbāsī, 1376/1997: 190).
63 Qazvini had words of praise for the ‘great works’ of the recent past in Iran: the defeat of the British tobacco monopoly, the Constitutional revolution, and the parliament of 1906 (Erfān-nāme, 1309/1930: 269). The Solṭān'ālīshāhīs (except for Qazvini) refrained from such appreciations, which underscores that the nation-state was less obvious as a frame of reference for them.
in society [that] are like organs in the body, [and] that must be present in the society to the extent that they are necessary, not too much and not too little, otherwise society would become defective like the man with four eyes and one hand, or four feet and one tooth.”

Of the clergy, very few were functional. The underlying axiom held that if there were many clergymen, there would be more corruption, and few religious benefits. In a city of half a million, Qazvini estimated, one person would be enough, to be present once a week for prayer and for teaching ‘necessary subjects’. No such leniency was left over in his consideration of formalist, or ‘customary’ (marsûm) Sufism. In Qazvini’s distinctly modern mode of functionalist reasoning, the organ of traditional Sufism was not only un-Islamic, but also nationally dysfunctional:

The See of Dervishhood, which had blossomed in the era of impotence of government in Iran, - during the war between the Zands and the Qajars - split into an abundance of branches. Now that it is 1928 in the Christian era, there are twenty dervish Sees in Iran. They flaunt one another with sarcasm and except for negating one another, they have no ground to substantiate themselves.

Mutual admonitory advice

(4) Häjj Sheykh Moḩammad Ḥasan Šāleḩ’alîshâh (1891-1966) assumed the leadership of the Solţân’alîshâhî order after his father was poisoned in 1918, and the torments that befell his father and grandfather awaited him too. But Šāleḩ’alîshâh survived, despite assertive views on Sufi authority. In a 1950 interview, he was asked who at present represented the Hidden Imam. Šāleḩ’alîshâh’s stated: “All orders claim that the directives [...] from their predecessors lead up

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64 'Erfân-nâme, 1309/1930: 311-12.
65 'Erfân-nâme, 1309/1930: 313.
68 Cf. ŞÂLEH’ALÎSHÂH., 1372/1993-4: 6; JAZBÎ-ESFAHÂNÎ, 1372/1993-4: 229. There were regular harassments of and violence against Šâleḩ’alîshâh and his affiliates and destructions of Solţân’alîshâhî property in Gonabad, which caused Šâleḩ’alîshâh to flee from Gonabad several times. He had moreover been abducted by Tzarist forces in his youth, together with his father Nûr’alîshâh.
to them. But they have no written authorization. It is us who are in the possession of a written authorization from the past.”

Ṣāleḥ’alishāh cultivated his religious studies, travelled widely to Islamic holy sites (and once to Geneva), and initiated works for the public good in Gonabad. He managed to reformulate the order from a persecuted outcast in the provincial periphery into a national source of morality. His position was enhanced through conspicuous organisational order and considerable wealth, which rumours say derived from the politically influential provincial aristocracy. The one certainty is that ever more well-to-do and influential affiliates entered the order - including many members of parliament and the premier Qavām as-Saltāna - and that his message became widespread.

When Reza Shah enforced the use of surnames in 1928, the wealthy and powerful Pole chose Bichāre, ‘helpless’ (which one critic used as an ironical joke and affiliates pointed out as a sign of piety). There are narratives of more direct early contacts between the Solṭān’alishāhs and Reza Shah as well, which concerned one of Ṣāleḥ’alishāh’s sheikhs, Ayatollah Ḥājj Sheykh ʿAbdollāh Ḥā’erī

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70 Cf. ṢĀLEH’ALISHĀH-, 1372/1993-4: 7. Among these works were the foundation of the Ketābkhāne-ye Solṭānī, that attained national recognition, the Sālehīya hospital, the propagation of literacy and adult education, and the digging of several qanāts.
71 The Solṭān’alishāhī order is “innerlich straffer zusammengefaßt, mehr geeint und zentralisiert, mehr von seiner Sendung überzeugt, als jede andere Ni’matullāh’-gruppe, abgesehen davon, daß der Pol der Gunābāḍi über ungeheure Geldmittel verfügt, die ihm helfen, seine Machtstellung nach außen hin sichtbar zu machen” (GRAMLICH, 1965: 64).
72 “Obwohl man in jedem Derwischorden in Persien Vertreter aller Bevölkerungsschichten finden kann, kann man doch in letzter Zeit beobachten, daß Angehörige höherer sozialer Schichten, besonders Beamte, Offiziere, Kaufleute und ähnliche [...], sich mit Vorliebe für die Gunābāḍī entscheiden” (GRAMLICH, 1965: 64). TRIMINGHAM cites an observation by IVANOW in the 1960s: “A few decades ago almost the whole of the class of the junior government clerks [...] belonged to the [...] Gunābāḍī order” (1971: 102). MILLER (1923: 347) mentioned “well-to-do classes such as merchants [and] landowners”; parliamentarians and the premier as Gunābāḍī affiliates.
73 POURJAVADY and WILSON, 1978: 252. It must be noted in addition to Pourjavady and Wilson’s reading, however, that Bichāre was also the name of a clan in Beydokht under which Ṣolṭān’alishāh had already been registered (cf. MAH-BUB’ALISHĀH-, 1373/1994-5: 47).
During the holy months the king used to send money to some of the clergymen for the breaking of the fast. He included Hā'eri, who, however, refused to accept the compromising gift.\footnote{GRAMLICH (1965: 69) mentions that during his research one of the sheikhs had four sheikhs, one of them his son, keyvān Qazvīnī and Hā'eri, included: 1) Emāmeddīn Sabzavārī; 2) Mirzā Abū Tāleb Semnānī; 3) Mirzā Yūsof Hā'eri; 4) Emām Jom'e-ye Eṣṭaḥbānātī; 5) Asadollāh Golpāyegānī Īzād-Goshaš; 6) Mohammad Fānī Semnānī; 7) Mirzā Mehdī Mojtahed Solemnānī; 8) Mohammad Khān Rāstīn Arākī; 9) Abdollāh Şūfi Amlashī; 10) Mohammad Sharī'at Qomī; and 11) Hebatollāh Ja'fābādī.}

The present Pole, Majzūb-alishāh, stressed a less ideologically cleansed royal relation with the sheikh, to whom the king had allegedly ‘become captivated’. His version matched, in detail, a prerevolutionary account by Sheikh ol-Molk Owrang, Sufi member of parliament and court intimate of Reza Shah. Majzūb-alishāh related:

When he was still a hungry, poor and simple soldier, Reza Shah once had an encounter with Hā'eri, one of the sheikhs of Šāleb'alishāh. Hā'eri predicted: ‘You will be king’. Reza Shah was utterly amazed and said he didn’t believe the prediction. Hā'eri responded: ‘Yes, you will be king, and you must treat the people right’. After Reza Khan became Reza Shah, he recalled the encounter with Hā'eri and sent someone to search for him. Hā'eri was found and the two met for a second time, during which Reza Shah asked: ‘Is there anything I can do for you?’ Hā'eri responded: ‘No, nothing, just don’t loose out of sight that which I told you when we first met: Treat the people right’.\footnote{INTERVIEW ‘Majzūb-alishāh’, 04/19/97; cf. OWRANG, in Šāl-nāme-ye donyā, 22: 216-20.} Reza Shah had become opposed to Sufism, according to Majzūb-
'alishāh, not because of any preconceived grudge against it, but because its numbers had grown very large. A British traveller, in any case, was told in the 1920s that all of the people in the district of Gonabad were Sufis.\footnote{MILLER, 1923: 343.} During Šāleb'alishāh’s leadership, the Soltān-alishāhī numbers were estimated at about 40,000 (which approximated the size of the unified Ne'matollāhī order in the eighteenth century), while their affiliates were widely distributed over Iran.\footnote{SOLTONALI, in Šāl-nāme-ye keshvar-e Īrān, 1338/1959–60, (4): 124.}
Majzūb’alishāh recollected three additional, baseless reproaches: the Sufis in Beydokht were accused of smoking opium and bribing judges. Qazvīnī had written that the Sufis - Šāleh’alishāh among them - were aspiring to revolution and coveting the kingship. Reza Shah then, according to Majzūb’alishāh, himself visited representatives of the order in Tehran, who explained to the king that none of the accusations contained any truth. Reza Shah’s Minister of Culture ʿAlī Asghar Ḥekmat visited Gonabad and witnessed the Solṭān’alishāhī school for illiterate adults. After Ḥekmat returned to Tehran and reported his findings, the Shah allegedly made literacy compulsory for servants in the state machinery. Classes similar to the Solṭān’alishāhī one in Gonabad were then organised for adult illiterates.  

Finally, Majzūb’alishāh recollected a visit by Reza Shah to the Solṭān’alishāhīs in Gonabad, during which the king requested the writing of an instruction from which it would become manifest what constituted legitimate Sufi behaviour. The manuscript that resulted in 1939 was ‘Šāleh’s Advice’ (Pand-e Šāleh), a booklet which more than any other established the order as a legitimate religious force in modern Iran. It has perhaps been events like these, and booklets like Pand-e Šāleh, which underlay the claim that actually, fiReza Shah [may even] have harboured some sympathy for the dervishes.  

Pand-e Šāleh, according to another Solṭān’alishāhī manifesto, became “a household word amongst the religious of Iran.” The Sol-
ţan‘alishâhî order’s respectable mission, contrary to that of others, aimed at the broadest possible audience. Šâleh’s Advice, the laudatory introduction mentions, “makes clear for the ordinary man and woman how to practice this moral and spiritual discipline [of Sufism], and so to enjoy the fruits of the spirit in daily life in this world.”

\textit{Pand-e Šâleh} was recently observed to be “a work filled with platitudes and hackneyed moral exhortations, the mystical content of which is insignificant.” Whether or not one accepts this as a literary qualification or as a judgement of modern Solţân‘alishâhî doctrine, there is indeed little in it, apart from some measure of terminology, that could distinguish the Solţân‘alishâhî Sufis from other Iranian Shi‘ites. And there is nothing in \textit{Pand-e Šâleh} that would otherwise put the Sufis up against the social, the religious or the stately order.

\footnote{HAZEGHI, 1970: ix.}

\footnote{LEWISOHN, 1998: 452.}

\footnote{\textit{SOLTÂNHOSEYN,}, 1348/1969-70: 270.}

\footnote{\textit{HEYAT-E TAHRIRIYE-YE KETÁBHANE-YE AMİR SOLEYMÁNÍ,} 1367/1988-9: 141.}

\footnote{ABRAHAMIAN, 1973: 297, 282.}

\footnote{MILLER, 1923: 354.}

\footnote{\textit{9HAZEGHI, 1970: ix.}

\footnote{LEWISOHN, 1998: 452.}

\footnote{\textit{SOLTÂNHOSEYN,}, 1348/1969-70: 270.}

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\footnote{ABRAHAMIAN, 1973: 297, 282.}

\footnote{MILLER, 1923: 354.}
lined religiosity which stories surrounding Şâleḥ’s Advice claim was commissioned by Reza Shah, the leader of the nation. Thus, the Şoltân‘alîshâhî order evolved from being a powerful but localised *ferqe* (sect) into, to some outward extent at least, becoming a subdued but nationally integrated socio-religious organisation.

The Şaf‘alîshâhî order

The Şaf‘alîshâhî order takes its name from Mîrzâ Ḥasan Bâqer Eşfaqânî (or Yazdî), a disciple of Raûma‘alîshâh, the last leader of the unified Ne‘matollâhî order before contemporary divisions. He was born in Isfahan in 1835, travelled widely, repeatedly met with persecution, but founded a flourishing order, and died in Tehran in 1899.90 Şaf‘alîshâh was, like his pupil Qazvînî, accused of entertaining relations with the Bahai community; he was reproached for Freemasons being among his disciples,91 and his “connections with the Ismâ‘îlis were obviously strong.”92 When in India, “Safi ‘Ali Shah [had] also kept company with the local Sufis, Yogis and Brah-

90 11/24 or 25/1316Q, cf. Gramlich, 1965: 61; Hoseyni, 1377/1998: 11; Barq, 1352/1973-4: 3; et al. Şaf‘alîshâhî’s lodge and burial site was allegedly built in 1316Q/1896 (see Kiyâni, 1369/1990-1: 244; Ma‘şumalîshâh: 1318Q/1900, (3): 446 (*Târîeq al-haqeq*), but this was contested by Homâyûnî (1371/1992: 276). “After the passing away of Şaf‘alîshâh nine hundred *râmnân* was assembled and spent on the restoration of the lodge and the payment of the heirs of Şaf‘alîshâh” (Chahârdâhi, 1360/1981-2: 15). Besides this lodge, the Şaf‘alîshâhis have a general burial place between Tajrish and the Emāmzâde-ye Qâsem in Tehran. It was built and named after Ẓahir od-Dowle by his Society of Brotherhood, from money acquired from the sale of adjacent lands (*op. cit.*, p. 28). The Şoltân‘alîshâhis stress that Şaf‘alîshâh had accepted the *ejz-e-nâme* of his (Şoltân‘alîshâhi) competitor Șa‘âda‘alîshâhî (Esfahâni, 1372/1993-4: 35-8). As there is no denying this, many Şaf‘alîshâhis grant the Şoltân‘alîshâhî version but add that Șa‘âda‘alîshâhî had, with authorisation, accepted Şaf‘alîshâhî’s superiority in the affairs of Sufism. The details of the agonising conflicts over Şaf‘alîshâhî’s succession fall outside the scope of this research (they are dealt with in Gramlich, 1965).


Kasravi wrote (without, however, providing any evidence) that Safi’alishah had annexed Sufism to the deifiers of ‘Ali (‘Ali-Illahi), the ‘extremist’ Ali-e Haqq. In another sense, Safi’alishah was an undisputed innovator: he wrote a tafsir in rhyme and in Persian, which many of the clergy found blasphemous, and for which they declared him an unbeliever. The tafsir was nevertheless, through Nasers od-Din Shahi’s intercession, sanctioned by a fatwa of the Iraqi Source of Emulation Mirza-ye Shirazi.

Even more interesting than the allegations and facts of an ecumenical and innovative mind, one of his successors read Safi’alishah’s appearance and success in Tehran politically, in the context of the reform of Qajar despotism. The theme of reform would, in conflicting definitions, dominate developments in the Safi’alishahi order after the founder’s demise. All of the new sub-branches became preoccupied, through their leaders, with far-reaching organisational and ideational changes.

In his last breath - dying, according to a legend which survives to the present, in a corner of the lodge in Tehran - Safi’alishah reportedly murmured to the disciples who were surrounding him: “have no disunity” (ekhtelaf ma-dar). But contrary to the Soljun’alishahi order - in which a largely undisputed, genealogical leadership came into existence - the Safi’alishahi order has seen incongruously antagonistic claims for leadership, immediately after the founder’s death and until presently. After Safi’alishah, there has not been any Sufi leader who compared to the founder in charisma, reputation or following. Safi’alishah had sixteen sheikhs, none of whom were unambiguously declared his one and only successor. For this reason, Safi’alishahi spirituality has to this day radiated around Safi’alishah’s personality.


KASRAVI, 1342/1963-4: 50.
Safi’alishah held that the Pole-ship ought to be claimed by a person whose being sufficiently shared in that of the Hidden Imam during his occultation, and to whom nothing would remain unknown (ZANGANE-PUR, 1343/1964-5: 471). The sheikhs were: 1. Ḥājī Sayyed Mirzā Mahmūd Khan Na’inī ‘Heyrat’alishah’ (d.1919/20) (CHAHARDAI, 1360/1981-2: 36); 2. Ḥājī Mohammad Ebrahim Namazī Shirazi ‘Niyāz’alishah’ (d.1904/05); 3. Ḥājī ‘Abdollah Ne’mati Mostashar’alishah Ker-manshahi (Hajji Dadash) (d.1948) (CHAHARDAI, 1360/1981-
Ma'rūf'ālishāh, Mīr Ma'sūm Khān Kermanī, Ḥeyrat'ālishāh and Zahīr od-Dowlā all claimed to be Saff'ālishāh’s exclusively legitimate, appointed successor. The claimants produced and contested various documents and oral authorisations. But the evidence made public and subsequent conflicts over succession did not result in clearly demarcated branches. Several sheikhs attempted, to the end of the reign of Reza Shah, to regain the spiritual leadership over the central branch, and others gave up their claims in silence.\(^7\) The central branch in Saff'ālishāh’s lodge has remained a contested asset.

The Shirazi horse trader Ma'rūf'ālishāh made a claim for the leadership, but soon thereafter pledged his allegiance to Mīr Ma'sūm Khān Kermanī,\(^8\) whose alternative lineage was influential up to the ‘glory of the gnostics’ (fakhr ol-'oraţā) Mūhammad Ḥakīmiyān 'Rahmat'ālishāh. Reza Shah’s first Prime Minister Mīrzā Moḥammad ‘Ali Khān Forūghi Žakā‘ ol-Molk and the Speaker of Parliament Šādeq Ţabāţabā’ī were among Ḥakīmiyān’s influential pupils.\(^9\) Although Ma'rūf'ālishāh’s successor initially followed Zahīr od-Dowlā, Qāsem Tavāngar later parted from his Society of Brotherhood (see below), that he reproached for illegitimate innovations of Sufism.\(^100\)

Ḥajj Sayyed Māhmūd Khān Nā'īnī Ḥeyrat'ālishāh reportedly ‘brought forth a lot of noise’ after Saff'ālishāh died, quarrelled fiercely with Zahīr od-Dowlā, and fled to Mahān. Mahān was, a contemporary Saff’ālishāhī Sufi reminded, an uninhabitable place where the late Shah had done away with exiles. But it also contained the shrine of Shāh Ne'matollāh Vālī, at the foot of which Ḥeyrat'ālishāh


\(^7\) Historical reality has certainly been more complex than the chart in Figure 4 outlines (see below), but given that several Sufis from different sub-branches agreed on it when I presented it to them, I am convinced that at least the main structure must be accurate. I am particularly grateful to 'Monavvar'ālishāh who took the trouble to delve his memory and go over it with me.

\(^8\) CAHĀRDĀHI, 1360/1981-2: 34.


\(^100\) Tavāngar died in the 1960s or early 1970s (verbātim Nima Hazinī, 10/29/99).
built his own Ṣaffā'īlīshāhī lodge. Thus, an early competitor branch was established, located in an untouchable spiritual realm that bore witness to Heyrat’s authentic mystical religiosity. It was to Ḥeyrā’talīshāh and the Mahani rebel lodge that the son of Ṣaffā’īlīshāh retreated as well, when a conflict evolved between the heirs of Ṣaffā’īlīshāh and the new masters of the lodge in Tehran.101

Two other influential sheikhs who were opposed to both the heirs of Ṣaffā’īlīshāh and the new masters surrounding Zahir od-Dowle were ‘Abdollāh Ne’matī (Ḥājjī Dādāsh) and Ḥādī Mowlāvī Gilānī (Vafā’īlīshāhī).102 Vafā’īlīshāhī had been authorised on the Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī path by Niyāz’alīshāh, the successor of Ḥeyrā’talīshāh. However, for some time Vafā’īlīshāhī had also lived in Zahir od-Dowle’s house and been the latter’s Master of Ceremonies (pīr-e dalīl). Some fifty years after the successional conflicts, he was honoured by burial in the graveyard adjacent to the lodge of Zahir od-Dowle’s Society of Brotherhood. Vafā’īlīshāhī took care of the edition of Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī’s tafsīr and The Last Writing of Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī.103

The kind reference to Zahir od-Dowle in the latter publication further moderates the image of militant opposition which later Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī sheikhs project upon Vafā’īlīshāhī.104 The renown of Vafā’īlīshāhī as a prominent Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī Sufi with leadership pretensions had been wide enough for Kasravi to attack him harshly:

Let me cite [an] example of the unclean spirit of the Sufis. A man named Mowlavi was a pupil of Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī [...] (and they say he is now his successor). This man has produced a masnawi about history named ‘Ālam va ādam [...] Two poems from it [...] are to the praise of Timur Leng [...] It is a sign of the darkness of the soul of this person who has completed retraites (chillahā) and traversed ‘stations’ (maqā-

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101 The brother of ṣaffā’īlīshāhī (who also was one of his sheikhs) was named Āqā Rezā Shams ol-‘Orfā 〈Ḥoseyn’alīshāhī (CHAHĀRDAHī, 1361/1982-3: 149).
102 Interview Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī Sufi, 03/25/97; CHAHĀRDAHī, 1360/1981-2: 171. GRAMLICH mentions Ḥājjī Dādāsh and Vafā’īlīshāhī as claimants for the qaṭbīyat after Zahir od-Dowle (1965: 63). This is not confirmed by CHAHĀRDAHī (in either 1360/1981-2 or 1361/1982-3). In any case, both initially opposed but later accepted Zahir od-Dowle’s Society of Brotherhood, if not his leadership (see below).
103 Asrār ol-naqā’ī, ākherin ta’līf-e Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī.
104 One Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī sheikh had Vafā’īlīshāhī as an irreconcilable enemy of the Shah and an aid to the rebel Mirza Kuchek Khan (cf. CHAHĀRDAHī, 1360/1981-2: 43). Another Ṣaffā’īlīshāhī sheikh, however, mentioned that the preface to Vafā’īlīshāhī’s Ālam va ādam contained praise not only of Timur Leng but also Reza Shah.
that after six hundred years he flatters the cruel Timur Leng [...].

A person whose soul is clean, should be disgusted by oppression.\textsuperscript{105}

Three loyalty groups were thus represented in and around the Tehran lodge. First was Zahîr od-Dowlă’s Society of Brotherhood, second were their divided enemies (among whom Heyrat‘alishâ), and third were remaining members of Saf‘alishâ’s family.

Apart from these informal loyalty groups were several Sufis who were reputed to be ‘impartial’ sheikhs (sheykh-e bî-taraf, such as Häjj Sayyed Mîrzâ Naṣrollâh Taqavî).\textsuperscript{106} Some of these sheikhs started their own lines of succession. A prominent ‘independent sheikh’ in the lodge (although successively a pupil of Saf‘alishâ and Zahîr od-Dowlâ, and later on an aide to the Society of Brotherhood) was Maúmân Saf‘î (Saf‘ ol-Molk), with his first and second adjutants and Masters of Ceremonies Dast‘îr and Mośaffè\textsuperscript{107}.

Although none of these groups (that is, including the impartial sheikhs) had sufficient power or skills to oust either of the others, soon after Saf‘alishâ’s death the actual leadership in the order became firmly established in the hands of the Society of Brotherhood.

\textsuperscript{105} KASRAVÎ, 1342/1963-4: 64-5.

\textsuperscript{106} Despite independence, Taqavî reportedly entertained relations with both the heirs of Saf‘alishâ and the Society of Brotherhood (\textit{interviews} with Monavvar‘alishâh, 03/25/97, 09/09/98; CHAHÂRDAH, 1360/1981-2: 57). Taqavî obtained his ‘authorisation’ (ej¿ze) from Saf‘â.

\textsuperscript{107} GRAMLICH, 1965: 64. There is a confusion of names as yet unresolved. Gramlich mentions ‘Dast‘îr’, Chahârdaheh refers to ‘Nûrollâh Daftarî’, “who smoked opium and hashish in the lodge” (1361/1982-3: 164). He was a nephew of the late premier Mośaddeq. Häjj Ahmad Mośaffè (1285/1906-7 - 1310/1931-2) was an employee in the Ministry of Finance who obtained his ej¿ze-ye ershîd from Vâf‘alishâh (\textit{op. cit.}, p. 19). The latter also granted an ej¿ze-ye ershîd to ‘Abbâs Āﬁ, an employee in the Sepâh Bank (\textit{op. cit.}, p. 42).
Figure 4. Initial branching of the Šaffā'īshāhī order

LEGEND. ø: cognomen; ü: genealogically independent; ←: the person to the left was (also) a pupil of the person to the right; (i): Adib Khorāsānī was also known as „Manzūr‘āl-shāh“ and „Adīb al-Orfā‘. Cf. Figure 8., on recent branching.
Relations between the Society and Šafī’alishāh’s heirs grew worse when the two parties began disputing the ownership of the lodge, which had been built by Šafī’alishāh’s sheikh Seyf od-Dowle. The unequalled significance to this day, for Šafī’alishāh Sufis, of the Tehrani site - beyond any other location, including Mahan - consists of its containing the grave of Šafī’alishāh. When the heirs wanted to sell the Tehrani lodge, they were therefore bound to meet with the enmity of Vafī’alishāh, Zahir od-Dowle and Heyrat’alishāh.

Although Šafī’alishāh’s granddaughter Nasrīn Neshā maintains that “Vafī’alishāh, who did not even live in the lodge, one day out of the blue claimed his ownership of the place”, many agree that initial hostilities erupted after Šafī’alishāh’s daughter Bānū Shams ož- Žoḥā requested the whole khānaqāh to be registered as her private property. Vafī’alishāh then went to court to dispute the claim, and the issue remained unsettled for many years. In the end, a judicial ruling ordered for the lodge to be split in two.

**Sufism and Freemasonry**

Yes! It was the Society of Brotherhood that shattered the court of the arrogant ones and that brought the leaders of the time, and the sons of the government of the age […] in conversation with the foqarā’ […].

Mīrzā ‘Ali Khān Qājār Zahir od-Dowle, also known by his Sufi cognomen Šafī’alishāh, was the son-in-law of Nāṣer od-Din Shāh and his Minister of Ceremonies. According to a canonised tradition still current among several Tehrani Sufis, Zahir od-Dowle was sent to Šafī’alishāh by the king, who mistrusted the concentration of social power in his Sufi circles. But the Qajar courtier became irresistibly captivated, instead, by the forceful personality of Šafī’alishāh.

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33 Interview Nasrīn Neshā, 07/20/97.
33 After the court ruling, Shams ož-Žoḥā reportedly remained in her part of the lodge. VAHĪDNTĀ (1352/1973: 256) claimed she remained in its 'surroundings'.
33 GRAMLICH (1965: 63) held that ‘Zahir od-Dowle’ was Šafī’alishāh’s second man and Heyrat’alishāh just a pretender. ‘Zahir od-Dowle’ was supposedly recognised by the majority as Šafī’alishāh’s successor. The above conflicts, however, suggest otherwise. The techniques; shaming, discrediting and stressing the urgency of reform, were also documented of the Ahl-e Haqq (MIR-HOSSEINI, 1994, (2)).
Figure 5. Sketch-map of the main Şaf'ālīshāhī lodge before the partition (see below), drawn by Monavvar‘alīshāhī, 04/04/97
In a test of his new pupil’s sincerity, Ṣaffā’alishāh then sent Zahir od-Dowle begging in the bazaar of Tehran. The Qajar noble humbly accepted and carried out the initiatory mission.

On December 18, 1899, seven months after the death of Ṣaffā’alishāh, Zahir od-Dowle officially founded the Society of Brotherhood (Anjoman-e okhovvat) within the Ṣaffā’alishāhi order. It gained the protection of a royal decree by Mozaffar ed-Din Shāh (ruled 1896-1907). As constitutionalist ideas were current in the Society of Brotherhood, Zahir od-Dowle fell out of grace with Muḥammad ʿAlī Shāh, who sacked the Society (in Zahir od-Dowle’s house) in revenge. Zahir’s son was arrested. Some Sufis reportedly fought along with government forces during the Constitutional Revolution, but at least three pro-constitutionalist Ṣaffā’alishāhs were killed. Beyond verbal agitation after the revolution, Zahir od-Dowle’s own role remains unclear. When the revolution was over, relations between the Society of Brotherhood and the royal court were not breached, as the new king Ahmad Shāh and his crown prince developed an interest in it. Until the ascent of the Pahlavi dynasty, the family of Zahir od-Dowle retained a royal salary. With the coming to power of Reza Shah’s regime, royal patronage came to a temporary halt, but not the Society of Brotherhood’s political life. It had been a long time before dying physically, according to legend, that Zahir od-Dowle had (spiritually) ‘died to the world’. He acted his last public part as governor of Tehran up to 1922, however, (only)

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113 Chahardāhī, 1361/1982-3: 44; Anwār, 1987: 88. The Society of Brotherhood was also called Okhovvat-e Ṣaffā’alishāh [Brotherhood of Ṣaffā’alishāh] (Gramlich, 1965: 63). It was probably the first major Society during the reign of Mozaffar ed-Din Shāh (cf. Ḥoseynī, 1377/1998: 10).
115 Ṣāfā’ī (1344/1965-6) has written a biography of ʿZahir od-Dowle’ in his ‘Leaders of the Constitutional Revolution’. He did not, however, contribute evidence to support his inclusion. The ideological fusion of Freemasonry and Sufism, in the sense that terms from either tradition were used to describe the other, was further openly stressed in Adīb ol-Mamālek’s famous, masonic poem from 1907, Āʿīn-e farāmāsān va farāmāshkhāne (cf. Algar, 1970: 288-9).
two years before his death. His successors in the Society of Brotherhood included similarly influential men of the world.

Zahir od-Dowle had self-consciously combined politics and mysticism, as he “brought Sufism into the shape of [...] a political party.” It was objected that “Sufism was an excuse for his political work”, while others would stress it had been ‘mysticism in the service of society’. In either case, the focus of mysticism had widened beyond the traditional, atomistic individualism: after the Constitutional Revolution, the Society organised festivities for the ‘national victory’. Because of the Society of Brotherhood, the Šafī’alishāhī order obtained its largest numerical growth.

From the beginning, Freemasonry embodied the political and mystical ideals in the Society of Brotherhood. There were historical and structural reasons for this. Reform-minded individuals in the Qajar court who found intellectual inspiration in its Western and elite ideals and sufficient protection in its secrecy carried Freemasonry in Iran. As the Iranian nation in the Constitutional Revolution and the nation-state under Reza Shah became markers of legitimate identity, the Society of Brotherhood could open up, in the sense of becoming more public. It did not ever, however, come close to being a democratic organisation. In sudden awareness, one Šafī’alishāhī sheikh expressed amazement to me of his having been in the order for nearly forty years without knowing very precisely who had been the board members in the Society of Brotherhood. The Society of Brotherhood remained public and nation-oriented externally, but secretive and hierarchical like Freemasonry, internally.

Iranian Freemasonry had come about from exile contacts with European representatives of the mother branches in Europe: the

120 Šafa’ī, 1344/1965-6: 10.
121 Šafa’ī, 1344/1965-6: 39.
123 The main reason for Sufism and Freemasonry, rather than other traditions, to have fused, lay in structural resemblances that gave them natural proximity: “Resemblances may [...] be noted between the Masonic lodge and many Sufi brotherhoods: a clandestine or semi-clandestine organization; a ceremony of initiation; the claim to esoteric knowledge; and disdain for the outward forms of established religion are all shared [...] Such similarities may have played some role in the preparation of prominent Iranians for entry to masonic [...] groupings” (Algar, 1970: 291).
Scottish and the German Grand Lodges and the French Grand Orient. Four small groups were connected to the German branch in Iran, that were to develop into independent lodges by the names of Mehr (Affection), Čťď (Sunshine), Vďď (Fidelity), and Şťď (Purity). Żahir od-Dowlé’s Sufi/Freemasonry organisation was directly related to Şťď (see next chapter), but all four Iranian lodges were to hold their meetings in Ferdowsi Avenue, in Tehran, “in the [administrative] centre of the Society of Brotherhood.”

Thus, the Society of Brotherhood would assume a central position in Freemasonry networks, and possibly already did in the Reza Shah era. One contemporary observer held it to have been “the congregational centre of the Freemasons and their secret sessions” [my emphasis]. Contesting the alleged status-equality in the Society of Brotherhood’s outward representations of self, it has been remarked of the leaders that “many [...] were eminent figures of their day” and that “their presence in the Society of Brotherhood [...] did much to extend the influence of Sufism in the [...] upper classes.”

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124 The international freemasons had reached an agreement on the admission of new lodges in 1929 (Pândah-e khorđâd, 1375/1996, 5, (22): 78). It is conveniently stressed, in and outside Iran, that Freemasonry spread with the British Empire. However, the first Iranian Freemasons were expatriates, in Europe (cf. Katřrâ1, 1355/1976-7), who brought back Freemasonry with them as an état importé (cf. Badie, 1992). One author considers Mīrzâ Şāleš Şhrâži, who was sent to England by Amîr Kâbir, and who wrote a diary about his experiences in 1817 and 1818, the first Iranian who became a Freemason (Qadımâr Irân ke vâred-e Farâmâşt in Pândah-e khorđâd, 1375/1996, 5, (22): 76. A fifth related lodge was Setār-ye šahr (Morningstar). “The Charter for these [five] lodges was obtained by a group of Iranians, most of whom were Sufis” (communication 12/07/98, via the Supreme Council of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States of America).

125 Żahir od-Dowlé’s Sufi/Freemasonry organisation was directly related to Şťď (see next chapter), but all four Iranian lodges were to hold their meetings in Ferdowsi Avenue, in Tehran, “in the [administrative] centre of the Society of Brotherhood.”

126 CHAHÂRDAH (1361/1982-3: 167) and RAJîN (1357/1978: 499), reported early connections between the Society and the French Grand Orient and (related) Iranian Bidârî lodges, but the content of these alleged ties, except for the fact that many members of the Anjoman were also initiates of the Bidârî lodge (ALGAR, “Nîmat-Allâh”, Encyclopaedia of Islam), remains rather obscure.

On 18 December 1923 Zahir od-Dowle had appointed Sayyed Mohammad Khan Entezam as-Saltane (Binesh'alishâh) as his successor. Häjjî ʻAbdollâh Nî'matî (Häjî Dâdish), who had joined Zahir od-Dowle as a seventeen-year-old and led his lodge in Kermanshah from 1911, disagreed and continued his own Society in Kermanshah, in the traditions of Āfu'llishâh. Some claim that Binesh'alishâh soon gave up his position, but he and Häjî Dâdish remained at the head of separate branches. The successional conflict not only reflected personal strife. It also involved mutually exclusive contestations of the nature of spiritual authority. Gramlich writes: “Mit dem Tode des [Zahir od-Dowle] ist f..."
Hajji Dadash’s Magazine of Brotherhood

Among the few material traces that are known to be left of Hajji Dadash, is the Magazine of Brotherhood (Majalle-ye okhovvat), which he founded and directed in Kermanshah. The Sufism which Hajji Dadash professed may be reconstructed in its broad outlines with the help of the Magazine of Brotherhood’s first twelve issues. In adherence to both Zahir od-Dowle and Safi alishah, the contributions to them explored current, worldly affairs and in many cases related them to patriotic or nationalist themes. Retaining his claim to traditional spiritual authority in terms of Sufi organisation, Hajji Dadash represented a modernist Sufism ideologically.

The Magazine of Brotherhood was modern because it was decisively this-worldly. It discussed ‘progressive’ themes, such as the meaning of the Wahhabi reform in Islam (1307/1928, 10-1: 29-32), in its section on The Islamic World of Today. There was no mention of the Wahhabites’ hatred of both Sufism and Shi‘ism, and the author (S. Vahdat, the name written according to the Western convention) instead estimated that they marked the beginning of ‘the grand awakening of Muslims’ (p. 32). The Magazine contained sections not only on the world of Islam and Iranian society, but also - uniquely, interspersing traditional poetry, treatises on Love and Truth and moral exhortations - a contribution on economy (1307/1928, 8: 6).

One example of straight-out patriotism had ‘What is more effective for the arousal of feelings: poetry or music?’ (1307/1928-9, 10-1: 9-13) as a title. The author pondered the mobilising effect of the French Marseillaise but concluded that poetry would be more effective in Iran, on condition that it would be unified with music (p. 13).

Patriotism blended with progressive themes, especially in discussions on and by women. ‘Patriotism is the first duty for women’, one article held (1307/1928, 3: 20), rather than, for instance, the more

133 In Tehran, the Society of Brotherhood had a magazine named Majm‘e-ye akhlq, in Kermanshah it had (besides Majalle-ye okhovvat) a newspaper named Khabak-e gharb (which, according to Chahar Dahi, 1360/1981-2: 54, was published by Hajji Dadash as well) and in Shiraz it had a newspaper named Okhovvat (Hoseyni, 1377/1998: 31-3). Majalle-ye okhovvat published some of Zahir od-Dowle’s poetry, obtained by means of Hajji Dadash (Afshar, 1367/1988: 453). According to Homayuni (1371/1992: 326), Hajji Dadash published the Magazine ‘for a few years’. I am not aware of scientific analyses of these sources in explorations of the history of the Anjoman.
traditional concern for personal chastity. The author first referred to ‘civilised nations’ in which women played considerable roles, then to Turkey, as an ‘Eastern country’ which had successfully copied the Western achievement, and ended with a call to Iranian women to do likewise and not be discouraged by resistance. Ş. Vahdat considered (contemporary) contact between Asian Muslims and Christian Europeans to have resulted in certain (positive) developments, among which were the emergence of constitutional governments in Islamic countries, and the codification of women’s rights (1307/1928, 8: 27).

Eight years before Reza Shah ordered the unveiling of women, Badr ol-Molûk Mostowfizâde expressed her opinion on ‘the veil and chastity’ (1307/1928, 4: 15-8). Through formal reasoning, she established there were no moral barriers for women to lay off the veil. Then she asked: When and Where?, to which she responded: not, certainly, now in Iran. For moral corruption prevailed, and in order for the veil to be removed, first men and women needed to be educated. Women needed to understand betrayal of their husbands as of the gravest sins to holy law. Men should become aware that maltreatment of their compatriot sisters was a sin legally and socially. For women, freedom from the veil would now be traded against the freedom which was provided for them in honour and chastity. “It is strange”, Mostowfizâde concluded, “that most of our intellectuals ask why women in civilised countries do not have veils. Dear Sir! Over there they do not have so much moral corruption [...].”

Binâshî’s elective assembly

Binâshî, vice-president of the Society’s Consultancy Council before becoming its leader and Zâhir od-Dowle’s ‘sheikh of sheikhs’, was for some time the director-general in the Interior Ministry under

134 Somewhat earlier, a development similar to the emergence of the Majalle-ye okhovvat had occurred in the Zâr-Reyâsatîn branch. In 1912 (Muneṣâlî’s, the master of Javad Nurbakhsh, had founded “the Fars printing press, from which he personally edited and distributed the important newspaper Ihyâ (Renaissance). The publication of this newspaper under his direction caused the people of Fars, or rather all Iranians, to become more conscious of the true rights of their national heritage” [italics mine] (NURBAKHSH, 1980: 118).
NEW MYSTIC REGIMES

Reza Shah.135 Under his leadership, a ‘new order’ came into existence, in which “they ended the institution of the Pole.”136

Although developments under Bīnesh‘alishāh compared to his own innovations, Keyvān Qazvīnī held the thriving of the Society of Brotherhood to have been “related to the personality of Zahir od-Dowle, not to [its alleged] real/true Sufism. Consequently, it would have dissolved after Zahir od-Dowle.137 But it did not, despite the lack of a charismatic leader and in spite of Sufism’s spoiled identity under Reza Shah. Influential courtiers remained in the Society of Brotherhood and its fourth leader, Farajollāh Āqvālī, pursued his impressive military and bureaucratic career under the king.138 Bīnesh‘alishāh’s son ‘Abdollāh Entezām, the fifth leader, entered the Foreign Service in 1919 and worked as a valued diplomat in Washington, Prague, Bern, and in Germany. From 1936 he entered into a long-lasting friendship with the king’s son.139

Contrary to the other Șaf‘alishāhī lineages, the Society of Brotherhood was tightly organised. People could be officially removed, while in Șaf‘alishāh’s main lodge a persona non grata would be pushed, pestered or harassed until he left on his own accord.140 Entry into the organisation was similarly formalised, and made conditional upon the intercession of two persons deemed reliable. Central offices existed for the administration of the membership flow, general finance, and alms collection.141 The Society’s conception of modern self was further seen in that, while most orders to this day congregate on rugs, uneven in shape, colour and size, the Society possessed “102 chairs that were all alike”. The usage of chairs had its origin among

138 Cf. Iran Almanac 1969, p. 740, and his biography in Yād-nāme-ye Shāh Darvāzeh Sepahbod Farajollāh Āqvālī (2536/1977). When I inquired about regime relations, a Sufi in the lodge of Zahir od-Dowle recollected the story of a visit by the king, Reza Shah, he said, had once passed by the lodge and he had seen a Sufi engaged in work. The Shah had then said: “Dervish, do not hit the nail in the tree.” The fatherly reproach as conceived by this Sufi, I take it, meant an implicit recognition of his Sufi order’s rightful existence.
140 This treatment awaited the son of Șaf‘alishāh after his father’s death. Critics of the order’s Freemason domination often refer to this episode to state their case.
westernising Qajar princes in the royal court, i.e. an origin among the likes of Zahir od-Dowle. It was these and similar “changes in the ceremonies” that even Chahardahi, faithful disciple of the modernist Qazvini, found excessive. Zahir od-Dowle had not founded a new order in the Sufi sense of the word, and the innovations which he initiated had been unauthorised “according to the laws of Sufism.”

The Society of Brotherhood was as centralised an organisation as many Sufi orders, but contrary to Sufism elsewhere it had ‘interpretation/exegesis by opinion’ (tafsir be ra’y), instead of the sheikh’s dictates. These and other ‘exoteric features’ (sef-e zaheri) were and are in retrospect held against the Society of Brotherhood and its ‘worldly’ (donyavi) behaviour. The complaints point to a leadership collectivity that led the Society since its foundation - the Consultancy Council (heyat-e moshavere). The Consultancy Council had ellipsed around the founder and below him Bineshalishah - as ‘sheikh of sheikhs’ and as its vice-president. Personalised authority was retained after Zahir od-Dowle died and Bineshalishah took the leadership upon himself. But Bineshalishah himself did not appoint a successor - neither in the Consultancy Council or the Society of Brotherhood, nor in the Safi-alishah order at large.

In a far-reaching administrative reform that must have occurred during Bineshalishah’s leadership or soon thereafter, “the sheikhs and the Poles were abolished.” The balance decisively shifted towards the Consultancy Council, the ‘leader’ (ra’is) of which was no more than first among equals. The leaders who came after

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143 Chahardahi, 1360/1981-2: 56. The French traveller to Iran Eugène Aubin made an interesting observation of Iranian Sufism (probably on the basis of encounters in Tehran), which has not been mentioned in later, authoritative accounts: “J’ai vu chez les derviches de véritables chapelles, où les cierges brûlaient devant l’image d’Ali” (1908: 471). Although detailed accounts of Sufi religiosity in nineteenth century Qajar Iran are lacking (and one thus lacks a comparative measure for the preceding era), the observed ‘christologie’ might possibly reflect the context of Sufi religious renewal that Chahardahi referred to and that this chapter is concerned with.
144 Interview Monavvar’alishah, 03/25/97.
146 Cf. Gramlich, 1965: 64; Fragner, 1979: 124. The Society did not completely sever its ties with what had formerly defined the shape of Sufism, as the Consultancy Council was entitled to appoint sheikhs in the Society’s name for the ‘guidance’ (dastgiri) of the Sufis. Until 1959, the Council had not, according to Gramlich (1965: 64) made use of this right. Safi-alishah Sufis that I spoke to contested this account, and mentioned sheikhs appointed by the Council, whose
Bineshalishah did not bother with the traditional tokens of legitimate spiritual authority: dream instructions by Shi‘ite Imams, notables or the Prophet, genealogical proximity, or letters and personal communications of appointment. Their being chosen through restricted election by the Consultancy Council (that was not accountable or responsive to the Sufis it led) was sufficient. The Society of Brotherhood that throughout its existence maintained it headed a Sufi organisation, had as its leaders people who did not ‘pretend to ‘disclosure and vision’ (kashf-o-shohad), and neither, like the other sheikhs of the path, to supernatural things [...].”147

* * *

The Sa‘falahi order travelled two distinct, modern paths. On the one hand, the Society of Brotherhood modernised organisationally, through Freemasonry. Its nationally powerful elite did not confront the Shah’s autocracy, and its modernism evolved from self-proclaimed democratic reform-mindedness to political silence.

As Freemasonry internationally, its elite leadership structure did not prevent appeals going out to ‘the high and the low’ - the Iranian nation at large. The Society heralded progress through the elective principle, while causing an unbridgeable gap: for Sufis, the Consultancy Council leaders had become unapproachable men in high places. Their doing away with the traditional authority structure matched the reformist ideologies of Sangelaj in Shi‘ism and Qazvinî in Sufism, both of which - similarly - had the particular modernity of Reza Shah’s Iran as a context. By effectively abolishing gene-

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alogically motivated, charismatic and unitary leadership, the Society effected Iranian Sufism’s most far-reaching reform ever.148

On the other hand, Hājjī Dādāsh more radically reoriented mysticism toward the here-and-now of the Iranian nation, while retaining his claims to traditionally legitimate spiritual authority. His Magazine of Brotherhood is not easily interpreted as an ‘ideological state institution’ - a label which in certain respects fit the Society of Brotherhood. While the king’s blend of nationalistic modernisation involved the violent imposition of a unitary identity, the Magazine rather offered discussions of it. Contrary to the vertical chain of command in the Society, finally, Majalle-ye okhovvat hosted a wide range of authors, male and female, with widely differing views.

Beyond individual differences, however, Nematollahi Sufism in Tehran and Kermanshah bore witness to a common social transformation. The new mystic regimes of Hājjī Dādāsh and Bīnesh’ālishāhī did not classify as Messianic ‘Religions of the Oppressed’ (LANTERNARI, 1965), which do not emerge automatically where West-inspired modernisation confronts indigenous religiosity. To the contrary, the Šaf’ālishāhīs featured ‘authentic’ modernist voices. Previously a ‘vertical’ sect - laterally isolated, oriented up towards sheikh and king149 - the Šaf’ālishāhī order split and developed into several national, ‘horizontal’150 organisations, in the context of the nation-state.

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148 The third leader Marzbān later recollected: “The Society [...] rendered valuable services for the [...] education of the people [...] It was [...] a pioneer” (in AFŠHĀR, 1367/1988: 64-9).

149 This double authority structure is evident in the biography of Ṣaf’ā’alishāhī. His tafsīr included a laudation of Nāser od-Dīn Shāh. Demanding absolute obedience to himself, he forbade his flock to speak against the Shah’s views, either in private or in public (HOSEYNI (1377/1998: 17-8).

150 For a discussion of these concepts in the Iranian context, see ABRAHAMIAN (1973). Kasravi’s resistance against religious sects was led by the belief that they constituted states within the state (op. cit., p. 283). KASRAVİ felt that “nowadays in Iran [...] there are several institutions which, without crown and throne, rule like kings” (1342/1963-4: 107).
Résumé

The Ne'matollahi orders lost much of their exterior power through the Constitutional Revolution and under Reza Shah because their intimate state ties were cut. Sufism transformed with the new regimes, as the nation(-state) became a prime marker of legitimate identity. But rather than silent victims of state oppression, the Ne'matollahihs seized opportunities and developed ‘authentic’ modern voices. While nationalistic modernisation involved the imposition of a unitary identity for the nation, Hajji Dadash’s magazine rather offered pluralistic discussion of it. A second aspect of the transformation, was the emergence of new master-disciple relations. The Ne'matollahihs faced new cohesion problems in contestations of traditional spiritual authority, which mirrored Sangeloji’s modernist struggle in Shi’ism. The transformation of Iranian Sufism occurred on all three relational levels of mystic regimes.

Internally, nationalism, nationalistic modernisation and the dismantling of traditional power bases that occurred in their name, were paralleled by Sufi struggles for spiritual authority. Sufi masters and disciples took issue with self-explanatory, charismatic rule. What motivated them was never democracy, but rational - that is: reasoned - rule. What they asked for, if often implicitly, was relevance to the nation-state. Qazvinî dismissed traditional Sufi authority as nationally dysfunctional. It was Bineshalishah’s elective assembly, however, - one bridge too far to match the taste of Qazvinî - that acted and uncompromisingly abolished traditional spiritual authority.

Externally, nationalism and nationalistic modernisation provided contexts for both lateral relations to other religious regimes and vertical relations to the state. The Society of Brotherhood publicly propagated a national religiosity and its elite members, such as Bineshalishâh and Entezâm, were personally involved in the nation’s construction by the state. They did so, respectively, through working for the nation-state’s establishment at home and by representing it abroad. In the Soltan’alishâh order, Nür’alishâh appealed to the nation in a bit for support of his leadership claim. The genesis of Şâleh’s Advice lay in the perception of state concerns for Sufi orderliness. The Soltan’alishâhis addressed these concerns through the prescription of a generalised Shi’ite religiosity, for the lateral regime of the (national) Shi’ite community.
CHAPTER FOUR
CONTRARY MYSTIC REGIMES, 1941-1979

Emblematic texts such as ‘Under the royal patronage of her Imperial Majesty Farah Pahlavi the Shahbanou of Iran’ accompanied many publications in Iran in the post-war period. Patronage, in the sense of an exchange of favours for loyalty, was a dominant mode of relating in Iranian society. Royal patronage obtained in the strong sense of an exchange of social benefits for public allegiance to the monarchy, and in the weaker sense of ideological incorporation. Even physical proximity to royalty counted, in the autocratic late Pahlavi environment, as one of its signs. Both types of patronage were enabled primarily through the royalty’s recruitment of a network from among elite networks. Its second defining characteristic was the extension of relations to the lowest nodes in the status hierarchy - from the ‘shadow of God on earth’ to proverbial vagabonds, and lastly, royal patronage extended to Sufism.

A closer look at Sufism’s ideological incorporation could modify a dominant and rather flat image of the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah - as one of inherently militant religiosity, trampled by a despotically secular monarch. The process through which Shi‘ism in the end became predominantly militant, involved nearly four decades of cultural battle for political and religious authority, between societal and state actors, with certain versions of Sufism as royal weapons. Sufism in the period 1941-1979 would thus remain as enigmatic, without the political context of royal patronage, as Opus Dei without its flawless embedding in Franco’s ‘nationally catholic Spain’.

1 Taḥt-e tavajjoh-e ‘aliya-ye ‘olyā ḥaẓrat-e shāhbanū Farah Pahlavi.
2 Cf. studies on the ‘circle’ (dowre or ḫulqa) such as Bill (1973) and Zonis (1971).
3 Cf. Zonis (1971); Behnam (1986); Sanghvi (1968).
4 This characteristic is expressive of Iranian social mobility, exemplified in Morier’s Hajji Baba of Isfahan, and since Morier observed by many travellers to and analysts of Iran. Bradburd stressed that the extensive networks of royal patronage assumed a pyramidal shape (1983: 30).
5 The vision is partly seen in Algar (1972), who claimed Shi‘ism was essentially rebellious. It was contested by Floor (1983) with respect to Iranian jurists’ alleged revolutionary character.
What follows is a discussion of Sufism’s royal patronage in the period 1941-1979, and its partial transformation, as a religious tradition, into a regime-bound discourse. Secondly, the Şaf’alishahî order’s social prominence is related to royal patronage. Lastly, the emergence of religious opposition in the Solţân-alishahî order is discussed in relation to its effective balancing act between royal and clerical loyalties.

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The mutual attractions and interrelations of royalty and mysticism constitute a recurrent motif in Iranian monarchical and Ne’matollâh history. 7 Shâh Ne’matollâh proposed worldly rulers to function as military transmitters of Sufi Truth; Nûr’alishâh warned rulers that the neglect of Sufism’s superiority would be to their own peril; Karîm Khân Zand died six month after he expelled the Ne’matollâhî Sufis from Shiraz, Moḥammad Shâh was initiated by and surrounded himself with Ne’matollâhîs; and Reza Shah’s ascent to power had several Sufi claimants.

The theory of religious regimes postulates an immanent developmental logic, in which the growth of religious regimes increases organisational complexity, making them more like, and possibly transforming them into, states. States rather than religious regimes, however, have in the long run monopolised the means of taxation and violence. It has been argued in chapter two that Ne’matollâhî development proceeded through trilateral figurations, in which the exterior measure of state centralisation was crucial. Where state power was weak, as in the transition to Qajar rule, the Ne’matollâhî regime assumed state-like properties in its conceptions of self as a parallel power. The Pahlavi restoration could not tolerate such parallel power, whether it existed in tribes, autonomy-aspiring regions, or in Sufism. Reza Shah relied on repression and co-option, respectively, towards Khâksâr and Solţân-alishâhî Sufis.

When Mohammad Reza Shah inherited his father’s state in 1941, most centrifugal threats had been subdued. The positive relations that would from 1941 onwards develop between monarchy and mysticism, therefore, compare in some ways to Sufism’s nineteenth century absorption into Qajar court society. Dynastic rule firmly established, Sufism had lost its potential state-like properties, providing useful counter-weight to religiously and politically assertive jurists. Because of the

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following they commanded, Sufi masters were useful political brokers of monarchical ideology, to the subjects or the nation at large. However, there were also concerns more intrinsically religious than the desire to divide-and-rule, for the royal usage of Sufism.

Beyond the promise of personal salvation, Sufism offered a doctrine of empowerment. Herein probably lies an important reason why it was Sufis rather than, for instance, monarchy-minded jurists, to whom royals were particularly drawn. There was no provision in Shi'ism for a caliph, let alone a king, but the idea of divine power vested in the physical person of a leader was what defined Shi'ite Sufism - as it did the former state religion of Zoroastrism, the main pillar of royal legitimisation.

It was a universal longing that must have played in the royal attraction to Sufism: the need for blessing by those who possess ‘higher knowledge’, for a mystical sanction of ambiguous, worldly power.

Power had to be relocated from the profanity of human interventions - the throne had come through the British - to be reunified with the (super)natural order of things. The kind of longing, that is, which brought together Katharina and Rasputin, and made credible the Soltan'ali Shah sheikh who predicted the unlikely reign of Reza Shah in the eyes of the king. In Frazerian analysis, these mystical sanctions make the king into “a being apart [...] who articulates the natural and cultural orders [and] this ritual function is the foundation of the political function of royalty.”

Sufism, then, represented potential for royalty’s empowerment.

The recognition of power was mutual, in Sufism’s late twentieth century royal relations. Asked about the nature of Sufi ties to the Pahlavi dynasty, a Sufi riddled that “the king remains [always] as the sea.” In addition to being a source of material rewards, that is, the sovereign represented sacrosanct - holy and dangerous - power in person. An essay addressing Sufi influences in Iranian culture stated that:

[One] manifestation of the other self (man-e digar) (in the station of controlling the lower self) consists of the relation between the ruler and the ruled. Politics and the legal machinery are areas in which the particulars of this kind of relations become clearer. In Iran, kings have always been seen as the representatives of God [...] In this regard [...] one could consider the king as that ‘higher power’, whose existence is a symbol of the

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8 De Heusch (1996: 213). I use Frazer’s ‘sacred kingship’ only as an analogy, and it is not implied that a central mechanism in it - the king’s ritual slaughter - is what also happened to the Pahlavi king.

9 My paraphrase of Padeshah mesl-e daryâ mi-mânad (interview, 06/19/97).
other self. That is to say: a symbol of the self controlling the lower [bes-
tial] soul (nafs-e sofî) [my insertions].

* * *

Farah Diba made friends with the painter İrân Darrûdi when they stud-
eyed together in Paris in 1959. Darrûdi was interested in Sufi mysticism,
and it was she who reportedly took Farah to a Sufi lodge several times.11
The Shah’s twin-sister Ashraf was held to have visited several khâna-
qâhs as well, one of them being located in the private living quarters of
Şâdeq, son of Mohammad ʿAnqâ, the leader of the Oveysî order.12

In 1976, Mohammad ʿAnqâ was mentioned as an exponent of organi-
sed Sufism whose ideas remained unknown.13 It is not just post-revolu-
tion discrediting that engages him, in retrospect, in an ideology beyond
the self-contained, spiritual Sufi life. “[The Sufis] Şâdeq ʿTabâtabâi and
[...] ʿAnqâ and [...] people from the elite gathered [...] and occupied
themselves with [...] political matters.”14 ʿAnqâ himself acknowledged
he engaged in politics, and his (Sufi) son ʿAli was a Senate delegate.15

10 AHMADI, 1375/1997: 55 (in Kiyân, 6, (34)).
11 Cf. BALDICK, 1993: 28. The contact between Farah Diba and Darrûdi had come
about through Farah’s mother (DARRUDI, 1377/1998: 96), who lived next door to
Darrûdi’s mother. In an interview (09/22/98), Darrûdi did not, unfortunately but under-
standably, wish to discuss her relations to Farah Diba with me, let alone the Sufi com-
ponent, in any detail. Mrs Diba (Farah’s mother) was (in)famous for being a dervish.
The Shah’s Minister of Court ALAM (1991: 387-8) wrote in his diary on 13 September
1974: “Told [the Shah] that Mrs Diba still longs to be awarded the Order of Khosroid
(‘The Sun’) reserved for members of the royal family. She never refers to it by name,
but goes on and on about ‘the other decoration’ [...] ‘How peculiar’, HIM remarked. ‘Tell
her that it doesn’t befit her status as a self-confessed dervish to covet such baubles’.”
Elsewhere the Shah was quoted as referring to Farah and ‘the vanity of this dervish
mother of hers’ (op. cit., p. 472). On 19 September 1976: “Sought HIM’s permission to
pay Mrs Diba’s expenses for a trip to Romania. ‘By all means’, he said, laughing; ‘Our
dear Mrs Dervish hopes Mrs Aslan’s treatment will restore her to the bloom of youth’.” Mrs
Aslan claimed to have discovered the secret of eternal youth and had prominent
Western politicians amongst her patients (op. cit., p. 511, footnote).
12 Interview ʿAli Ḥasûrî, 04/16/97, who claimed he gave me a first-hand account.
13 BAGLEY, 1976: 61. Farah was the Shah’s third wife. They married in 1959. ʿAnqâ,
before establishing his own order, had been a disciple of Keyvân Qazvîni
(CHAHÂRDÂH, 1356/1977: 82).
14 CHAHÂRDÂH, 1361/1982-3: Text photo appendix. ʿAnqâ and ʿTabbâbâî, for-
merly a Speaker of Parliament, had been pupils of the influential Ṣaffâlîshâhî sheikh
Mohammad Hakîmîyân. Hakîmîyân was buried in ʿTabbâbâî’s graveyard in Shahr-e
Rey (HOMAYOUNI, 1371/1992: 304).
15 ʿAli ʿAnqâ was a pupil of Sabzavârî, a pre-revolution khâtîb in the main
Ṣaffâlîshâhî lodge.
Moḥammad ḤAnqā held important state functions, among which was the leadership of the Shah’s Special Office. He was explicit about the purpose of his teaching, which he said was ‘not all gnostic mysticism’: “There is a very [...] political side to it [...] The message is that in politics as in life itself, what makes for the realization of being in its positive manifestation is beautiful, what does not is ugly [...] All who are interested only in gain in the world become rebellious to the masters who [...] point them the right way.” In these passages, ḤAnqā’s discourse testifies to the development of a theosophical mysticism - initiated in 1942 by Irānshahr’s doctrine of ‘neo-Sufism’ - which was as elitist and transnational (German, Swiss, Iranian) as Corbin’s orientalism, and which proclaimed universal harmony as much as ḤAnqā did. As theosophical mysticism linked up with ‘scientific’ practices (magneticism, spiritism), ḤAnqā brought Sufism in line with astrology and physics.

ḤAnqā’s esoteric words were moreover decisively anti-liberal, and in this sense they matched a nineteenth century brand of religiosity which features with great clarity in two of Dostoyevsky’s characters. Humble Alyosha in ‘The Brothers Karamazov’ resists the rational rebellion of his brother Ivan in trust of divine order, and the optimistic prince Myshkin in ‘The Idiot’ exclaims that ‘beauty will save the world.’ Contrary to these characters, however, not so humble ḤAnqā aspired to shape the national destiny on the political plane. His was a vision - adopted by many Sufis who shared in royal patronage - that may be grasped as Platonic, in a political sense.

‘ḤAnqā’s Platonism projected a pure, natural, hierarchical order, which was threatened by the pollution of political dissent: “In our age of turmoil, the virtues that bring men towards [...] oneness have been thrown over for the vices that tear men apart. Tenderness in the body politic is killed and men become ready for any sort of rebellion [...] however others may suffer.” The way to a ‘true political reform’ that would end

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17 BROWN, 1358/1979: xix.
19 The influence of (Neo-)Platonism on Shi‘ite esoterism (in Iranian Sufism in particular) has been enormous. See Henry CORBIN’s En Islam iranien, vol. ii (1971). Plato’s reception in Islam by philosophers such as al-Fārābī has focused on the question of a ruler’s ideal characteristics as the basis for the ideal state. In Sufi conceptions of such a state one finds many statements that stipulate a ‘gnostic-king’, a variation that does not deviate in essence from Plato’s ‘philosopher-king’-concept.
20 BROWN, 1358/1979: xix.
all political friction, i.e. not the path of antagonism engaged in by oppositional politics, was achieved “only as man begins to penetrate the illusion of the sensuous in politics as in his own life.” Then, “true harmony between ruler and ruled will be achieved.”21 In ‘Anqā’s brand of mysticism, the monarchy was in safe hands.

The empress’s royal patronage was primarily conducted from an Office for Social and Cultural Affairs suggested to her by Seyyed Hossein Nasr,22 a Sufi, Islamic scholar, head of Farah Diba’s Office in the last months of the Shah’s regime, patron of the multilingual, theosophical magazine Sophia Perennis/Jāvidān kherād and director of the Imperial Academy of Philosophy. It was “one of the intellectual tasks” of the Imperial Academy of Philosophy, over which Farah in turn presided as a patroness23 “to explicate Sufism in the context of Iran’s modernity.”24

Nasr’s views - on Sufism, Islam, Iran’s modernity - promoted, like ‘Anqā’s, a conservation of the powers that be: “What is going to induce man, whom all the external forces of human society during recent times have been pushing to [...] outwardness [...] to [...] turn towards the inner pole [...] If some think that [...] political resolutions will achieve such ends they are mistaken.”25 Contrary to Ṣḥāḥ-Muḥammad and ‘Alī-‘Anqā, Nasr was not explicit in his aspirations after a public role in political office. But he shared with the ‘Anqā Sufi family a perspective that opposed the authentic to oppositional Islam. On the eve of the revolution he stated:

[V]olcanic eruptions and powerful waves of a political nature associated with [...] Islam [...] and Shi‘ism in particular have made an authentic knowledge of things Islamic imperative, lest ignorance destroy the very foundations of human society and the relations which enable discourse

21 BROWN, 1358/1979: xix, cf. HOMAYÜNI (1991: 218), for another Master’s Platonistic Corporatism: “I gave a lecture on strikes [and] stressed the fact that, in my opinion, they are always detrimental, not only to workers and employers, but to society and the country itself.” Homayūni was among the leaders of the Irān Novin and Rastakhīz political parties, both of which were the Shah’s creations, in effect his ‘loyal opposition’. Unlike Indian and British Theosophy as described by VAN DER VEER (1996), Homayūni’s international Theosophy was (just like Iranian Sufism), regime religiosity.
22 EILERS, 1977: 323. Rumour has it Nasr forced the office on Farah Diba.
24 NASR, 1967: 61-2. Nasr is resented for his role as a government aid and refusal to repent. The damage to Sufism is suggested by curses encountered by FISCHER during fieldwork, prior to the revolution, in Qom: “Nasr - you know why we don’t like him, because he is trying to turn Islam into Sufism” (1980: 143) [italics mine].
CONTRARY MYSTIC REGIMES

between [...] communities.26

Befriended, quietist religious notables defined the Islam that Nasr thought real and worthy. It was remarked of ‘Allâme Ṭabâṭabâ’î’s Shî‘ite Islam, just before the revolution, that “the original [...] version of this work [...] with [an] introduction by [...] Nasr, has become one of the most widely read works on Shi‘ism in Iran itself and [it] has been reprinted many times.”27 One part of the compendium is dedicated to the affairs of this world. It is a commentary on Imam ‘Alî’s ‘Instructions to Mâlik al-Ashtar’, that “clarify the general situation of Islamic society in relation to the practical application of Islamic government.”28 In nothing it resembles Khomeyni’s assembled lectures, clandestinely and widely distributed since 1970, that unfolded a theory of Islamic government in terms of the ‘Rule of the Religious Jurist’ (velâyat-e faqîh). The Shah’s government, for Ṭabâṭabâ’î, apparently was an Islamic government.29

Farah’s patronage became a public event when, in 1977, she inaugurated a House of Culture in Tehran. Sufis performed an open-air dance in her presence. It is reported that she “had decided not to sit and watch the performance on the chair reserved for her, but came and sat, [...] naturally, on the ground with the rest [...] She was obviously moved and overcome by the ecstatic incantations of the dervishes.”30

26 NASR, 1979: 11. ALAM (1991: 262) had noted in his diary on 29 November 1972: “Much to my alarm Dr Hossein Nasr, the new President of the Aryamehr Institute of Technology, has reported that many of his students are poor, and a great number of them fanatical Moslems.” The Shah then ordered: “Warn Nasr to tread carefully but to make a thorough investigation.”


28 ṬABÂṬABÂ’Î, 1982: 22. Mâlik b. al-îari¢ al-Nakha‘î was appointed by Imam ‘Alî as governor of Egypt, but he was poisoned on the way of assuming his post in 658-9. Legitimising reference to ‘Alî’s instructions was also made in the Shah’s biography (SÂNGHVI, 1968: xxii), and “in his pre-1970 writings, [Khomeyni, too, had] tended to accept the traditional notions of society as sketched out in Imam ‘Alî’s Nahj al-Balaghah” (ÂBRAHÂMIAN, 1993: 26).

29 DÂBÂSHI (1993) saw Ṭabâṭabâ’î as an ideological founder of the revolution. But there is no information in his biography or oeuvre to suggest he had anything positive to say about it, which Dabashi himself actually admits (op. cit., p. 277). Because of an initiation, Ṭabâṭabâ’î must be considered a Sufi: he “conducted his own spiritual [...] exercises under the mastership and guidance of Sayyid al-Arefîn Hajj Mirza Ali Qazi, the man for whom he reserved the exclusive title of ‘the master’ and whom he held in utmost respect, reverence, and honor” (op. cit., p. 303). NASR (in ṬABÂṬABÂ’Î, 1981) mentioned that Ṭabâṭabâ’î taught Sufism ‘in more intimate circles’ (op. cit., p. 24).

Far outstripping Farah’s Office in size and reach, royal patronage was primarily embodied in the Pahlavi Foundation. It was founded in 1958 and soon began to play a major role in Iran’s economic, social and cultural life. The Prime Minister, Minister of the Court, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of Parliament were on its board. Moreover, most of the major institutions in Iran were in some way linked to it. A cultural office not directly linked to the Foundation, but nevertheless operating under a state sanction, was the Bonyād-e Mowlavī, founded with royal permission in 1974. “It was headed by Professor Zabihollah Safa, historian of Persian literature [and] devoted to research and propagation of the works of [...] Rumi [and] the books influenced by his School of Dervishes.” The Bonyād-e Mowlavī may in addition be described as an ‘ideological state institution’ because “[Rumi’s] Sufism became the guiding philosophy of Iran, permeating many aspects of its culture [and to] judge by his own writings, especially Mission for My Country, [the] Shah could be considered one of its followers.”

31 Cf. PAHLAVI, 1979: 152. EILERS (1977: 323) mentioned 1961 as the founding year, but this was the year in which the Foundation, “perhaps the most distinctive court institution” (MC DANIEL, 1991: 67), was given an administrative structure. The Foundation was founded in 1958.

32 EILERS, 1977: 322. The Foundation’s pervasiveness is suggested in the following citation: “That patrimonialism in government breeds corruption was particularly evident in Iran [...] Pensions were synonymous with handouts or rewards for favours or fringe benefits to those faithful to the regime. The Pahlavi Foundation’s interests in [...] banks [...] and other industrial and commercial enterprises evidenced the extent to which the Shah and his immediate family were involved in the economic affairs of the country” (BEHNAM, 1986: 169).

33 Royal permission was the prerequisite for any major social organisation in Iran.


35 ‘Ideological state institution’ is a free adaptation of ALTHUSSER’s ‘appareil idéologique d’État’ that he put forward to broaden the traditional Marxist outlook on the state as an instrument of repression (1976: 82). This study does not support his Marxist underpinning of the concept. Another such ideological state institution since 1963 was Iran’s Theosophical Society (see HOMAYUNI, 1991: 231).

Involvement by the state in the promotion of a certain mysticism may help explain why Sufism became ‘fashionable’ and “many members of higher society quite openly confessed to belonging to one of the [...] dervish orders.” Commenting on the relations between Iran, civilisation and mysticism in a way that must have appealed particularly to the ‘members of higher society’, the Iranian exile writer Jamâl-Zâde (although he himself was not exactly co-opted by the Pahlavi state) claimed that “if we conceive of real civilisation as [...] a mixture between [...] the mind and the heart, then we may count some of our own mystics among the brilliant examples of the ‘civilised man’.”

Just like Moḥammad and ʿAlī ʿAnqā and Nasr and their institutions, the Bonyâd-e Mowlavî was centrally located in the post-war elite figuration. Their ideologically incorporated Sufi discourse was an “ecumenical mysticism [...] that obfuscate[d] the historical and sociological dimensions of religion.” In its projection of a divine and natural hierarchy, their quietist mysticism resented what became “a major element of Islam for ordinary believers; socio-political criticism of the state.”

After the urban uprising of June 5, 1963 (‘pânzdah-e khordâd’), the Shah was increasingly faced with a resilient religious opposition that would not be co-opted. ‘The infiltration of Sufi orders’ has been mentioned as a means available to the state to cope with it. That Sufism could be made into a counter-ideology to Islamism by the government and related institutions, is seen in a curious, 1969 definition in the semi-official Iran Almanac: “A religious movement, second in importance in

38 Eilers, 1977: 323. Among the Ahl-e Haqq, a subsect of urban and educated affiliates came into being from the 1960s (Mir-Hosseini, 1994, (2): 212). From 1974, when he succeeded his father, Bahram Elâhi attempted to give the order ‘a more universal appeal’ and attracted new converts who included foreigners (op. cit., p. 215). However, it is not suggested here that Sufism in the late Pahlavi era was but an elite phenomenon. Underlying elite affiliation was ‘general mystical religiosity’, which is seen through a remark by During: “C’est que de l’avis de tous les soufis [...] Nûr ‘All Shâh était un très grand Maître [...] De nos jours il représente encore, dans la mythologie populaire, le prototype du saint extatique mort en martyr” [my italics] (1976: 123).
41 “In the 60s [...] ties between clergy and monarchy were broken” (Vieille, 1981: 3). The process was fastened by the death of the quietist Source Borâjerdi in 1961.
42 Zonis, 1971: 194, cf. Alam (1991: 151), who wrote in his diary, on 11 May 1970, that “I mentioned [to the Shah] that a group of Naqshbandi Kurds have agreed to ‘flee’ to Iraq, posing as refugees. Once there they are sure to be received by General Bakhtiar who will be at their mercy.”
Iran only to Shi'ism is [...] Sufism [...] Sufis themselves claim Islamic sanction for their system." The positioning of Sufism as 'a religious movement' outside the Shi'ism-Sunnism divide, is a construction that has been alien to most Iranian, Shi'ite Sufi understandings of self - both before, during and after the Pahlavi dynasty. As they have conceived of Sufism as an integrally Islamic movement, 'Islamic sanction' constructs an opposition that is not justified by indigenous views.

Besides institutional absorption, the state incorporation of mysticism materialised in a more personal aspect as well. A claimant to the position of Shams al-'Orfâ 'axis', Hajj Mir Sayyed 'Ali Qomi Borqe'i, was a reputed jurist. From this status emanated his appointment as a teacher of the Shah in religious matters. Dr. Rezâzâde Shafaq, a disciple of the Kowshâri Ne'matollâhi sheikh 'Ali Samandar, had been appointed - it is not clear in exactly which period - to the same end.

Kingship having once more become an axis of legitimacy in Iranian society, royal patronage was not just bestowed upon but also actively sought by Sufis. Sufi literature had reportedly been published with congratulatory dedications to the king under Reza Shah. Under Mohammad Reza Shah, there were Sufis who requested congratulatory dedications of the royal state. Ma'sûm'alîshâh Modarresi 'Âlem sent a manuscript to a great many political personalities, and included their laudatory let-

43 Iran Almanac 1969: 516, cf. SANAI (1951: 3); Iran Almanac 1968 and 1963, the latter of which states: “We have dealt [with] the Sufis [and] no [...] noteworthy event about them has [...] taken place” (op. cit., p. 436). SAVAK’s demolition of Khomeyni’s reputation in 1963, however, portrayed him as a person who, except for being a homosexual, a spy and a foreigner, “had written erotic Sufi poetry” (CHEHABI, 1990: 235). Besides the obvious damage that ‘erotic poetry’ would do to one’s ascetic reputation in Iran, the charge hardly makes any sense, except when one interprets it as a state attempt to divide the jurists through associating one of them with Sufism, i.e. by playing on the opposition between Sufis and jurists. Iran Almanac 1975 contains a reprint of a newspaper report on the (mainly Qâderi and Naqshbandi) dervishes of Sanandaj, Kurdistan.

44 Iran Almanac 1969: 516. In its summary of Iranian history, the same report omits mentioning the crucial fact, which is not normally lost on anyone, that Shâh Ismâ'îl, who declared Shi’ism the state religion in 1501, had been the leader of a Sufi order (op. cit., p. 48). There is a striking similarity between this definition of Sufism from the Pahlavi era and (post-)revolutionary redefinitions. A contemporary anti-Sufi manifesto (Sâlehi‘alîshâh, 1375/1996) reads: “They gave Sufism an Islamic freshness” (be tâsâvvof âb va rang-e eslâmî dâdand) (op. cit., p. 46).

45 ‘Ali Borqe’i was an emam-e jami‘at and he published several books, one of which was forbidden by the Sources of Emulation (marâje‘-e taqâli‘). When Mohammad Reza (the dethroned king) was [still] the heir apparent, he instructed him in the Holy Law” (CHAHÂRDÂHI, 1361/1982-3: 60).

ters of response, including the royal emblem of the lion with a sword, in the final edition. Another, more traditional technique that was also known from the Reza Shah era, was the (mostly post-factum) claim to Sufi foresight and magical intervention:

First miracle - One day the Honourable Vahid ol-Owliýa sat serenely among an assembly of his lovers and he was worried. Suddenly [...] he proclaimed: ‘A danger awaits His Majesty Mohammad Reza Shah, please bless him and recite this holy dya after the morning prayer, 110 times, for his health and in order for the danger to be removed from him’ [...] A few days later he reported that His Majesty had been shot at by one of the enemies [...] and that each bullet had miraculously missed, as if an invisible hand had kept them away from His Majesty’s face, [...] and this event occurred on the day of Bahman 15.

ROYAL PATRONAGE AND RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION

The Şafí‘alısháhí order

The Shah’s younger brother Ali-Reza reportedly had a liking for Sufism. He often visited the Şafí‘alısháhí sheikh Mánzúr‘alısháh and extended royal grants to surrounding Sufis. Notwithstanding the royal patronage, there had always been and still was a negative stereotype. The informal master - whom one Sufi held to be Şafí‘alısháhí’s brother’s

47 Cf. Ālem, 1338/1959. Ālem is a sheikh of the Kháksár order and a Shi‘ite religious notable (Gramlich, 1965: 86) who resided - at least to the 1980s - in Tehran, and founded his own branch which he named after himself: Modarresi‘Ālemiya Kháksáriya (cf. Khvája od-dín, 1360/1981: 19). A comparable and common technique of legitimisation is seen in the four pictures of the Shah, with full honorary reference, on a visit to Na‘im that are included in Balaghí, 1369Q/1949 (op. cit., pp. 15, 17), who was a Shams ol‘Oráf-i-Ne‘matulláh leader.

48 Hafez ol-kotob, 1338/1959: 82. 15 Bahman corresponds to the 4th of February 1949, when the first attempt at the life of the Shah was made by a member of the Islamist movement Fedá‘iyán-e Eslám (active between at least 1945 and 1953). The Fedá‘iyán-e Eslám were even more opposed to secular politicians such as Mosaddeq. When the CIA-sponsored coup restored the Shah in power in 1953, they referred to it as a ‘holy uprising’ (Abrahamian, 1993: 109). Váhid ol-Owliýa (d.1956) was a leader of the Záhábiya order. An example of earlier techniques: “One of the Sufis from India by the name of Şast Mehr Bábá related the coming to power of Reza Shah in Iran to himself and said that his becoming a king had been because of his willpower” (Irani, 1371/1992: 18, cf. previous chapter).

grandson, while another denied any such blood relation - spoke of his mother's fears. She had been afraid of the Sufis as she knew them to be engaged only in smoking hashish and dark activities in the cellar of the lodge. The master himself had a similar opinion, until he once visited the lodge out of curiosity and never left again.

None of the lodge's leading notables were blood relations of its founder. The conflict over the lodge's ownership was concluded after 17 years, in the 1950s, with the help of the Freemason and 'impartial sheikh' Nasrollah Taqavi. The settlement provided for the separation of the congregational part from the living quarters (the latter of which were allocated to the heirs of Šafi‘alishâh). Afterwards, Šafi's heirs withdrew from the lodge: they retreated into their living quarters or went abroad. The lodge was now de jure in the hands of the Society of Brotherhood and remained so until 1979.

With the coming to power of the Pahlavi polity in 1921, royal patronage came to a temporary halt. Now, in the Islamic Republic, a Sufi in Zahir od-Dowle's Tehrani lodge quite openly took pride in the royal relations that developed after the interlude, in the period 1941-1979. He boasted of royal patronage in the weak sense, consisting of a visit by the Shah's twin sister Ashraf.50 “Here is Ashraf”, she had called out after ringing the bell. “Well, I am the Honourable One and I am sleeping”, the resident sheikh responded. Ashraf said: “If Your Honour is tired, we will not enter.” The sheikh then changed his mind, when he saw who was at the gate, and invited in the princess and her entourage. After having spent an agreeable time with the sheikh and upon leaving, Ashraf commanded: “Dervish, ask something of me!” The sheikh responded (in modest dignity) that there was nothing he could possibly wish for, and the ritual was once repeated before the company left.51 Royal patronage in the strong sense however - as in the reported case of Manzûr'alishâh - was less publicly jubilated.

50 A similar visit is reported of Farah and her mother (conversation, 06/19/97).
51 The story was obviously framed in a classical Sufi mold, an anecdote of Rûmi's: “Once, a lover came to his Beloved's house. He knocked on the door. 'Who is there?' the Beloved asked. The man answered, 'It is I, your lover'. 'Go away', said the Beloved, 'for you are not really in Love'. Years passed, and again the lover came to the door of the Beloved's house and knocked. 'Who is there?' asked the Beloved. This time the man answered, 'It is you'. 'Now that you are I', replied the Beloved, 'you may come in' (Mathnawi, I: 3056sq, cf. NURBAKHSH, 1978: 89). I interpret this to indicate that my interviewee wished to express Ashraf's serious intention, her being essentially a Sufi.
The Shah’s elite co-optation involved a cross-class network of “courtiers, personal adjutants, military generals, and economic and political confidants.” These persons were recruited from the ‘general elite’ that Zonis reckoned to have consisted of “officers, directors, members of the board, of leading fraternal and social organizations (e.g., the Rotary Club, Lions Club, [...] the Freemasons, etc.).”

From the 1960s onward royal recruitment increasingly involved politicians, who came to the fore as a professional class for the first time, and among whom were many Freemasons. In 1969, the secret service SAVAK wrote a report on Freemasonry in Iran, in which their total number (in 1969) was estimated at 12,000. It listed from their midst 22 members of parliament, 17 senators and eight members of the ministerial council, most importantly the late premier Amīr-Abbās Hoveyda. The Society of Brotherhood occupied a central position in these Freemason networks. Its administrative centre provided a meeting point, and developments under Mohammad Reza Shah further intensified the relation. Simultaneously, leading Safā’alishāhīs increasingly contested the confluence of elite Sufism and worldly, royal state power.

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52 Bill, 1973: 142.
54 Interview ‘Monavva’alishāh’, 03/25/97. Besides as a high status mutual-interest club, Freemasonry’s popularity is partly explained by its legendary roots, i.e. the building of King Solomon’s temple (cf. Tehran Times, 05/08/97). Although many unrelated others were involved as well, it is probably correct that ‘Zahir od-Dowle’ was one of the founders of Freemasonry in Iran’ (Cha’īrdahī, 1361/1982-3: text accompanying photo appendix); cf. Afshār, 1367/1988: 52.
55 The SAVAK report (Faramäšiñī va tashkilāt-e ān dar Īrān dar sāl-e 1348 (3)) was published in Pānzdah-ē khordād, 1375/1996, 5, (22). Many of its articles present documents pertaining to the Iranian revolution and the preceding dynastic period.
Dr. Isma‘îl Marzbân Amin ol-Molk

After Binesh‘alîshâh died in 1932, the oculist Marzbân assumed the Consultancy Council’s leadership. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Society of Brotherhood in 1949, he held a speech in commemoration of its genesis. It stands out in this text that Marzbân spoke of royalty as an equal. He strongly suggested that the well-being of the Monarchy was related to the state of Sufism (or at least the Anjoman). His speech did not assert parallel Sufi power, but it nevertheless radiated a self-conscious proximity to the Monarchy.

After the bombardment of the Society by the agents of Mohammad ‘Ali Shâh, who because of this very act destroyed his Kingdom, his successor Ahmad Shâh developed an interest in [it]. Mohammad Hasan Mîrzâ, [his] crown prince, turned to Sufism/spiritual poverty [faqr] in this very Society [...]. Through this act the great divide between the various classes of the people (which Şaf‘‘alîshâh had ordered to be lessened), came to an end, from this moment [...]. In the Society, they made the king and the beggar equal [...] [my italics].

King and beggar were held to be equal, but the leaders belonged to Tehran’s elite. For this reason, Marzbân was confronted with an anonymous pamphlet that challenged the Society’s confluence with worldly power. It responded to the Council’s ‘Letter of Vigilance’ (Entebâh-nâme), which legitimised the abolition of the Pole.

Present leaders propounded ‘the thoughts of Faraonism’ (i.e. of the despotic era of ignorance before Islam). “Gentlemen”, the Response admonished, “spiritual poverty and Sufism do not accommodate aristocracy.” The ‘eleven noble gentlemen’ displayed a ‘love of leadership’ (reyâsat-dâstî), while Sufism without (one) ‘living, perfect essence’ was impossible. The Vigilance Letter referred to holy sources to legitimise electory principles. This illegitimate innovation proved that the Council was not only disrespectful of Sufism, but also ignorant of the holy law.

60 Pâsokhi be entebâh-nâm–ye hey‘at-e moshâver-e ye anjoman-e oakhovat: 2.
Čaqevlī and the ‘war of words’

The Society’s fourth leader was lieutenant general Farajollāh Čaqevlī. He had held important state positions among which the ministry of the Interior during the Hakīmī and Qavām cabinets in the 1940s, and he was rewarded with the royal Homāyūn medal for his services. In 1961, retired and out of official political office, he came to head the Society. He was re-elected in 1966 and remained its leader until he died in 1974.

In 1956, 30,000 members were registered. In 1963, the numbers had risen to about 34,000. This means there had been a yearly increase from 1956 of some 570 members, and that the Society of Brotherhood was a vastly expanding social organisation. The Society did not completely sever its ties with what had formerly defined ēafal shāh Sufism. The Consultancy Council was entitled to appoint sheikhs in the Society’s name, for the ‘guidance’ (dastgirī) of the Sufis, apparently not to lose touch with the basis that defined its public legitimacy.

The structure of the Society may have inspired Binder’s reflection before the revolution that “most [Sufi orders] do not appear to be serious religious movements anymore.” But degrees of conviction are hard to measure, and opponents’ labels often enforce false dichotomies. The category of Shi‘ite Freemasonry, mocked by many as ‘inauthentic’, was a social reality. Dr Sayyed Ḥasan Emāmī, a Tehrani Friday Imam, saw no contradiction in being both a Shi‘ite leader and a Freemason.

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64 The Shah’s regime survived initial instability, according to Abrahamian (1978: 29), “not because of the Iranian mystique for kingship but because the Shah was much more aware of the [...] need to retain control of the unmystical military”. Farajollāh Čaqevlī, however, was a mystic/soldier. Another famous decoration besides the Homāyūn medal, The Lion and the Sun, had been installed in Persia in the honour of the British diplomat and traveller Sir John Malcolm (Sykes, 1951: 308).
The Consultancy Council did not make use of its elective power until 1959. Thereafter several Sufi masters were appointed as 'elected sheikh' (sheyk-h-e montakhab). They were violently resented by Sa'di-alishâhîs opposed to the Anjoman, and subordinated to the Society in a structure that no other Iranian sheikh would have accepted. Sufis in Zahâr od-Dowlâ’s lodge cherished the memory of Qâevl for his maintenance of the graves and a large-scale repair of the main khanqâh in 1961/2. But not in the main lodge itself, regained after the revolution by non-Freemason Sufis who remained stubbornly indifferent to the source of beauty that came to them as an invasion.

Under Æqevlî, discontent over the ways of the Society led to a new ‘war of words’ (jang-e lafżî). In addition to face-to-face confrontations, it was often staged in pamphlets and magazines with a wide circulation such as Vâhid and Mehr. One sheikh in Isfahan, Qâsem Tâvângar (see chapter 2, table 2), wrote in defence of ‘the real path of Æaf/the rightful path of purity’ (dûde-ye haqee-ye Æafâr) and revived the issue of the in-

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69 Under Marzbân two persons were appointed, and one under Æqevlî:
(1). Mošâfâ Sâlâr Amjad (Mošâfâ’alishâh) (d.?). Sufis in the Sa’di-alishâhî lodge claimed that Amjad was the pîr of Aytollah Tâleqânî; (2). Fatollahî Sâfâ’ ol-Molk (d.1940). For biographical details, see CHAHâRDAHî, 1361/1982-3: 154, 174, 1362/1983: 42-3. (3). Prince ‘Alîrezâ Mirzâ Khosrovânî (Hakîm Khosravî) Qâjâr (d.1966). The last elected sheikh under Marzbân, see CHAHâRDAHî, 1361/1982-3: 162. At the orders of Æqevlî, ‘Abbâs ‘Afî (Shahîd’alî) (d.?) was designated Khosrovânî’s pîr-e da’llî. Through the intercession of Æqevlî, ‘Afî had allegedly obtained a job in the Sepah Bank (CHAHâRDAHî, 1362/1983: 42-3) (which critics of Sufi Freemasonry claimed was subordinate to Æqevlî’s wishes). The history is one of sublime irony, if one is to believe present-day sheikhs in ‘Afî’s line. ‘Afî obtained his ejzce from Vafâ’alishâh, who was reputed for joining the separatist forces of Kûchek Khân in Gilân in the First World War and later in the struggle against Reza Shah (for whom Æqevlî worked, see previous chapter). When Æqevlî assumed the leadership, ‘Afî was reportedly fearful of his forceful personality and dared not by himself approach Sa’di-alishâhî Sufis (CHAHâRDAHî, 1362/1983: 42-3).

70 Yaghmâ (1353/1974, 27, (10): 414-5) published an elegy that commemorated Æqevlî as a Sufi leader of great social importance. The biography in Iran Almanac 1969 mentions he was important in the Constitutional Revolution and later imprisoned by the British for alleged Nazi sympathies.

71 Rather, the Society of Brotherhood was reproached for its negligence in the conflict with Sa’di-alishâhî’s heirs: “Yes, it was this Consultancy Council that sat and watched while Mahmûd Neshât, that unbelieving tyrant, confiscated nearly three quarters of the lodge’s sahn and sold another part” (Pâsokhî be entebâh-nâm-e heyyat-e mosâhâvere-ye anjoman-e okhovvat: 7-8).
dispensable Pole.\textsuperscript{72} It is an enigmatic piece that layers contradictory, overt and rather more hidden messages. Upon superficial reading, one might take it as a laudation of the Society of Brotherhood. Although many of the Society’s leaders came from a political background, Tavângar held, they had not used the Society for political purposes. In state service they had, motivated by Sufism, rendered valuable services to the country.\textsuperscript{73} Entezâm as-Salâne had been morally outstanding like Šafâ himself. Selfless Marzbân had dedicated his whole life to others. Āqevlî had “several sensitive jobs, among which […] the directorate of the Sepah Bank, being a high-standing member of the Board of Directors of the Lion and the Red Sun, [being involved in] harbour development and other activities.” In all of these he had “no objective but service to the Shah and the fatherland,” and had “the honour of reporting to the first person of the country.” In these days, one did not often come across a man who was so full of (both) “Shah worship and Sufi features.”\textsuperscript{74}

Abruptly changing subjects, Tavângar then wrote: “Our topic is presently the real path of Šafâ/the rightful path of purity.” His purpose was not criticism, as it was an error (khaÿ) to have discussions on dervishhood. Rather, he wished to bring into mind the history of the Šafî-alîshâhî order. If, after Šafî-alîshâh and Zâhir od­-Dowle, a claimant was not found, or if such a person did not want to make himself known as the Pole of the Time of the Path, then it did not follow that there was no Pole. Thus, Tavângar did not consider Bînesh-alîshâh and his successors legitimate, but his construction of events carefully related the absence of a Pole to faulty reasoning rather than deliberate acting. Fur-

\textsuperscript{72} TAVÂNGAR, 1345/1966. Tavângar’s piece was a response to earlier critique of him by Āqevlî.

\textsuperscript{73} TAVÂNGAR, 1345/1966: 197.

\textsuperscript{74} TAVÂNGAR, 1345/1966: 198. Āqevlî’s nationalism is for instance seen in a memorial speech from 1971, as head of the National Heritage Organisation, of his anti-clerical friend Hasan Taqi-zâde. Taqi-zâde (who reportedly had masonic affiliations (ALGAR, 1970: 296), like Āqevlî), had “reckoned any fanaticism as blameworthy”. His most important scientific work had been a research on the national Iranian epic. He had been characterised by a ‘learned […] love of his fatherland’ and he had known the Persian language as the strong foundation of nationalism. Taqi-zâde had furthermore been important in his consideration of the ‘rebirth of the national spirit of Iran’ after the Arab invasion. In him, Iran had lost one of its wisest and worthiest children (in Yaghmâ, 1349/1971, 23, (12): 728-29). Mehdi Sheykhbahâ’î, a Šafî-alîshâhî leader for Europe (in the Netherlands) in the line of Tavângar, confirmed that Aqevlî had been a regular visitor to the royal court (interview, 06/24/98).
thermore, if the Society had not wanted to acknowledge a Pole, then this would not justifiy considering the following of him unauthorised.\textsuperscript{75}

Here then, Tavangar said by implication that what had been so valuable for the nation, society and the state in Āqevel, had not been translated in a way that would benefit Sufism. In a stronger, although still evasive counterimage to the initial laudations, he held that “of course [...] the brothers of the Ṣafī'-alishahi path are not seeking fame (shohrat), and their acts are ‘with ‘Ali’ (bā mowlā), and their way is with the truth, except for a limited few who have been ‘showing off’ (tażāhor).”\textsuperscript{76} But in any case, Tavangar ended, “We are convinced that the [...] Path had a Pole, and presently has one, and that one cannot exist without a Pole (who is in contact with the Imam of Time (emām-e zamān)) [...] The Society belongs to us and we belong to the Society” [my italics].\textsuperscript{77}

‘Abdollāh Entezām’s ‘new perspective’

Binesḥ'ālishāh’s son ‘Abdollāh Entezām was Iran’s Foreign Minister between 1953 and 1956,\textsuperscript{78} a member of the Consultancy Council since at least the 1960s and its leader from 1974.\textsuperscript{79} He took part in an informal gathering (dowre), the participants in which were ranked among the 307 most influential Iranians of their time.\textsuperscript{80} A comment on similar groupings held that they “may even bind their members to secrecy and mutual aid by oaths or various rituals”,\textsuperscript{81} which is a likely reference to the Freemason/Sufi Society of Brotherhood. During Entezām’s leadership, the influential Mohammad Okhovvat (d.1979) was appointed as (the last) ‘elected sheikh’. Okhovvat had been a counsellor of the national supreme court, and he had received the Agha Khan III on one of his

\textsuperscript{75} TAVANGAR, 1345/1966: 198-99.
\textsuperscript{76} TAVANGAR, 1345/1966: 199.
\textsuperscript{77} TAVANGAR, 1345/1966: 199-200, cf. Pāsokhī be entebāh-nāme-ye hey'at-e moshāvere-ye anjoman-e okhovvat: 2. Other critics also stressed that the order was ‘the path of Ṣafī and Ṣafā’ (tariqe-ye Ṣafī o Ṣafā), i.e. not only that of Šahīr od-Dowlāl (interview ‘Monavvar’alishāh’, 09/09/98).
\textsuperscript{78} Between 1957 and 1963 he was the director of the state-owned National Iranian Oil Company. A Sufi dissident claimed, possibly in an attempt to clear Sufism’s name, that Entezām had no Sufi credentials but owed his position to socio-political prominence. In reality Entezām’s Sufi identity as Binesḥ'ālishāh’s son preceded his socio-political prominence (which was largely of his own making).
\textsuperscript{79} HOMAYUN, 1371/1992: 327.
\textsuperscript{80} ZONIS, 1971: 238-9.
\textsuperscript{81} ZONIS, 1971: 240.
visits to Iran and the main Ṣafī’alishāḥī lodge, to which old spiritual connections existed. The Shah had awarded the Agha Khan several honorary titles, such as ‘Vālāḥażrat’, during these visits.

In 1977/8 Entezām wrote a series of articles entitled ‘A New Perspective on ʿErfān and Sufism’ (Naẓarī tāze be ʿerfān va taṣāvvuf). He used the pseudonym ‘I do not know’ (lā adrī), and the articles allegedly reported the question-and-answer sessions of a Sufi master. Thus he set out on a Socratic investigation of Iranian mysticism. There was a traditional, initial modesty to anything Entezām was going to say on mysticism through his sheikh, and he stressed that complacency was to be avoided: “Our understanding of the divine sphere/self (lāhūt) is limited to the perception of its traces, not its essence [...] We must know that even the thought of [it] is beyond us. No matter how much we ascend to high stations, we will not uncover this enigma.”

But the importance of Sufism, Entezām also held, could hardly be overestimated. Like Mohammad ‘Anqī, Entezām stressed personal reform as the key to humanity’s salvation. Although lives in the service of others were incumbent on commoners and the elite alike, he especially recommended the participation of the ‘high authorities of the country’, who could be brilliant ‘moral examples’ for the ‘others’: “If a Minister makes simplicity his motto in his own life [...] then all civil servants in that Ministry will change [as well] and be turned into abstemious and dutiful people.”

Entezām pointed at the impotence of philosophy, which had from Plato to Existentialism come up with the illusion of political solutions, but his sketch of a Sufi guardian class reminds one of the Republic as much as ‘Anqī’s discourse does.

Furthermore, Entezām’s sheikh held a critical view of Sufism’s contemporary manifestations. Nowadays youngsters took alcohol and various drugs, that addicts referred to as a ‘trip’ (safar). The ‘mystical audition’ (samāf) of the ancients had been converted into pop music. “Do

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82 Cf. CHAHĀRDĀHL, 1361/1982-3: 45; 1362/1983: 180. Okhovvat was a disciple of Ṣafī’alishāḥī (BARQ, 1352/1973: 15). The Agha Khan (d. 1957) - a central figure in the international jet set and political scene, and Spiritual Leader of Ismā’īlī Muslims - visited Iran in 1948/9 and 1951. Historical relations between the Ne’matallāhī and the Ismā’īlīya have been explored by WILSON and POURJAVADI (1975). Intimate (financial) relations between the Ismā’īlīs and the Zoro-Reyāsateyn ended in 1948, when the Agha Khan took insult at Mānes’alishāḥī’s refusal to visit him (op. cit., p. 133).

85 Vahid, 1356/1977-8, 207: 35.
not presume that these are the words of a dry and inexperienced person”, he warned, for “the world of drunkenness is happy, but unfortunately, it does not last long and its sequel is a hangover.”

86 Neither did the traditional Sufi leaders, who were full of claims to knowledge and authority, seem to share his rational views:

This is to the leaders of various Sufi orders: Are my words baseless? Can people not be shown [...] a new way? If you say ‘no’, then I say: ‘what have you achieved’? Is your conscience cleared [...] by building a few lodges? Dear honourable Elders, I spent fifty years on these teachings, and I do not make any claim. I am a lover of Sufism [...] Do you really have faith in [...] Sufism? [italics mine]

87 By the time he published his ‘new perspective’ on Sufism, Entezam had discreetly accomplished a further integration of Şafi alishahi Sufism and Freemasonry. The four Iranian lodges had grown in number and confidence, and developed their own rules with regard to admission and litany. The conspicuous independence was not appreciated at headquarters, and it resulted in a separation from the German mother branch.

88 Operating from the Tehrani Şafi alishahi building, the Iranian Freemasons joined forces and chose the Society of Brotherhood’s Entezam, who also headed the Şafā lodge, as their representative.

In 1969, Entezam went to see the Shah and make a petition. He requested an Iranian lodge, “without any form of foreign bondage,” established as the one Grand National Lodge of Iran. The Shah consented. The Iranian lodge was inaugurated in 1969, and Jafar Sharif-Imami was chosen as its head.

89 The Freemasons then chose the administrative cen-

86 Vahid, 1356/1977-78, 208: 30.
87 Nazari taze be ‘erfan va tasavvof, 1363/1984: 114, 115.
88 Only Setare-ye sahar (the fifth Iranian lodge related to German Freemasonry, see previous chapter) retained German sponsorship (communication 12/07/98, via the Supreme Council of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States of America). The separation probably occurred, according to this source, “some time in 1958” (communication 02/16/99, idem). In a 1348/1969-70 SAVAK document published in Pânzah-e khordâd (1996, 22, (5): 72-96), however, it is mentioned that the four lodges established independence from the German branch “three years ago” (p. 76).
89 Pânzah-e khordâd, 5, (22): 77-8.
This event marked the completion of Freemasonry-Sufism integration in the Safi‘alishāhī order.

Rumours held it among the self-proclaimed tasks of the Society of Brotherhood to prepare from its midst a person for the premiership. In this context, one cannot help noticing - the extent to which this is telling will remain for historians to judge - the formal resemblance between the Consultancy Council and a national cabinet. When massive protest shook the foundations of power and the Shah complained of former friends who were hastily leaving the sinking ship in December 1978, the Shah turned to Enteẓām for a solution. Despite a cloudy episode, the Shah had known Enteẓām as a friend since 1936.

A correspondence on the eve of the revolution has been retrieved that documents a plea on the part of the Grand Lodge of Iran. It pledges compliance with Khomeyni and the revolution, in reward for protection afterwards. It was the (Sufi) Freemasons’ royal patronage and deep absorption into the institutions of Pahlavi power, however, as ‘courtiers, personal adjutants, military generals, and economic and political confidants’, which made for the offer to be immediately rejected.

The Solṭān‘alishāhī order

Contrary to the Ṣafi‘alishāhīs, who evolved from the cradle of the Qajar monarchy and retained its protection, the Solṭān‘alishāhīs had to do without significant patronage on the eve of their ascent. They barely survived persecutions and a widespread hatred of Sufism. Given the early history, the Solṭān‘alishāhīs’ later, generally acknowledged development into the most ‘respectable’ Sufi order of Iran makes for a riddle.
It seems plausible that the early history engrained into the order an ethos of survival; the urge to pacify hostile powers. The acquisition of official Shi‘ite religious status - unalienable and protective - was the primary means in its repertoire. Secondly, at a more mundane level survival depended upon societal integration. Thirdly, no royal patronage is officially known to have been extended to the Solṭān‘alishtāhif order during the era of Mohammad Reza Shah, but as the order expanded enormously, many of its members held influential positions in Iranian society, members of the government visited its lodges, and there were several contacts between the royals and the Sufis. Thus, ideological incorporation was from several angles beneficial to the Solṭān‘alishtāhs. Lastly, what proved as important as these elements, was the Solṭān‘alishtāhif balancing act between royal and clerical loyalties.

Ḥājj Sheykh Moḥammadd Ḥasan 〈Ṣāleḥ‘alishtāh</p>

Ever more well-to-do and influential affiliates had entered the order under Ṣāleḥ‘alishtāh (1891-1966), and his message had become widespread. He had acquired weighty religious status even before publishing Pand-e Ṣāleḥ, through a visit to Iraqi Sources of Emulation in 1912, “all of whom bestowed the utmost kindness on him.”

In Beydokht, Ṣāleḥ‘alishtāh built a library and a mausoleum for his grandfather and a ‘tremendous number’ of followers gathered around him. Their appearance did not distinguish them from other Shi‘ites. It was remarked in 1959 that “the Ni‘matullahi cap [...] is seen more rarely among the dervishes [...] because they are all in the service of society and [...] dressed in the customary clothing of their own time.” For Solṭān‘alishtāhs, work and contemporary clothing were not only customary but obligatory. As regards politics, Ṣāleḥ‘alishtāh felt that “no one can

96 NĪRBAKHSH, 1338/1959: 52. The observation is made in contradistinction to the Khāksār order, which is not known for attempts to be respectable and that cherishes its traditions: “In the [...] Khāksār [order], the cap is worn more often. There exists a difference [...] between Ne‘matollahi and Khāksār caps: the Ne‘matollahi cap is like a half-globe while the Khāksār cap is more like a cone. The mark on top [...] is not customary in the Ne‘matollahi [...] order”.

97 〈ṢĀLEḤ‘ALISHĀH〉, 1372/1993: 72, 88, 92. This issue is closely related to the primary importance of Shi‘ite ‘dissimulation’ (taqiya) in the Solṭān‘alishtāhif order (cf. op. cit., pp. 36, 107).
interfere in state affairs without the ruling and proclamation of the Shah [...].” Şâleh’alishâh had established integration, religious, civil and political. In 1954, he became seriously ill. He spent his last twelve years reading, writing and bestowing advise. When he died in 1966, “in most Iranian cities, glorious ceremonies of commemoration were held.”

Hâjj SolţânHOSEYN Tâbande 〈Reţâ’alishâh〉

Şâleh’alishâh’s son SolţânHOseyn (1914-1992) was born in Beydokht. At the instigation of his father he studied a range of civil and particularly religious subjects, which resulted in an authorisation (ejâze) to narrate the traditions of the imams and, in 1950, to lead congregational prayers (after which he would be called 〈Reţâ’alî〉). In imitation of his father, Reţâ’alî travelled widely and visited many religious authorities. During a visit to Najaf he managed to impress Ayatollah Mohammad Ḥoseyn Āl-e Kâshef ol-Gheṭâ, who on March 22, 1951, after an examination, allowed him ‘independent judgement’ (ejtehâd) in religious matters, which effectively made him a jurist (mojtahed). Upon his appointment as successor in 1960, he received the cognomen 〈Reţâ’alishâh〉.

In a spatial representation of Gonabad, Reţâ’alishâh located it in between Shi’ite holy places - Mecca, Karbala, and Mashhad. His religious geography thus indicated the Solţân’alishâhî home was (in) the centre of the (religious) universe. The religious geography is furthermore significant in that it absorbed a Sufi repertoire which held the world’s turning to be de-

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99 JAZBI, 1358/1979: 5
101 There had been jurists in the order, such as Şoltân’alishâh’s pupil Hâjj Sheykh ʿAbdollâh Hârîrî (d. 1938, cf. GRAMLICH, 1965: 67; previous chapter), but not, as Reţâ’alishâh, in the position of Leader. The ejâze text has been published in ĀMZÂYESH, 1372/1993: 5, cf. ŞâLEH’ALISHÂH, 1372/1993: 11.
ependent upon Sufi masters: Gonabad is displayed as an axis around which the word turns (see figure 7).102

Back in Beydokht, Režā’alishâh managed the Solṭān’alishâhi agricultural estate, and took care that none of the Sufis would lead astray and damage the Solṭān’alishâhi order through ‘unlawful habits’ (i.e. drugs and alcohol consumption, etc.), or by idling or begging.103

He assumed the leadership of the order at his father’s death (1966), and would not be confronted with any of the modernist challenges of his forebears. In the winter of 1951, he had met with the brother of Aya-tollah Sangelaj (whose innovative Shi’ite thought resembled the blasphemies of Qazvînî), and praised his religious expertise (ignoring the reform program that his brother had proposed).104 Kasravi was assassinated in 1946 and Qazvînî’s disciples did not pursue their teacher’s fight.

Although it was forbidden from early on for any Solṭān’alishâh Sufi to engage in politics, politicians did visit the order’s religious centre (hoseyniya) in Gonabad.105 In 1951, Režā’alishâh visited several ‘friends and notables’, among whom was Hasan Emâmi, the Freemason Friday prayer leader of Tehran, who had been personally appointed by the Shah in 1945, and had just recovered from an attempt on his life in 1950.106 Before embarking on the hajj in September 1950, Režā’alishâh also met with general Razmara, who had just been appointed as Iran’s premier, and whom he told that “most people in Iran look favourably upon your government.”107 In March 1951, Razmara was killed by a member of the militant Fedâi-yân-e Eslâm. Another meeting in Tehran had come about through the invitation by the Shah’s stepmother Térân to visit her son prince Gholâmrežâ Pahlavî. The rendezvous in Gholâmreżâ’s house reportedly provided an opportunity for Režā’alishâh and the prince to exchange their Meccan pilgrimage experiences.108

Some Gonabadi affiliates were politicians themselves. One had been a college lecturer in Tehran and a diplomat who “in national and inter-

102 Figure 7. stems from 〈SOLTĀNHOSEYN〉, 1348/1969: 24 (Tārikh va jeghrâf-ye Gonâbad).
103 Cf. biography in 〈SALEH’ALISHĀH〉, 1372/1993: 11. 〈Režā’alishâh〉 was also responsible for the restoration of the burial site of 〈Raḥmat’alishâh〉 (d.1861) in Shiraz (CHAHĀRDÂHL, 1352/1973, 3: 527).
105 A long-time influential affiliate passed on this information to me.
107 〈SOLTĀNHOSEYN〉, 1337/1958: 5.
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national affairs [alike] evidenced a reconciling faculty which has helped antagonistic groups to work together for the benefit of all.”

Moreover, “Mr. Hazeghi [had] been four times [a] Member of Parliament […]: twice its delegate to the Constitutional Assembly; and three times Amirul-Hajj, leader of Iran’s pilgrims to Mecca.”

When Rezā alishāh returned to Tehran from a visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1957, which Hazeghi had helped facilitate, “many of the statesmen and parliamentarians came over for a visit.”

But the larger paradox is the political involvement of Rezā alishāh himself, and the oppositional direction in which it guided the Solṭān alishāhī order. In contrast to other Iranian Sufis, to his grandfather, his father and even himself up to then, Rezā alishāh all of a sudden, in the 1960s, publicly criticised (representatives of) the Shah. To be sure, he did not conceive of his criticism as political: “I have never taken part in politics, and know nothing of any political aspects or implications […]. It is only from the religious angle [….] that I shall discuss the matter.”

But then, as an official Sufi/jurist Rezā alishāh knew that “in Islam, religion and politics are not separated [and that] the government [can not] be divorced from the official religion” [my italics].

109 Goulding, 1970: xi; Hazeghi [Hāzeqi]: “On journeys to diplomatic posts I have held in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, I always stopped for at least a couple of days at Bidukht en route” (1970: viii). When Hāzeqi was the cultural attaché of the Iranian embassy in Kabul in 1957, he invited Rezā alishāh, who accepted his invitation (Jazbī-Esfahānī, 1372/1993: 245).


111 Rezā alishāh, 1354/1975, (2): 331-2. In addition, a hostile account mentioned the forceful ‘protection’ of the order by Manuchehr Eqbal, Iran’s premier in the late 1950 (Mādānī, 1376/1997: 45-6). The author did not, however, produce any evidence to back up his allegation.

112 It was claimed after the revolution that Rezā alishāh had resisted the landreforms of the 1960s, and the following citation was brought forward in support: “I wrote several letters to the [officials] of the time and I made proposals, but as it appeared this program had been designed in advance and that it [conformed] to an international standard, [I realised] it could not be changed and discussing it would be pointless” (Heyvat-e tahrirīye-ye ketābkhāne-ye Amīr Soleymānī, 1367/1988: 146). There is no accompanying evidence of these letters (while others are included), and despite the fact that a fatva had been issued against the landreforms, Rezā alishāh’s moderate wording suggests it was not too much of a crucial, religious issue to him. In conclusion, there is no evidence here to suggest that Rezā alishāh publicly opposed the Shah, as did his son (see below).


A ‘religious perspective’

The occasion was provided for by the 1968 International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran, which was opened on April 21 and presided over by princess Ashraf. Reżā’alishāh had written a manifesto entitled ‘Religious Perspective on the Human Rights Declaration’, which, a later preface explains, presented “an Islamic attitude to the [Universal Human Rights] Declaration [and] was put into the hands of the representatives of [all] Islamic [countries that] attended the [...] Conference.”

The Religious Perspective not only criticised the Universal Declaration but also took issue with a (royally sanctioned) parliamentary decree on the regulation of prostitution, which had been enforced since 1953. Fiercely condemning and rejecting it, Reżā’alishāh took the opportunity to lament fading Islamic values, the spread of non-Islamic male-female relations, the neglect of female religious obligations, and ignorance of Islamic women’s rights and restrictions in Iran.

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115 HAZEGHI, 1970: x. Reżā’alishāh’s text has been published in Persian and in English. The Persian Naẓar-e ma‘hab be e’lāmiye-ye hoşq-e bashar, literally A ‘Religious Perspective on the Human Rights Declaration’, has been translated as ‘A Muslim Commentary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, possibly on purpose, with a Western audience in mind.

116 When we want to declare ourselves on the side of chastity [...], we actually pass a new law. [January 10, 1953] our Foreign Office presented a ‘Supplementary Measure’ to the Majlis on behalf of His Imperial Majesty’s government entitled ‘Improvement of arrangements for the control of Prostitution’. When I heard this I was astounded and grieved. How could the leaders of our country be so ignorant [...] of the Islamic Canon as to take up the [purification] of our land and the prevention of moral degradation without reference to the Canon, in obedience to the promptings of outsiders? The State religion of Iran is officially [...] Islam: and within that the Canon of the Shari’a and the teachings of the Imams [...] Why then should our government [...] bypass this religion and its Canon, which has omitted no point that concerns human life, morals and society, nor failed to legislate for every need of the human community? [...] What could give clearer evidence of the ignorance and negligence of the Commandments of Islam which prevails, than the ‘Supplementary Measure’ of our 1953 Parliament [...]? Some of our leaders may even believe that Islam is like Christianity in having no rule that governs these matters, but merely a general moral principle” (Reżā’alishāh, 1970: 55, 57).

117 Today, alas, most Islamic values are influenced by the [...] politics of strangers. Muslims fail to see the [...] evil of these foreign ways. [R]eligious rites for the Prophet’s birthday [...], for the birth of Ali [...] are neglected, and the holidays, instead of being holy days, are dissipated in banqueting and revelry” (Reżā’alishāh, 1970: 48, 49).

118 “The 9th and 10th days of [...] Muharram [...] are amongst our most sacred holy days. But far too many people not only fail to partake into the due ceremonies [...], but [also] deliberately throw them over in favour of pleasure jaunts to the seaside, where they gloat over the sight of near-naked bodies or indulge in debauches: and yet they have the effrontery to continue to call themselves Shī’a” (Reżā’alishāh, 1970: 49).
Režā'ališāh apologised for addressing these issues. They had been “somewhat of a digression [...] The subject is so sensitive that the horse of my pen took the bit between its teeth and ran away with me.” But the ‘peripheral’ issues and the main treatment of the Declaration shared common ground: the lament over Westernisation, which had become a crucial issue in opposition to the Monarchy since the early 1960s. That is to say, the manifesto reads as a political judgement rather than as a general, religious commentary with one ‘slip of the pen’. It confronted a seamless whole of Westernisation, as the antithesis of religious power.

While Solṭān'ališāh forebears had nearly always shunned political judgement, Režā'ališāh now felt that “certain ideas and systems, e.g. parliamentary democracy, have grown up over millennia in their own environment, and so proved effectively successful. But woe betide the attempt to plant them in another soil and climate where a different growth of thought and of social intercourse has subsisted from time immemorial.” In 1968, the presence of irreligious M.P.s wielding

The following is an indication of the position of women in the Ne'matollāh orders in the Pahlavi dynasty (that is, under Režā'ališāh): “Bei den heutigen Ne'matullāhyya hält der scheich einer frau, die in den orden aufgenommen wird, zum handschlag nicht die hand, sondern einen stock hin, den die bewerberin zu fassen hat” (Meier, 1976, (2): 351, referring to a remark by Gramlich).

119 “Alas! most modern Islamic lands follow habits which do exactly the opposite. Indeed in some, lewdness and lechery prevail more than in non-Muslim lands, since their women have assumed total liberty: and with the throwing off of controls, they have also cast off religion and morality, chastity and temperance. No Faith - indeed no reasonable intelligence - could accept such conduct [...] why should we any longer go on permitting the increasing laxity [...] which has been spreading from the west to the east, seeing that this runs counter to the [...] standards of our religion and to the social dignity of our community? Not only has this false freedom brought shame and disgrace but it has also caused [...] the collapse of families and even murder, as the far too frequent reports in our newspapers testify” [my italics] (Režā'ališāh, 1970: 53-4).
120 “Women are touchy and [...] imprudent [...] the generality [is] more gullible [...]” and thus, should not have equal rights in divorce cases (Režā'ališāh, 1970: 39).
121 “In spiritual matters, Islam does not allow women to take leadership or religious office [...] so women] cannot exercise spiritual authority” (Režā'ališāh, 1970: 52).
122 The major ideologue of Iranian nativism was Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad. His famous pamphlet Gharbzadegi, ‘westoxication’ - that was greatly appreciated by Khomeiny - was “the most significant publication of 1962 for Āl-e Ahmad and for the entire formative political culture of the 1960s [...]” (Dabashi, 1993: 73).
authority was unbearable to Reżāalishāh. In 1964, similarly, Khomeyni had declared decisions taken by members of parliament null and void.\textsuperscript{125}

The predominance of a worldly authority that made no provision for the superiority of Muslims,\textsuperscript{126} whether in parliament or behind the Universal Human Rights Declaration, was the context for Reżāalishāh’s rejection of its spine, the ‘freedom and equality-article’, Article 1:\textsuperscript{127}

People [who rely on] man [...] abuse Reason, [...] which distinguishes man from the brutes, and fail in that belief in the Creator which Reason demands. As humanists they degrade [man] to [the] animal level and put themselves out of the ranks of [mankind.] They are [...] gangrenous members of the body politic.\textsuperscript{128}

Reżāalishāh apparently took Shi‘ite religion far more strictly and political than many of his co-religionists did. Paradoxically, it even led

\textsuperscript{125} He did so in a speech on October 26, 1964 (which caused his exile), after parliament had passed a ‘Capitulation bill’ that granted US military advisors diplomatic immunity (see RAHNEMA and NOMANI, 1990: 303, and ABRAHAMIAN, 1993: 10-11).

\textsuperscript{126} Article 2: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.”

Reżāalishāh’s commented: “Since Islam regards non-Muslims as on a lower level of belief [...], if a Muslim kills such a non-Muslim [...] (i.e. not one who is a professional killer of non-Muslims), then his punishment must not be the retaliatory death, since the faith [...] he possesses is loftier [...] A fine only may be exacted [...]” (op. cit., p. 19). In this spiritual aristocracy, “the top rank is given to fighters for the faith, and the highest of all to martyrs who have laid down their lives in that warfare” (op. cit., p. 18). The vision of Muslims as a superior humanity legitimatised slavery: “A prisoner of war, taken fighting against the true believers, because of his enmity to Islam is automatically of lower rank and therefore reduced to slavery: and the son of such a one is a slave by inheritance [...]” (op. cit., p. 19). This traditional view resembled Khomeyni’s implicit acceptance of slavery in the period 1943-70 (cf. ABRAHAMIAN, 1993: 46).

\textsuperscript{127} The first Article of the Universal Declaration declares unambiguously that: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

\textsuperscript{128} `Reżāalishāh’, 1970: 15. Article 18 reads: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

`Reżāalishāh’s’ comment: “This article is largely acceptable but not without difficulties. Freedom of thought, of conscience and of belief is allowable to the extent that it does not clash with the Qurān or with Islamic Canon Law” (op. cit., p. 32). In line with this view, freedom of expression was only allowed to the extent that it would not disturb the (general order and the) Great Men of Religion (1354/1975, (1): 106).
him to the praise of (the Islamic Monarchy of) Saudi Arabia, the official Wahhabite creed of which had identified Shi‘ism and Sufism as its main enemies: “Saudi Arabia owes its superiority over other lands in the security of property and of social order to the fact of the stricter enforcement of Islamic laws, the higher level of their practice and the greater severity of the penalties for contravening them that prevails there.”

With the contrary example of Saudi Arabia’s Islamic Monarchy - into which one might read an insinuation concerning the Islamic status of the Iranian Monarchy - Rezā‘alishāh concluded that the Declaration promulgated nothing new and that if there was any good in it, it was because of the faint shadow in its articles of more perfect, eternal Islamic prescriptions. ‘Islam is the summit and nothing excels it’.

As a people, we do not [...] aim to improve ourselves, nor do our leaders seek to enlighten us by making us aware of the [Islamic] Commandments. Not only have we ceased to practice these: we have ceased even to recall their existence [...] We run after the dicta of strangers who, if they do possess any good [...], gained it by gleaning over the fields which our great ones sowed and harvested for us, and stored up in the granary of our religion [insertion mine].

When asked whether Rezā‘alishāh had been opposed to the Shah, the present Leader responded in a fashion similar to the former’s conception of politics: “No, the Solṭān’alishāhī order is not political. He was not opposed to the Shah but to his deeds.” But the Religious Perspective, a far cry from the ‘softer Islam’ that is often projected into Sufism in the West, establishes Rezā‘alishāh as a precursor of the Islamic Republic.

There were surely some positions in the Perspective that assumed a traditional clerical stance towards the Monarchy (which still was, however, a long way from Ṣaf‘alishāhī attitudes): “The only right course for a government in matters [of] religion is to consult the Ulema [and] if the government fails to call them in, the Ulema themselves must approach the government and belabour them with indignant protests.”

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132 Interview Majzīb’alishāh, 04/1997, cf. Šāley’alishāh’s exemplary quietist declaration of his order’s Sufi principles in Hey‘at-e Tahkīye-y-e Ketārkhāne-y-e Amīr Soleymani, 1367/1988: “We are not a political party” (op. cit., p. 411).
133 Rezā‘alishāh, 1970: 70. This view matched Khomeiny’s earlier thought (1943-1970), which stressed the clergy “had the responsibility of speaking out if the government did not carry out its main tasks”, including the protection of Islam, and “in
One finds no indication whatsoever in the order’s official literature from 1941 onwards, however, of unease, let alone indignation vis-à-vis the prevalent Islamic Monarchy. Rather, the Iranian Monarchy was celebrated in annual sessions that the Solṭān-ālishāhī Sufis organised in the Gonabadi khānaqāh on the occasion of the birthday of the Shah. That is to say, even the ‘traditionalist’ stance was an innovation.

There had been much indignant, religious protest in Iran from the beginning of the 1960s, and simultaneously a weakening of the position of quietist jurists - who were in fact consulted by the royal government on many occasions. It was to the jurists, a dominant section of whom were now developing activist leanings, that the Religious Perspective specifically addressed itself - contrary to the earlier ‘broadest possible audience’ in, for instance, Pand-e Šāleh. The Perspective was published “in the hope that [...] especially the learned Ulema [...] in whose field this work falls, will pardon and correct any errors they may discover, so that my readers may not be misled.” The protests and the larger shift in the balance of religious power, then, in which Režā-ālishāh could and did now officially share, are what most probably accounted for his change in tone, from neutral to traditional, and beyond that, militant.

Režā-ālishāh is not known to have issued public statements in speech or writing that explicitly call for the establishment of an Islamic Republic ruled by religious jurists. But the fact that a governmental commission for ‘Islamic human rights’ recently consulted his Religious Perspective, indicates at least that some of his ideas have been recognised as legitimate in the Islamic Republic. The following militant statement is a clear sign as well of the Islamic state that Režā-ālishāh envisioned:

The government of an Islamic country is officially Islamic. A government not set up on an Islamic basis, that does not profess Islam, cannot rule. [If a member] of such a government is not a Muslim, his [...] position is strictly illegal. Every member of the Judicature and [...] Legislature must be a Muslim.

_Kashf al-asrar_, Khomeyni had accepted monarchies on condition they sought the advice and consent of the senior clerics (ABRAHAMIAN, 1993: 46, 54).


_Interview_ (Majžib-ālishāh), 04/19/97. The Commission had abandoned its aim of using the Religious Perspective, however, once it found out about its Sufi origin.

_REZĀ-ĀLISHĀH_, 1970: 70. Attacks against the Monarchy frequently centred upon its members. Princess Ashraf consumed and was accused of selling heroin (cf. NIRUMAND, 1967: 186).
The Shah’s adornment of his Monarchy with Islamic signs and his personal efforts at having him portrayed as professing Islam\(^{138}\) were not sufficient anymore to Rezā’alishāh: they lacked the prerequisite of an ‘Islamic basis’. The master’s conviction echoed the militancy of Imam Khomeyni and it sealed the death knell for the reign of the Shah.

Considering this (late) judgement, the report of a meeting in 1978 between Rezā’alishāh and Khomeyni is a plausible one. In it, the Imam - notorious for his reluctance to comment on his politics - explained in detail to Rezā’alishāh the nature and aims of the unfolding revolution.\(^{139}\)

\(^{138}\) The Shah made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1956. “L’événement fit d’autant plus sensation que l’on n’avait pas vu de souverain iranien en ces lieux depuis fort long-temps” (CORBIN, 1971, (1): 66). He initiated the publication of a ‘royal Qur’ān’ named ‘Pahlavi’ in 1965/6, which many jurists fiercely resisted. In 1976 the Court organised an ‘id al-fitr celebration in a Tehran mosque, during which the Shah quasi-spontaneously accepted criticism of his rule by a Molla (REEVES, 1986: 160). Despite the political danger, the ban on ‘Ashūrā-processions was lifted in September 1978. ABRAHAMIAN (1993: 23) cited an opposition newspaper that tellingly stressed the state had been “out to nationalise religion”, as opposed to, this suggests, trying to eliminate it.

\(^{139}\) The meeting is referred to in 〈MAHBÜB’ALISHĀH, 1373/1994-5: 81. On April 19, 1964, 〈Rezā’alishāh〉 wrote a letter to Khomeyni to congratulate him on his ‘release from state detention’ (〈MAHBÜB’ALISHĀH, 1373/1994-5: 498). Sufi informants indicated an earlier contact in mentioning that Khomeyni often referred positively to the tafsīr of 〈Solṭān’alishāh, Bayān os-sa‘ādāt,〉 when teaching jurisprudence in Qom (ALGAR (“Nī‘mat-Allāhiyya”, Encyclopaedia of Islam) juxtaposed its respectability to the tafsīr of 〈Ṣaf‘alishāh,〉 which was “widely criticised, both because of its contents and because it was composed in verse”). They similarly pointed out that 〈Rezā’alishāh〉 and the Imam had had ‘good relations’. Thus, nothing could be further from the truth - at least for the Solṭān’alishāhs - than the statement, made in the Pahlavi era, that the (Iranian) Sufis “deny the need for an intermediate Imām” (FRY, 1956: 10). Even among the enemies of Sufism, there is acknowledgement of the Solṭān’alishāhs’ support for the revolution - although in a very malign interpretation: “Yes, it is the politics of the leaders of the Solṭān’alishāhī khānaqāh to have divided their policy on every issue and to support all of the various, conflicting wings” (MADANI, 1376/1997: 159).
Résumé

The nation-state remained an important frame of reference for the late twentieth-century Ne'matollah regimes. Its representation by the late Pahlavi regime, however, became a ground for political contestation. Iranian Sufism in the period 1941-1979 had royal patronage as an important political context. It was impossible for large organisations (except the religious hierocracy) to operate independently. For them to survive, royal, state patronage was a necessity. Different degrees of royal, state patronage - from personal sponsoring to general ideological incorporation - relate to both the Šaf‘alishāhīs’ social prominence and the Solṭān‘alishāhīs’ sudden religious critique.

Internally, the Šaf‘alishāhī order remained a theatre of conflict, which involved contestations of Freemasonry conceptions of spiritual authority. What made these conflicts characteristic of the period 1941-1979, was the political twist given to them. The Society of Brotherhood was no exception to the Sufi Mystery of Power that established authority through the denial of worldly attachments. Nevertheless, internal enemies were well aware of these attachments, and political implications, and rejected them. Among the Solṭān‘alishāhīs, to the contrary, unitary order was visibly established. There had been resistance to Nūr‘alishāh’s appointment, but Šālelyalishāh and Režāalishāh came uncontested. Both leaders cherished contacts with state and societal - particularly religious - authorities, and the earlier phase of bloody persecutions had been left behind. The pupils of former modernist critics did not pick up their masters’ fights, and unitary spiritual authority even survived Režāalishāh’s late politico-religious shift of sides.

Externally, while the Šaf‘alishāhī elite integrated into the stately regime, the Solṭān‘alishāhīs developed close ties to the lateral, clerical regime that came to represent the Iranian nation more successfully. Režāalishāh’s condemnation of the Shah and his meeting with Khomeyni were conditioned upon the Solṭān‘alishāhīs’ relative independence, created through civil, religious and political integration, which provided crucial room for manoeuvre when the balance of religious power shifted. Despite relations with prominent representatives of the Pahlavi regime, the Solṭān‘alishāhīs’ royal patronage did not extend beyond some measure of ideological incorporation. Institutional overlap between the Society of Brotherhood and the National Lodge, to the contrary, defined an exclusive position, which ruled out any manoeuvre for the Šaf‘alishāhī order when the political tide swept away the Shah’s regime.
PART THREE

In the Islamic Republic
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CHAPTER FIVE
PURGATORY REVOLUTION, 1979-1989

Shortly after the victory of the Islamic revolution, one of its foreign academic supporters stated that “the word ‘mysticism’ is a little problematical” and that “Sufism as an organized body has only a peripheral existence in [the] Shi‘i school. We do find sufi orders, but they are generally rejected by the Shi‘i ulama.”¹ In the Islamic Republic, some two decades later, one disappointed Şaf‘ī alishāhī sheikh held a similar opinion. In reply to my questions as to the social state of contemporary Sufism in Iran, he compared the fate of the various Ne‘matollāh paths to that of “a vine, the shapeless branches of which have decomposed.”²

One could be easily led by statements such as these to the assumption that Sufism - whether Sunni or Shi‘ite, urban or rural - must have suffered greatly from the Islamic revolution, and that as a consequence, it should have virtually disappeared by now. However, a Sufi in exile in the safe haven of London stated of the Solţān‘alishāhī qoţb that he had (wished to stay and had) “remained in Iran after the revolution, displaying his surrender and obedience to Ayatollah Khomeyni.”³ Revolution-ary purges long gone, it was felt by another authority that nowadays “the Nimatullāh Order has many followers in [...] especially Persia.”⁴

The Ne‘matollāh orders overcame initial suffering through social, doctrinal and ideological reform(ul)ations. There were, for instance, personnel changes among the Şaf‘ī alishāhī Sufis that to some extent

¹ ALGAR, 1983: 55, cf. BAYAT, 1982: 195; FISCHER, 1980: 143, 277; and RICHARD, 1995: 51-2, for reflections on the impact of the revolution on groups not favoured by the revolutionary elite (i.e. among whom Sufi orders). LEWISOHN (1998: 440) held that “Despite the fact that certain Sufis with a clerical background, such as Majdūb Āli Shāh, and Husayn Āli Shāh, and some clerics with gnostic tendencies, such as Mullā Hadi Sabzvārī and Bahr al-ul‘īm, were able to transcend the artificial exoteric-esoteric divide in their lives and works, effecting a reconciliation between the largely separate fields of the juridical shari‘at and the mystical šari‘at, the intellectual endeavours of individuals belonging to these elite subcultures have done little to dispel the bitter rivalry and enmity which still permeates public social relations between the two groups (especially in Iran under the ayatollahs)”.
² Cf. CHAHĀRDAHI, 1361/1982-3: 182.
³ HOMAYÕÕN, 1371/1992: 221. The qoţb referred to is the late Ṯeţ‘alishāhī.
⁴ NURBAKHSH, 1991: 144. The author referred to the Zor-Reyāsatayn order.
helped shape a revolutionary profile for the order, while the informal leader in the main lodge abstained from any claims to sheikhal authority. The Solṭān’alishāhī Sufis identified themselves strongly with revolutionary clerics and with victims of the war with Iraq. Generally speaking, both Ne’matollāhī orders redirected their public discourse and practice towards political, Shi’ite audiences in the new Islamic state. These developments facilitated their accommodation in the Islamic Republic.

The depth of Sufi suffering that can be attributed to the revolution is still lacking in any precise measurement to this day. But the consideration of reform(ulations) in the Ne’matollāhī orders allows one to scratch the surface of Sufism’s survival through adversity. The extent to which the Šafi’īalishāhīs and Solṭān’alishāhīs succeeded in maintaining themselves in the Islamic Republic, was conditioned not only on contingent forces but also variant reputations on the eve of the revolution, and different sets of performance in the face of the new circumstances. The disadvantage of ties to the ancien régime made itself felt in the Šafi’īalishāhī order. The stains of an otherwise spoiled Solṭān’alishāhī reputation were blurred, inversely, by a pre-revolution meeting with Khomeyni made public in the Islamic Republic. Through the shadows of the past and the revolutionary fervour, new mystic regimes appeared.

Until 1996, the history of the Islamic Republic roughly divided into three periods in which the state ideology successively emphasised the supremacy of Islam alone (‘Islam-Islam’), then blended it with patriotism (‘Islam-Iran’), and finally, with full-blown nationalism (‘Iran-Iran’). The third period - after the ‘decade of war and revolution’ and Khomeyni’s death in 1989 - brought a series of reforms. These included ideological moderation and the emergence of ‘state mysticism’, enabling Shi’ite Sufism to accommodate to regime religiosity (see chapter 6). In the first period, however, the Shi’ite hierocracy reoriented itself towards state affiliation, and Khomeyni’s doctrine of the absolute Rule of the Jurist. Guiding the process of state building, this hermetic ideology largely ruled out opportunities for Sufism to assert itself either religiously or politically. It was only once Shi’ite religiosity attained a patri-

otic colouring, during the war with Iraq (1980-1988),\(^7\) that Sufis saw chances to acquire national religious legitimacy.

\section*{IN BETWEEN REJECTION AND PERSECUTION}

The account of ‘what happened’, whether or not an ‘event’ had occurred and, if so, what was its nature, always had a rhetorical purpose [...]

Violence [...] plays the motivating role [...] whether as physical confrontation, [...] vengeance, [...] or state oppression that one must escape.\(^8\)

The refutation (radd) of their doctrines and their denunciation as heretics (takfîr), by either rulers or jurists, had been the fate of many Sufis throughout Islamic history. Social configurations in which rulers co-operated closely with jurists (as in the late Safavid era) had been particularly detrimental. Now, with the Shi’ite vanguard’s assumption of state power - i.e. rulers and jurists uniting in terms of personnel - revolutionary purges had to be lying in wait.\(^9\) Certain clerical attitudes moreover seemed to make these plausible. The universe of clerical anti-Sufism was clearly revealed to me during a coincidental meeting in Qom with Ayatollah Āzād, who took the traditionalist stance with enthusiasm: “We do not agree with Sufism at all. Sufis do not marry or work, are lazy, they beg and they do not recognise the holy law. They are outside Islam and we do not exchange our women with them.”\(^10\)

However, among all official and documented repression of Bahais, Freemasons, or Monarchists, sources are silent on Sufism.\(^11\) It seems

\(^7\) \textit{Tehran Times} (11/03/96) published a telling ‘Interview With the Mother of 3 Martyrs’: “Q: What was their motivation for going to the battlefield? A: It is incumbent on not only every Muslim but on every person to defend his homeland, let alone the fact that my sons were defending Islam.”

\(^8\) \textit{Gilsenan}, 1996: 48, 59. \textit{Mir-Hosseini}’s account of the Ahl-e Ḥaq in the Islamic Republic (1994, (2)) stated they see the Islamic Republic as hostile (\textit{op. cit.}, p. 217, my emphasis), while evidence indicated they played a far from insignificant socio-political role in it: “In both the previous and the 1992 parliamentary elections [Ahl-e Ḥaq leader Sayyed Naṣrāddîn] proved that his support for one candidate could transform the electoral results at the level of the province” (\textit{op. cit.}, p. 224).

\(^9\) For the Ahl-e Ḥaq, the Islamic Republic “revived a painful collective memory, dormant in the last decades before the revolution” (\textit{Mir-Hosseini}, 1994, (2): 217). Providing context for Ṣ̱r-Reyāsateyn attitudes, \textit{Lewisohn} (1998: 460) stated that “with the advent of the religious revolution [...] the historical animosity between mulla and Sufi had hardly subsided; the Ṣ̱r-Shi’ite clergy’s hatred of Sufism lay dormant but not dead. Only a century and a half away lay the anti-Sufi pogroms.”

\(^10\) \textit{Interview}, 06/07/97.

\(^11\) “Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, the head of the judiciary, stated in 1996 that Bah’āism was an espionage organization [...] Attorney Mohammed Assadi was executed
that public documents from revolutionary Iran that testify to Sufism as a target are either unavailable, as yet, or non-existent. Nevertheless, many Iranians narrate the fate of Sufism in terms of official persecution.

An official at the Police Department for Foreigners’ Affairs lectured me on Sufism’s illegality when I was at his office to renew my visa. When I asked for evidence, he decided not to stress the point. A student who was sympathetic to the revolution explained to me that Sufism was referred to in schools as an example of what Islam would be if devoid of its social mission. He cited political statements of Shi’ite revolutionaries but he could not produce one that framed Sufism as infidelity (kofr), polytheism (sherk) or illegitimate innovation (bed‘at). Officials in Tehran’s Parliament Library looked at me sternly when I introduced myself, but they nevertheless allowed me to consult their collection, which included generally accessible Sufi handwritings. A Tehran-based Hojjat ol-Eslâm held Sufism to be a worthy object of persecution, but he enthusiastically agreed when I cited Henry Corbin to him, who had cited ‘Heydar ‘Amoli’s dictum that “true Sufis are Shi’ites and true Shi’ites are Sufis.” A teacher of ‘erfân in Qom held Sufism to be rejectionable, but the person who introduced me to him told me that he himself was known as that city’s Sheikh of Sufism (sheykh ol-taṣâvvoof).

The alleged systematic persecution of Sufism in Iran prevailed not only in outsiders’ representations, but is also suggested in a contemporary Sufi narration of the self. The (hi)story of the Zo‘r-Reyãsatêyn Ne’matollahi order provides the particular context for its articulation.

The Zo‘r-Reyãsatêyn order as it is presently known, was shaped and moulded by Javad Nurbakhsh, who became its qoãb in 1953. In 1955, Nurbakhsh bought the lodge of his deceased spiritual master in the South of Tehran and reportedly had it registered as a religious endowment (vaqf). It was, according to a Tehrani affiliate, enlarged through

on August 9 on charges that included [...] being a Freemason and a member of the International Lions organization” (U.S. Department of State, Iran Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997, pp. 6; 2). On 10/24/93, “Majlis deputies approved a bill [...] which entails that administrative offences would now include [...] membership of deviant groups [...] and membership of Freemasonry organizations” (unspecified internet message). It has furthermore been reported that “all documents and records of Iranian Freemasonry were captured by the Revolutionary Guards in 1980” (communication 02/16/99, via the Supreme Council of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States of America). Although Human Rights Watch and Amnesty reports have repeatedly included sections on the persecution of religious minorities in Iran, I have not been able to trace any clear case in these reports that concerned Sufism.
the purchase of surrounding properties, and subsequently adorned with a garden, library and a museum. The Žo‘r-Reyāsat eyn morīds had their private places in the lodge, but they did not live inside. The master’s modern views held that social life was to be accomplished outside the lodge, while the inside was reserved for spirituality. From 1962 to 1977, Nurbakhsh combined the leadership of the order, among many other activities, with a position as psychiatry professor in Tehran.

In 1974, Nurbakhsh visited the United States and in 1975, the first American convent was founded in New York City. More American lodges followed, and a building was purchased in London as well. The ‘temples’ attracted Iranian students who had gone abroad for education. “They lacked spirituality in the West,” a Tehrani affiliate told me, “so they came to look for it with Dr. Nurbakhsh.” He was the appropriate man for them, because as a secular professor - who was lecturing academic audiences on Freudian psychoanalysis - he represented the Westernised and educated elite, while his Sufi spirituality represented in some ways a compromise between religion and modern life. In the Western wave of ‘spiritual reorientation’ in the 1960s and 1970s, it was possibly this very attraction that brought foreigners to Nurbakhsh’s order as well. About a dozen of them travelled to Iran to see the spiritual homeland of their newly found, mystic faith, to go around the country to visit lodges, and see the main lodge in Tehran.

The order developed as the membership structure changed. Its ranks had been filled by elderly people, “many of whom were illiterate and

\[12\] Interview Tehran affiliate, 11/27/96. Scattered over the country, there were according to my interviewee about forty lodges, especially in smaller cities, bought or constructed between 1960 and 1970, and an equivalent number of sheikhs to lead them. He hesitatingly admitted the Žo‘r-Reyāsat eyn order represented, in Iran in the late 1960s, ‘tremendous social power’. ALGAR (“Ni‘mat-Allāh’, Encyclopaedia of Islam) wrote that Nurbakhsh ‘managed to recruit many members of Tehran high society at a time when the profession of a certain type of Sufism was becoming fashionable; to build a whole series of [lodges] around the country; and to publish a large quantity of Ni‘mat-Allāh literature, including many of his own writings.” Cf. MIR-HOSSEIN’S (1994, (2): 214) account of the Ahl-e Haq, who went through similar modernising developments. Besides doctrine, the Ahl-e Haq seem to have differed from the Žo‘r-Reyāsat eyn mainly in their middle-class, as opposed to upper-class, affiliation.

\[13\] NURBAKHSH considered himself “one of the first Sufi authorities to be well versed at once in the traditional science of the soul and modern psychiatry” (1991: 157).

\[14\] “Under Dr Nürbaksh, this branch of the order has undergone a vigorous expansion with several new khānagāhs built in Iran and, taking advantage of the interest in Sufism in the West, an expansion of the order to England and the USA” (MOOREN, 1985: 214).
did not see the use in reading,” the Tehran Sufi said. From the late 1950s, book collecting and publishing started, which, according to the Master, resulted in “one of the largest collections of ancient manuscripts […] on Islamic mysticism in Iran.”¹⁵ As Nurbakhsh now headed many branches in Iran and abroad, his prolific writings gained in importance, in addition to his presence in person or mediated by his kholafāʾ. In his writings, the stress on Islam became less pronounced. While the earliest publication strikes one as fairly traditional, later references to Islam have an ambivalent, which is to say ecumenical sound to them.¹⁶ When the revolution came, the Žo‘r-Reyāsat-eyn had not only physically (geographically) but also spiritually become an international order.¹⁷

¹⁵ NURBAKHSH, 1991: 157; LEWISOHN, 1998: 459. Contacts were reported between Nurbakhsh and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (who was held to still regularly visit the London lodge whenever he came around), and Henry Corbin is also reported to have regularly visited the order in the 1970s.

¹⁶ Golzār-e Mīnes from the late 1940s is a traditional composition (highly valued by non-Žo‘r-Reyāsat-eyn Ne‘matollāhī as well), in honour of Nurbakhsh’s master. Three decades later, a statement by Nurbakhsh still looked traditional: “since a sufi must be a Moslem, whoever claims to be a sufi without being a Moslem, makes a false claim” (1978: 107). However, Gramlich cited a sheikh (before the revolution) who stated there were no preconditions whatsoever for an adult’s entrance, which contrasted sharply with even the Šaf‘ī alislāhī Consultancy Council’s demand for monotheism (1981: 74). In a 1991 summary of the Ne‘matollāhī order - that says curiously little about Nurbakhsh’s immediate forebears, while earlier qoṭbs are expounded upon (‘ŠA‘Ī‘ALISHĀH, 1375/1996: 433, mentioned a rupture) - Nurbakhsh only once referred to the meaning of Islam for him, which puts in doubt the extent to which he still conceived of Sufism as intrinsically Islamic. Ecumenicalism stood out: “Any propagation of Sufism should aim at the reality of Islam so that an attitude of love may be generated capable of unifying followers of divergent faiths” [my emphasis] (1991: 158). My first impression of Žo‘r-Reyāsat-eyn ecumenicalism derived from visiting the London khānaqāh in 1996 and reading the magazine Sufi, both of which addressed international audiences interested in spiritual progress in a broad sense. This corresponded to a reproach against Nurbakhsh by an enemy of Sufism: “Ya‘ ‘Ali Saviour, a general Shi‘ite formula] was changed into Yā haqq [Oh Ultimate Reality/God, a specific Sufi formula the ambiguity of which leaves for many interpretations] […] in order for him to be accepted by non-Islamic masses as well” [my insertions] (‘ŠA‘Ī‘ALISHĀH, 1375/1996: 398-9). The Žo‘r-Reyāsat-eyn, it is not exaggerated to state, were a ‘weststruck’ part of Iranian society. Idries Šāh’s international Sufi Movement featured a similar ecumenicalism - in his case particularly concerning Sufism and Freemasonry, which, he said, were basically the same (1964: 206-7).

¹⁷ LEWISOHN’s (1998: 439) interpretation of Žo‘r-Reyāsat-eyn history stated that “Persian Sufis - the [Žo‘r-Reyāsat-eyn] branch of the N‘matullāhīyya in particular - have often […] aligned themselves with advocates of secular liberalism and modernization.” As regards the late twentieth century, however, evidence for such a statement is lacking. The Žo‘r-Reyāsat-eyn were ecumenical and modern, but neither in touch with religious, nor secular (including liberal) opposition to the late Pahlavi state.
After the revolution, “the Islamic authorities invited [Nurbakhsh] to pledge allegiance to Imam Khomeyni [...] to demonstrate that there was no political ambiguity between the Ne'matollāhī order and the new government.” 18 Nurbakhsh, however, had decided to flee and emigrated to the United States, where he founded new lodges. 19 In 1983, he settled in London, which became the new headquarters. Four British members were then appointed deputies. 20 A basis abroad had also become a necessity now, because of Nurbakhsh’s public hostility to the Islamic Republic: “Several invitations [...] asking him to come back to Iran, have met with [his] irrevocable ironic reply: ‘I will return on the day when you can guarantee that I can insult Khomeyni with impunity [...]’.” 21

According to a Tehrani affiliate, twenty-five lodges were closed down after the revolution, and the orders’ publications were prohibited. 22 In 1996, the centre in London stated that the main Tehrani khāna-qāhī had been among the closed lodges and that visiting the Sufis in Iran would be a very dangerous enterprise. 23 However, “during the 1990s, Nūrbakhsh has [...] written monographs in Persian on individual classical Sufi masters [...], which were published in Tehran and almost immediately sold out.” 24 Whatever happened in the revolutionary fervour

18 RICHARD: “The insistence of the authorities led Nurbakhsh, who was anxious above all things to preserve his freedom, to go into exile” (1995: 51-2). Cf. MIR-HOSSEINI’s account (1994, (2): 212) of the international attractions on exile Iranians of a modernist group in the Ahl-e Ḥaqq.
22 ʿHASHŪRĪ stated that “disputed lodges [were] confiscated” (1375/1997: 8). In an interview (04/16/97), he could not confirm whether these confiscations concerned ʿOṯr-REYĀŠATYNAH lodges. According to the leader of the Zahabīya order, Dr. Ganjavivān, no Zahabī lodges have been confiscated by the Islamic Republic, and the publications of the Zahabīya have continued (LEWISOHN, 1999: 48).
23 Visit/Interview ʿAlīreżā Nūrbakhsh, 04/16/96.
24 LEWISOHN (1998: 460). A Tehrani affiliate was uninhibited in writing for the international ʿSufi. Although the “publication of new works and reprinting of old works on Sufism under the Niʿmatullāhī imprint has been banned since 1995 by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance” (op. cit., p. 461), it is equally true that “the Niʿmatullāhī master’s writings, which had been reprinted in 1994, were still available [in 1996] in bookstores” (op. cit., p. 461). Solijānʿalishāhī books have, reportedly, been taken out of stock a few years ago, and are only now, with the current regime changes, reprinted (conversation, 07/03/97). Critical editions and literary reviews of classical Sufi literature did continue, as is seen, for instance, in Nāme-ye farhangestān, 2, (1), 1375/1996. In 1985, a new edition of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq treatise Haqq ol-ḥaqīyekh came out in Tehran (MIR-
and the nearly two decades that followed it, Sufi gatherings continued in 1997, and Nurbakhsh’s publications were quite readily available.

Except for literary mysticism, certain kinds of (popular) Sufi piety survived without an effort because they could not be distinguished - except in terms of their practitioners - from Shi‘ite (popular) religiosity - self-flagellation, Fatima-worship, dream-visitations by the Imams, belief in the evil eye, etc. The Khākṣār were not blemished by a reputation for royal relations. In the outskirts of Tehran I met with ‘Ali, a Khākṣārī who had ostentatiously filled his little antique shop with Sufi paraphernalia - no attempt had been made to conceal them. A private Khākṣār lodge, in a garage, was filled with what critics would surely denounce as ‘Sufi idols’, but here, they included pictures of the Leader and Imam Khomeyni. “The Khākṣār are the only legitimate Sufis,” its chairman said, proudly, and related of the lawful wonders of Ayatollah Bor‘jerdī. On Imam ‘Ali’s birthday, a Sufi ceremony was organised in his neighbourhood, which, except for ‘ekr and some real ‘Sufi idols,’ was indistinguishable from other signs of Shi‘ite religiosity in the city.

However, the Zo‘r-Reyāsatīn - who have successfully managed to portray their branch in the West as the one and only Ne‘matollāh - were internationalised when the revolution came, and consequently, the margins of republican Islam proved too tight for them.

HOSSEINI, 1994, (2): 214. LEWISOHN (1998: 461) mentioned there are to this day some 60 Zo‘r-Reyāsatīn lodges, ‘the lights of which remain still lit’.

25 There has been official legitimisation for certain kinds of popular religiosity from the Howze-ye ‘Elmiye-ye Qom: “Question: Does the matter of the ‘evil eye’, current among women, contain truth, like if they say this or that person was struck by the evil eye? Answer: The evil eye is a reality” (Pāsdār-e eslāmī, 1375/1997, 178: 44).

26 Congregation, 11/23/96. To underscore respectability, one Sufi referred to his group as Khākṣārī-Ne‘matollāhī. Initiation into the four main Khākṣār groups has meant co-membership in the Ahl-e Haqq, whose fate was reportedly less fortunate. In Tehran (and probably urban areas in general), it meant spiritual affiliation and the extension of a highly valued title (cf. CHAHĀRDĀHI, 1361/1982-3: 491). The Ahl-e Haqq were historically reproached for being ‘deifiers of ‘Ali’ (‘Alīfālāhī), and they were held to feel God manifested himself in the Ahl-e Haqq leader Soljān Esdāq (CHAHĀRDĀHI, 1370/1991: 36). They have been organised in ‘houses’, that according to CHAHĀRDĀHI (1370/1991: 35) numbered 12 in 1991. The Ahl-e Haqq singer Parās (reportedly a pupil of ‘Safvat), who performed for women’s audiences, has been forbidden to record her music in the Islamic Republic. This fate has been shared by many other female singers, such as ‘Marziye’ (cf. The Economist, 04/01/95).

27 This has been contested by many. A Soljān‘alishāhī protested Nurbakhsh’s biased presentation during a SOAS congress on historical Persianate Sufism in May 1997 (conversation, 07/03/97).
While the Islamic Republic’s invitations of Nurbakhsh indicated a certain readiness for coexistence, his narration suggested state oppression - Khomeyni’s wrath - to be Sufism’s fate. But other Neamatollahi orders were primarily Iranian, geographically and spiritually, and their fate has been more complicated. Many Sufis did pledge allegiance to the new order and one ought therefore, beyond the plain and prevalent view of repression and resistance, to explore Sufism’s accommodation.  

The Soltan‘alishahi order

Haaji Soltan‘hoseyn Tabezadeh "Reza ‘alishahi"

While Reza ‘alishahi’s brother ‘Nuri’ Tabezadeh reportedly “aided the revolutionaries in Tehran”, the situation in the order’s centre in Beydokht, Khorasan, had become very tense because of revolutionary agitation against the Sufis. Alleged royal and regime connections were and are contested. A contemporary, defamatory pamphlet claimed: “An evil [...] man such as Lieutenant General Neamollahi Nasiri, head of the Security Organisation during the era of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi [...] belonged to a Sufi [...] family, and he himself too claimed to be a Sufi [...] and he was allied to the Gonabadi line.” A local mullah wrote: “The revolutionary Muslim people of Gonabad became very anxious from the demonstrations of allegiance to the Shah by the club-bearing dervishes, and in the end, on the day of Moharram 12 [two days after ‘Ashura, December 2, 1979] they got into their cars with the aim of smashing up the Sufis.” This was allegedly averted on the mullah’s intercession - despite his being a self-proclaimed enemy of Sufism - and as a result, he observed with satisfaction, “some of the Sufis became remorseful and turned over to the clergy.”

Later on, Reza ‘alishahi was brought before a revolutionary tribunal in Beydokht, on the basis of unclear charges. Preventing victimisation by revolutionary justice, however, a decree issued by the Judicial High Court in Tehran, “which was based upon Reza ‘alishahi’s absolution by  

28 ORTNER (1995) criticised dichotomous models of repression and resistance such as SCOTT’s (1990), both as an unsatisfactory theoretical predisposition and as ‘ethnographic refusal’.
Apparently, even enemies admit, Khomeyni (or those who spoke in his authority) stood up for Reżā'ališah, whom the Imam had probably met with somewhat earlier.

On March 31, 1979, immediately after the victory of the Iranian Revolution, Reżā'ališah had returned from a trip to Mashhad to settle in Tehran for a few months. In between medical treatments for his deteriorated condition, he had also managed to meet with various Sources of Emulation. After recuperation, Reżā'ališah again made a number of travels, some for medical treatment, which took over five months, and returned to Tehran on March 20, 1980. He made cautiously clear that these and other travels were not a pretext for flight from Iran, as is seen in a reverential advertisement published in the most respectable national newspaper, Etteľā'at. Hereafter, he would reside permanently in Tehran, both because of repeated requests by the foqarā in the capital and because of protracted hostilities by the local population in Beydokht.

However, before his return, in his absence, an event had occurred in Tehran that profoundly impressed the Šoltān'ališah order. This is how Reżā'ališah’s son, his successor ʿMaḥbūb'ališah, narrated it:

35 ʿOh God! 121. Taking leave. In the name of God [...] We hereby ask the honorable presence of the great and revered āyatollāh ol-ʿozma Khomeyni [...] for permission to embark on a short foreign journey, because of the agony of finding my heart in a non-tranquil state, because of rheumatism and other ailings, and we would by these means like to say goodbye to the high-placed gentlemen of the ʿolamā and the great clergy who display gratitude with respect to poverty, and to the honoured friends and noble brothers, and we ask of God for all of them good health and prosperity and we hope that the brothers in faith will accomplish the realisation of the duties of the sharīʿa and the work in stipulations of religion [...] and constant development of the truly Islamic revolution. And greetings to the highest ones and to God’s pious servants of ʿAli, Faqīr Šoltānhoseyn Tābane Gonābādī, Rabī’ al-avval 29, 1401, Bahman 16, 1359’ [February 5, 1981] (in Homāyūnī, 1371/1992: 222).
36 This reason is unofficial. An enemy of Sufism malignantly related an opposite version: “[The Sufis] were on the lookout [...] in Beydokht to check on any car coming in, for portraits of Imam Khomeyni. When they found portraits, they smashed the windows of the car’ (Madanī, 1376/1998: 155).
[...] in the night of ʿĀshūrā\(^{37}\) in the year 1400Q (Āzar 9, 1358) [November 30, 1979], after the closing of the ‘azādārī gathering,\(^{38}\) in about the middle of the night, just as [happened to] the tents of Hoseyn,\(^{39}\) the Hoseyniyya Amīr Soleymānī in Tehran became involved in a heavy fire, which caused the complete destruction of the building, as well as its equipment and furniture. During that time, in which my noble father was abroad for medical treatment, he, after hearing of this calamity, and expressing much grief, ordered for the ‘azādārī ceremonies not to be stopped under any condition and to continue them in the adjacent house. In the same way, he ordered: ‘prepare the ground of the Hoseyniyya for reconstruction from tomorrow proper, and in case financial possibilities will not be found, I will, if possible, sell my own house [...] so that assistance will come in the expenditure’ [insertions mine].\(^{40}\)

From the time that Reżā’alishāh took up his permanent residence in Tehran, he would be fully occupied by his daily activities, which included first of all overseeing the reconstruction of the Hoseyniyya Soleymānī. Furthermore, he presided over Sunday and Thursday evening and Friday morning sessions, and ‘azādārī gatherings in the second lodge in the capital, the Hoseyniyya Hā’erī. The gatherings were shifted back to the Hoseyniyya Amīr Soleymānī after its reconstruction. The new building, which included a semi-public library that contains 12,000 books in many languages, was completed on July 12, 1982, and it was opened on November 7 the same year.\(^{41}\)

The calamity of fire set to the convent has been dealt with by Solṭān’alishāh notables with an overall silence. If they are pressed to the point, one will hear them evasively declare that it was “the work of

\(^{37}\) ʿĀshūrā is the tenth day in the month of Moḥarram on which Hoseyn’s martyrdom is mourned.

\(^{38}\) ‘Azādārī gatherings in general are mourning sessions for deceased persons, and more in particular mourning sessions commemorating the martyrdom of Shi’ite notables and the imams.

\(^{39}\) ‘The tents of Hoseyn’ refers to the fire set to Imam Hoseyn’s military camp outside Karbala in 680, by the troops of Yazīd, after which the political cause of Shi’ism was lost for centuries. See the sections on the Ṣaff’alishāhī order in this and the next chapters for their religious, Sufi significance.

\(^{40}\) Māḥbūb’alishāh, 1373/1994-5: 120 (note), cf. op. cit., p. 81: “in the night of ʿĀshūrā in the year 1400Q [1979] the Hoseyniyya Amīr Soleymānī in Tehran became involved in an arson attack, and as [Reżā’alishāh’s] biography will later show, he allowed for no delay whatsoever in the procession of the ‘azādārī ceremonies [...] and he ordered the sessions to be continued [...].”

ignorant enemies of Sufism," and refuse to be any more specific. Angry silence, as a token of avoidance or communication breakdown (qāhr), is a recorded repertoire in Iranian ways of conflict resolution, which is held to clear the field for third-party mediation. Such mediation to have taken place, is suggested in a complementary scenario of co-optation: a widespread rumour claims the order has received 40 million tāmān from the government after the fire, in return for silence about the event. Although I have been unable to ascertain the real course of events, the fact that Soltān’alīshāhi silence was melancholic in resignation, deliberately not angry, excludes the reading that has the rhetoric of silence, in any power context, as a token of resistance. Whether or not mediation has taken place, silence here served accommodation. This reading is supported by the order’s external activities in the Islamic Republic, which it tried to convert into a home.

The double mission of social and religious integration, which was successfully accomplished in the Pahlavi period but now under renewed strain, was to be re-established. A new state context for religion had come to the fore in revolutionary definitions of Shi’ism, in which “rituals such as namaz-e jama’at (the congressional prayer) [were] reinterpreted as forums for expressing political solidarity of the Muslims.” After the revolution, it was observed that “lifecycle rituals provided mediums for the new messages. Funerals of village martyrs were turned into propaganda rallies, and at weddings girls chanted slogans like, ‘Death to the opponents of velāyat-e faqīh.’”

42 Āzmāyesh soberly remarked: “it is often said that it was a premeditated attack from the side of the prejudiced and the enemies” (1371/1992: 14). A Tehran resident unrelated to the order but aware of the above events interpreted this verbal caution as a case of ‘dissimulation’ (taqīya) (conversation, 10/20/96). His story is plausible as one of the order’s librarians lied to me about the real course of the event in asserting that it occurred somewhere during the Pahlavi era (conversation, 11/19/96).

43 ASSADI, 1982: 203.
44 Interview Šafi’alīshāhī Sufi, 05/01/97.
45 GAL (1995: 419) rightly stressed, in a critique of Scott’s exploration of covert forms of resistance (1990), that “silence can be as much a strategy of power as of weakness, depending on the ideological understandings and contexts [...].”

46 ALGAR (“Nī’mat-Allāhīyya”, Encyclopaedia of Islam) rightly observed of the Gonābādī Sufis that “they have been for several decades the largest single group of Nī’mat-Allāhī descent in Iran”, and that “it is no doubt because of the sober, shari’ā-oriented nature of their Sīfīsm that they have been able to retain this position even after the establishment of the Islamic Republic.”

Analogous to these generic changes and in line with the Soštân-‘alishâhî’s previous cultivation of clerical proximity, Režâ‘alishâh now, in 1979, publicly announced mourning ceremonies in the lodge on behalf of Ayatollah Ţâleqânî “who spent his life struggling in the way of Islam” and on behalf of Ayatollah Moţaḥhârî, who had obtained ‘martyrdom’ in the struggle with the (Pahlavi) ‘regime of oppressors’. Far from making Sufism into a ‘resistive space’, these performances, in which one could observe that “through mimesis [...] the disadvantaged appropriate the power of the [...] dominant classes and make it their own”, enhanced a public respectability.

From the second half of the 1980s, Režâ‘alishâh’s health deteriorated to such an extent that he was forced to spend most of his time at home. The foqarâ came to visit in between his morning activities, which included responding to the abundance of mail from Iran and abroad that he daily received, and his afternoon activities that included labouring on his last treatise. Rumours circulated in foreign countries of the Soštân‘alishâhî’s persecution in the Islamic Republic, but Režâ‘alishâh never gave up the stoical appearance that was so helpful in the socio-religious reintegration of Soštân‘alishâhî Sufism.

The Iran-Iraq war represented agony and horror for Sufis as much as for other Iranians, but it also provided an occasion for the acquisition of legitimacy. In March 1988, near the end, Tehran was exposed to the Iraqis’ shelling of the civilian population. Iranianness was now at stake.

49 Texts in Homâyûnî, 1371/1992: 221-2 (from Eţtelâ‘at). The openness during the commemorations contrasted to the silence on anything that had to do with initiation, and the workings of the inner organisation. When I inquired about organisational aspects of the order, such as its conspicuous real estate (among which a public hospital), my question was cut short by the leader’s remark that “all of this is non-essential” (interview, Majâ‘û‘alishâhî, 05/07/97). He did admit the secrecy (with regard to initiation) and stated that it had to do with protection against the enemies. “If you’d ask the inventor of nougat what his invention consists of, he will not tell you. But you could experience the invention by tasting it.” I came across this gnostic truth many times, as when the ‘teacher of ērfân’ Ostâd Binâ - who had tirelessly attempted to instil the basic principles of mysticism in me - was scorned for this by a critic: “He who finds a treasure, does not spread the word around” (interview, 06/19/97).

50 Werbner and Basu (1998: 8), relating Taussig’s and Stoller’s work to Sufism.

51 Perhaps - but I have no evidence for this claim - the fact that Soštân‘alishâhîs have been referred to as foqarâ, ‘poor ones’ (contrary to the Šâfi‘alishâhîs), has also aided the order in maintaining itself in the Islamic Republic. In the first years after the revolution, a left-wing rhetoric that juxtaposed ‘the poor’ and ‘the rich’ (garvat-mandân) was dominant in the state ideology (see Abrahamian, 1993: 26). Some Gonâbadîs were reportedly put in jail (various conversations; Lewisohn, 1998: 452).
more so than in the revolutionary heyday with the exclusive stress on political Islam, and the qoṭb contributed to the aid of the victims. Looking back at eight years of cruel war, a Solṭān' alishāhī Sufi related with unconcealed pride that “Rezā' alishāh was among the very generous few in the religious community.”52 Sufis had not been exempted from the general mobilisation, and consequently, Rezā' alishāh could solemnly - and publicly - reflect that “the foqarā of the [Solṭān' alishāhī] order are aware that a number from their ranks have become martyrs in the way of God and on the war front and soul to soul they have suffered.”53

Van der Veer writes of religious nationalism that “control over religious centres as material embodiments of beliefs and practices” is crucial.54 The control over their houses of worship - Rezā' alishāh’s primary pulpit - has been crucial, too, in Solṭān' alishāhī performances of religious nationalism. However, Solṭān' alishāhī houses of worship largely defy the premise of carrying any particular significance as ‘embodiments of beliefs and practices’, other than those of mainstream, Shi‘īte Islam. Rezā' alishāh did not resort to aliases in order to conceal mystic affiliations, but when he spoke in public, he spoke as a Shi‘īte Muslim, addressing Shi‘īte audiences. These facts are indicative of a rather complex economy of meaning, in which religious nationalism is only one element and in which Sufi identity is maintained through its dissimulation. The Tehranī lodge being termed hoseyniyya, ‘House of Hoseyn’ instead of khānaqāh,55 defuses conceptualisations of the centre in oppo-

52 Interview, 12/10/96. Differently affiliated Sufis (especially Ṣafī alishāhīs), commenting on the legend, fervently denied any such caritas. As is common in mutual denunciations, they accused Rezā' alishāhī, instead, of accepting money from the Sufis and thus being an immoral person.
53 In Homayoni, 1371/1992: 222. Similarly, the Ahl-e Haqq leader Sayyed Nasreddīn “personally headed an Ahl-e Haqq militia, fighting side by side with the state-organized basij […] to guard the only sector of the frontier that the Iraqi army failed to penetrate” (Mir-Hosseini, 1994, (2): 224).
54 Van der Veer, 1994: 11.
55 Although khānaqāh is inscribed on the Ṣafī alishāhī lodge, its Sufis hardly ever use the word. Nur Bahshī is the only Ne‘matollāhī leader who uses it without an apology, and his order’s publishing house is still named Enteshārāt-e Khānaqāh-e Ne‘matollāhī. The Zahabiya were particularly sensitive to public naming. After the revolution, their lodge in the South of Tehran was renamed Hoseyniya Aḥmadiya. When I first looked for it, I was told there were no khānaqāhs in this neighbourhood. When I mentioned the Zahabiya, someone immediately took me to the hoseyniya. The significance of hoseyniya is its reference to Imam Hoseyn, the most loaded symbol of politicised, militant Shi‘īte religiosity, and its neutralising value, as many Shi‘īte buildings are called hoseyniya too. When a mosque is called hoseyniya, this theoretically
sition to the mosque. In mass meetings, its spatial significance is downplayed for the foqarā, who are admonished that “the house of God is in man’s heart.”

It has been as crucial for religious nationalism as for any other Solṭān-ālishāhī performance to be staged from a purged religious centre. This, in turn, defined a major premise of lasting control over it.

In March 1989, three years before his passing away, Reżā-ālishāh made the contrary circumstances of wartime agony the topic of his speech in a gathering in the neutral Hoseyniyā, on the occasion of the national, Iranian, Persian New Year (nowrūz):

Last year was among the worst this country has seen. The people were exposed to missiles and the friends and the foqarā, from close by and far off, invited me; from Khorasan, from the North, Dubai, and Zahedan. But I said I will not move from among the friends and the foqarā. In joy I was with them, in difficulty I will also remain, until God removes this blight. We have no remedy but to turn to God. Even if we do not get an answer, we have no other place to go. We must knock on that very door, knock that door to such an extent that in the end a head will appear from that door [...] Last year was the most calamitous year for this country [...] Enshā’llāh may God, from his mercy, absolve our land.

invites believers to conceive of it as a signpost in holy war (although on September 17, 1996 (Eṣṭelā’āt, Āzar 27), Rafsanjani surprisingly referred to mosques as an ‘esoterical decoration for the seekers of truth’). Shi‘ite Sufism reserves a special reverence for the first Imam, and it is often heard from them that the khānaqāh is the Place of Worship for Imam ‘Alī. It is not predominantly the political history of the Imam’s defeat by Mo‘āviya, but his gnostic wisdom that constitutes the Imam as an object of Sufi worship. But whether or not Shi‘ite Sufis manage to convince others of their reading of khānaqāh, it does not have a clearly circumscribed Islamic meaning. There were constant worries in Iran with respect to declining attendance to Iran’s estimated 70,000 mosques (According to Iran News, 06/04/97, there were about 2,000 mosques in Tehran in 1997). One of the reasons was the existence of ‘unlawful mosques’, “attendance to which equals heresy”, and the hypocritical leaders of which “scared off the ḥurafā and the faithful (mo‘men) youth” (‘ARABI-NEZHĀD, 1375/1996). These allusions most probably refer to khānaqāhs.

58 Usually, mosques are considered God’s House (Eṣṭelā’āt, Ḥābūn 15, 1375/November 5, 1996).

59 Cf. MIR-HOSSEINI’s parallel case (1994, (1); 283): “During the last stages of the Iran-Iraq war, the takiya [lodge, in Tutshami] housed and fed the fleeing Iranian soldiers, although the Ahl-i Haqq at the time were under pressure from the authorities.”

50 ‘AbD, MABBŪ‘ ALISHĀH, 1373/1994-5: 83 (note). A major difference between Van der Veer’s Indian case and Iranian Sufi religious nationalism is the nature of the political arena wherein religious nationalism is staged. While in India two large communities are involved, here the ‘contest’ is between a rather marginal group and the state.

Nowrūz had been used as a symbol of opposition against the Shah. In March 1963, Khomeyni called for a boycott of nowrūz in protest of the Shah’s land reforms.
The Ṣafī’alishāhī order

In 1982/3, it was written of the Ṣafī’alishāhī order that “actually, this selsele has now been destroyed, and its shrine is now a place where the Qur’ān is read for the dead.”\(^{59}\) Neither part of the observation being entirely accurate, one suspects the observed decline to derive mainly from the revolutionary narrative that builds on the state persecution of Freemasonry - which had fused with Sufism in the Ṣafī’alishāhī order.

A Sufi in Ṣafī’alishāhī’s lodge related that “during the revolution, a heavy conflict evolved between the new revolutionary leaders and the Consultancy Council, because Freemasonry became a target”, and that “consequently, the Council’s leadership fled the country.”\(^{60}\) So, allegedly, did the surviving family of Ṣafī’alishāhī. The former khatīb of Ṣafī’alishāhī’s lodge, Sabzavārī, was well related to the Society of Brotherhood, and some relation to the Shah was attributed to him. After the revolution, he for obvious reasons did not return to the lodge, reportedly became blind and died.\(^{61}\) Officer Neshāt, a nephew of Ṣafī’alishāhī’s granddaughter and a member of the Shah’s royal guard, was executed.\(^{62}\)

was out of favour shortly after the revolution, but by the time of Rezā’alishāhī’s speech it had regained its status as a national and revolutionary symbol.

\(^{59}\) CHAHĀRDAHĪ, 1361/1982-3: 183.

\(^{60}\) During the revolution, many ‘findings’ concerning Freemasonry were published in national newspapers. A typical title for such an article would be ‘Dismantling of four Freemasonry lodges in Shiraz’ (Ettelā‘āt, Farvardin 20, 1358/April 9, 1979). Although if anything these articles prove that very little was found, they reverberate in Persian secondary literature as ‘evidence’ (cf. CHAHĀRDAHĪ, 1361/1982-3). “Between the time of the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Iran (1969) and the Islamic Revolution there were 44 subordinate lodges in Iran” (communication 02/16/99, via the Supreme Council of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States of America).

\(^{61}\) Interview current khatīb, 02/09/97. Reportedly, Sabzavārī had left not only because of former ties but also because of the occupation. The current khatīb referred to him respectfully: “Sabzavārī was very large, I am very small.” The poisonous claim of proximity to the old regime (cf. ḤASŪRĪ, 1375/1997: 8) also extended to the Oveysi order, that is generally held to have suffered from persecution and is now led from the United States. A similar (hi)story, but less dramatic, applies to Homāyūnī’s Malekniyā and Ganjaviyān’s Zahabiya orders. Both leaders fled to England (cf. CHAHĀRDAHĪ, 1361/1982-3: 291). In 1996-1997, the Zahabiya still had large buildings in working order as lodges, administrative centres and libraries, in Tehran and in Shiraz.

\(^{62}\) Interview Ṣafī’alishāhī sheikh, 05/19/97.
A Sufi recollected of the revolutionary times that “beards were set on fire”, and that until recently, people repeatedly threw firecrackers and other burning objects into the yard. Every now and then, self-proclaimed guardians of Islamic purity would make a provocative appearance. But none of Şafi’alishâh’s family, nor other Şafi’alishâhî Sufis are known to have been killed because of their being Sufis.

The Şafi’alishâhîs could not hope to retain the control over their lodge, like the Solţân’alishâhîs had after the fire, as it was immediately, “one night after the victory of the revolution” (Bahman 24, 1357/February 13, 1979), raided by the ‘Committee of Black-dressed People’ (Komîte-ye siyâh-pûshân). The Committee was one of the revolutionary ad hoc organisations that had taken control in the streets. Şafi’alishâhî Sufis said that Daryûsh Forûhar led it: an old-time political broker, and a member of the National Front (Jebhe-ye mellî) who was to become the Minister of Labour in Bazargan’s provisional government.

“How did all this happen?” I asked. “They came in armed with rifles, and just took over the khânaqâh”, my interviewee responded in resignation. “How was all this dealt with by the Sufis?” Smiling, the eyewitness explained that “the Sufis responded by preparing them a meal.

[The intruders] stayed for only a few days, but then their departure was followed by the entrance of another group, the Committee of Vali-âbâd.” Sergeants of the Air Force took part in the Vali-âbâd Committee, which had taken its name from one of the appropriated houses of SAVAK in Vali-âbâd Street in which they had settled. They had allegedly refused orders to use their helicopters and shoot demonstrators,
they had resisted the *ancien régime* in that way and they took their ‘directions’ from the ayatollah Sayyed Mahmūd Tāleqānī.

The Valī-ābād Committee made use of the kitchen to prepare food for its guards. But as “the committee came to rob, being after its carpets and gold,” Sufis also realised that “there were no political reasons.” ‘Big money’ was made in the lodge, which was the produce of the mourning sessions in the Saloon. Some resisted the proceedings. Asked as to what their action had consisted of, the eyewitness pondered and came up with ‘tactical resistance’, which resulted in the removal of rebellious Sufis from the lodge. But in the course of time, the Committee of Valī-ābād disappeared too; it “dissolved like sugar in the tea.” The lodge had by then been under occupation for nearly a year, and the *zekr*-sessions had been in suspension. Finally, after the invasion of revolutionary committees and before 1983, when the Tūdeh party was largely eliminated, “there was an infiltration attempt by Tūdeh-communists, to establish a basis.” But this event too was short-lived in its effects, as a new order would be established on different grounds in the lodge of Ṣafī’alishāh.

### The Board of Trustees

An informal group within the Ṣafī’alishāhī order, which allegedly had for long been opposed to the Freemasonry Council, took the upper hand in the shadowy contests for power. They appointed representatives from their ranks, who reorganised the religious sessions after the disappearance of the Valī-ābād Committee. The new leadership consisted of a council that contained (at least) two members of the order and one member of the Organisation for Religious Endowments (*Sāzemān-e owqāf*). The new leadership was said to offer an ‘annual report’ and pay a ten percent fee of its income (*kharāj*) to the Organisation, annually.

Their leader had gone to see the *Sāzemān-e owqāf* to make a request for registration. The new leadership principally wanted the lodge to be recognised as an organisation for certain ceremonies of mourning for deceased persons (*marāsem-e khatm*), sessions held the third, seventh

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66 There is an alternative (and similarly unverifiable) version as well. According to one Ṣafī’alishāhī Sufi, the *Siyāh-pāshān* were related to Forūhar only in name, while their effective leader was ‘Fotoh’, who, being ‘a charlatan after the lodge’s money’ was thrown out by several Sufis (interview, 05/19/97).

67 *Interview* Ṣafī’alishāhī Sufi, 03/09/97.
PURGATORY REVOLUTION

and fortieth day after the passing away. These ceremonies had been - several Sufis indicated - the lodge’s major source of income. It had been depleted by the Committees, and it was now - as were the convent’s other material assets - in a judicial limbo. Through registration, the material basis was legally restored. Not, however, public appeal. Contrary to the Solṭān’alishāḥī order, which enhanced its Sufi reputation from a purged religious centre, the Šaf’alishāḥī order’s traditional, Šī’ite mourning ceremonies were deliberately kept apart - literally, in their spatial allocation (in the Salon) - from the lodge’s Sufi activities.

Sufi activities included Monday and Thursday night zekr sessions, in the room containing the grave of Šaf’alishāḥ, adjacent to the Salon. The gatherings would take about two hours and were preceded by some sixty minutes of generally Šī’ite sermons in the Salon. These were encapsulated in the larger Sufi event as the entrance of affiliates into the lodge, beforehand, went along with ritual, Sufi greeting (mošāfahā), and before the revolution, too, they had accompanied Sufi gatherings. The leaders of the Board of Trustees would mostly be there, informally marking their authority through being seated together, occupying a central place (see figure 14) and by taking the lead and initiative in oratory and chanting. In addition, there would be regular Sufis affiliated to the order before the revolution as well, novices who never failed to be present, new visitors with an undefined Sufi affiliation and curious passers-by. Average Thursday night sessions would include in between fifty and

Interview, 05/19/97. Depending on mourners’ commitment, there are annual repetitions of the marāsem-e khatam, the fortieth one of which (that makes for the chelle) carries special significance. My personal observations and the above story, which several Sufis in the lodge confirmed, contrast with some of the claims stated by LEOYOSH (1998: 456): “With the triumph of the fundamentalist regime in 1979, the Anjuman-i ukhuwwat was forced to change its name to ›Maktab-i >Al’sibø. Although the actual Khānaqāh building in Tehran remains in much the same state, the building is used primarily as a mosque, and the dervishes who still adhere to this branch of the Ni’matullāhiyya seem to have given in to government pressure to participate in formalities unrelated to Sufism.” First, ’Maktab-i ‘Ali b. Abī Tālib’, referring to Šī’ism in general, is an unlikely description for any particular Šī’ite (including Sufi Šī’ite) grouping. Sufis who claimed they represented the Society of Brotherhood did not refer to their assembly as ’Maktab-i ‘Ali b. Abī Tālib’ to me. Nor were there written signs on posters, pamphlets or inscriptions on the lodge - that one would not have missed - which pointed to this. Second, Šaf’alishāh’s khānaqāh is not used primarily as a mosque (and neither is the lodge of Šāh od-Dowleh) - though sermons are given, as before the revolution, in advance of the zekr-sessions. Thirdly, Šaf’alishāh’s khanqāh was never the Anjoman’s main centre (while the actual centres of the Society of Brotherhood have all the signs of Freemasonry intact (see chapter 6)).
one hundred persons, and no participant could be mistaken as to the centrality of these sessions among the activities of the lodge. It was the other, public activities, then, which made for the widespread and false opinion that there was no Şafi‘alishâhî order anymore. These did nothing, therefore, to improve on Şafi‘alishâhî Sufi legitimacy.

More strikingly so than the Sol‘ün>al‘shâhîs, the post-revolution Şafi‘alishâhîs in Tehran were a new order. Many affiliates claimed - and this corresponded to the predominance of juveniles in the khânaqâh - that they had come to the lodge of Şafi‘alishâh since about fifteen years, which is to say: they did not know the order, other than under the new command of the Board of Trustees. A general observation of Sufism in the Islamic Republic, applied in particular to the Şafi‘alishâhî order:

[…] Words are now carried in Iran by people who have recently embarked on the path, because the old pîrs and morsheds and their representatives have for various reasons - such as their maintaining of relations with members of the previous royal family, or relations with international societies - either been eradicated, or they have moved to settle in other places in the world.

The Board of Trustees had nothing to fear from what remained of the Society of Brotherhood, and the centre of gravity in the Şafi‘alishâhî order definitely shifted back to the lodge of Şafi‘alishâh. But within the lodge, the Board was repeatedly confronted with dissent, that I hesitate to label ‘internal’ as it is doubtful if the Board ever effectively commanded the Şafi‘alishâhîs in the first place. In a Sufi’s somewhat flamboyant recollection of these years, it was held that “there were 133 groups.”

Sheikh Borhân, who claimed the possession of a written authorisation (ejâze) by the late sheikh Ma‘mu‘ûd Sangesar to continue his teachings (see figure 8), disagreed with the new order. The newly appointed ones themselves claimed that Borhân did not have anything like a written permission, but a ‘handwriting’ (dastkhaft) at most, of a far more

69 For some elder affiliates claiming recent affiliation, a rhetorical purpose may be suspected, as the post-revolution order is the one dedicated to official, Islamic respectability. I spoke to an old affiliate in the Tehran lodge who had left Iran and now returned for a personal visit from the United States. “This is not Sufism”, he said disapprovingly, “with all these celebrations for Ḥoseyn” (cf. chapter 6).

70 Ḥasûrí, 1375/1997: 8.

71 Interview Şafi‘alishâhî Sufi, 12/05/97. One of the charismatic pre-revolutionary sheikhs who continued to attract a spiritual affiliation was Ǧanżûr‘alishâh. Stressing the artificial character of the Şafi‘alishâhî Board of Trustees, one of Ǧanţûr‘alishâh’s fans mentioned that “he was a real Sufi.”
insignificant master (whom I was unable to trace). The struggle against Borhān on the part of the Board of Trustees involved a tested repertoire of character assassination for heretics. From the point of personal competence, it stressed, Borhān was unsuitable to lead any group, and from the point of morality, more effectively, he was a failure. The informal leader of the Board of Trustees once related to novices of the visit by a woman, full of complaints, who had asked Borhān for help. The pretender-sheikh had then accepted a conspicuously decorated ring from her, an act anathema to any Sufi ethos. “To ask for money is to destroy [the morality of] one’s deeds,” the leader interpreted, and implied that Borhān was but a miserable thief. “He accepted money, and they have thrown him out,” another Sufi summarised.

Borhān resided in a Ṣafā’alishāh lodge in Gilan and naturally cherished the inverse conception. His ejāze - the most important classical argument in claims to spiritual authority, whatever its particular worth - favoured the rebel sheikh over the Board of Trustees, not any of whose leaders possessed such a document of authorisation. Seen through this historical mandate, they were to be considered illegitimate usurpers.

In amazement of the contrast with the Solṭān’alishāhīs, I asked an old Ṣafā’alishāhī master: “What do all these conflicts stem from, why are they here?” He responded, in what seemed doctrinal imposition - a legitimisation of contingent disintegration: “They are necessary, because through them it appears who is the jewel (gowhar).” For the Solṭān’alishāhīs, however, this contest was eliminated in advance. Two mechanisms in particular, accounted for this: i) initiation (tasharrof) was (among other things) conditioned upon recognition of the leader as

72 “We have [...] pointed to the marriage of Shāh Ne’matollāh’s offspring with princes [...] from the rule of the Sufis who have [...] in raising the standard of their material wealth, filled their stomachs [...], we have a complete sufficiency of information. It is not without reason that the axe (tabarzān) has become the sign of the Sufis. By what means have the likes of Shāh Ne’matollāh Vallī lived up to today? [...] The Sufis of these days [...] try to tell one: If you clear your conscience and free yourself from worldly relations, then ultimate truths will become manifest to you. But they themselves are engaged with means such as investments in trading firms [...] and they even give themselves the right to receive gifts and unpaid services of the novices (moridān) [...]” [my emphasis] (HASRL, 1375/1997: 6). ‘Investments’ in combination to an earlier mention of ‘the likes of Shāh Ne’matollāh Vallī’ refers to the Solṭān’alishāhī order that uniquely engages in real estate investments on some scale (interview, 04/16/97). Asked as to his motives, the author stated: “Well, it’s obvious I hate the Sufis.”

73 Interview, 05/01/97.
74 Conversation, 05/01/97.
head of the ‘orafâ, who in spiritual terms represented the twelfth Imam during his absence, and ii) the ‘renewal of the covenant’ (tajdid-e ahd), with God, the Imams and with the flock, has been one of the most important acts required of a new leader once the old one died.\footnote{Interview ‘Majgûh alishâh, 05/07/97. From Mir-Hosseini’s account (1994, (2): 222, 224) it appears that the Ahl-e Ţâqq were faced with dilemmas to conform and survive after 1979, similar to those of the Solţân‘alishâhîs, which similarly accounted for explicit leadership among the Ahl-e Ţâqq.}

The current Šaff‘alishâhî strife and disintegration, to the contrary, were reflected in a paradox. Although the ejâže had been a fiercely contested asset in the order, it currently lacked a clear definition: “With us, it does not have the strict meaning that it has among the Solţân‘alishâhîs. It only generally denotes the authorisation to grant advice and instruction,” an affiliate reflected.\footnote{Conversation, 05/01/97.}

The lack of an exclusive and unified structure in Šaff‘alishâhî spiritual authority, in doctrine as much as in practice, made for its permanent contestation.

Several Sufis in the main Šaff‘alishâhî lodge in Tehran shared Borhân’s claim and felt that the sheikh was the lodge’s legitimate heir. Others felt that whether or not he should be the lodge’s one and only spiritual leader, he did have the right, as any qualified and charismatic Sufi had, to lead the religious sessions. Borhân reportedly derived pleasure from unannounced visits every once in a while, and from a provocative presence during the źekr. The sheikh from Gilan was an untamed challenge for the Board of Trustees.\footnote{Interview with old-time, regular Sufi visitor to the lodge, 03/09/97. The Board stressed personal qualifications as against formal legitimacy. It admitted to me that ‘ Şaﬄ‘alishâh had himself been less qualified in formal terms than his Solţân‘alishâhî competitor. “Sha‘alishâh was less qualified, but ‘Sa‘aadat‘alishâhî) was ‘illiterate/stupid (bi-savâd)!”’, it was held, in rhyme (conversation, 05/01/97).}

An ousted sheikh named Valî Dorostî resided at the foot of the Damavand mountain in northern Tehran, at a comfortable distance from the main lodge. Nowadays, Dorostî was conducting Sufism ‘from his own’, which is to say: he did not follow another sheikh, and he represented the starting point of a new spiritual genealogy, much like the Oveysî sheikhs who stressed the individual master-pupil relationship. The Board of Trustees dealt with Dorostî as it had dealt with Borhân. In response, Dorostî - who at my instigation confirmed he possessed an ejâže by sheikh Maḥmûd Sangesarî, but contrary to Borhân made no legitimising point of it - mentioned another classical argument that

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would undermine the legitimacy of the Board. As the Sufi disciple’s need for an insightful Spiritual Leader had been central to most Iranian Sufi orders for centuries, “the [whole idea of a collective] Board of Trustees is completely alien to Sufism.”

Why, then, was there a Board of Trustees? After being deliberately kept in the dark for months, I managed a Sufi to point out to me the existence of a financial committee. More visibly, it was obvious that the gas and electricity bills, dates, ḏūb-gūshティ meals, tea, rosewater, printing of announcements, maintenance of the garden and other properties, required funding. In an interview with the informal leader, I innocently attempted to bring up the subject again: “How is finance provided for?”

The Šaf’alishāhī leader silently stared at my shoes for about a minute, then turned his head to one of the novices, silently but visibly sighed, then coldly stared me in the face. “Money? There is no money whatsoever!” More calculated silence and a high, short giggle followed, but I was still eager for an impression of Šaf’alishāhī finance. “How, then,” I asked, “are expenses covered?” He raised his hands and brought them down, avoided my gaze and said in his version of šahadāt (tavakkol): “We are being provided for in our daily needs.”

We were seated in the erstwhile library, which stored several of the treasures that had been on public display in the lodge before the revolution. There was a small table next to the leader’s chair, and on it a little box. The leader looked me in the face again as if to measure the impact of his words. Novices, apparently shocked by the impiety of my questioning, were nervously observing the scene. Then, in a sudden move, the leader reproachfully turned the box upside down and produced a few coins. “This is all there is, nothing! Nothing!”

This argument, I later learned in a conversation with a novice, was sufficient and conclu-

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78 Interview, 04/03/97. One of the wildest conspiracy theories that I came across in Iran, held that Vali Dorosti only had female affiliates, which proved the role of ʿāhdas in the foundation of his spiritual centre (that is; his house), who were out to undermine the legitimacy of Sufism. Another pretender-Šaf’alishāhī sheikh, ʿSoljān-ʿalishāb (see figure 8), felt himself uniquely entitled to rule the lodge, but thought the time, political circumstances in particular, not ripe yet (interview, 05/01/97).

79 One Šaf’alishāhī Sufi, to the contrary, was convinced that the leader of the Board of Trustees had “obtained his position via the Ministry of Islamic Guidance, and became very wealthy through it” (conversation, 07/24/97). This accusation was repeated by a self-proclaimed enemy of Sufism (interview Ḥasanī, 04/16/97), who compared the state’s stipends to the lodge to those of mosques and mollahs. Several Šaf’alishāhī Sufis contrasted their financial ethics to those of Soljān-ʿalishāb leaders, who were held to receive - they themselves fervently denied this - a ‘monthly income’ (māhiyān).
sive. He had come up with definite evidence for trustworthiness of the Board of Trustees, mentioning that the kashkūl in the middle of the Sa- lon, in which donations were made, was emptied in public once in every year, so that anybody could witness the leadership’s yearly income.80

The suspicion of the new leadership to have created their structure as a personal Board of Profit, was brought up by several Sufis who were in turn accused of financial immorality by the Board of Trustees. <Monavvar- alshāh>, late Manzūr-alshāh’s son, his khānqāh only one street away from the lodge of Šaffalshāh, was one of the dissenting sheikhs. Just as Borhān reportedly did, Monavvar-alshāh made his entrance in the lodge every now and then, causing a quiet consternation. His group organised rival sessions in the sheikh’s private lodging, that centred around the recitation and exegesis of the oeuvre of Šaffalshāh, which Monavvar-alshāh claimed the ignorant Board of Trustees had no know- ledge of and that had been completely lost under its command. More effectively than Borhān, he moreover managed to recruit new members for his group from Šaffalshāh’s lodge. Under the Board of Trustees, they echoed sheikh Dorostī’s complaint, “there is no more Sufi order.”81

80 Conversation, 07/24/97. See Figure 15. For a photograph of the kashkūl.
81 Dige, ṭarīqat dāde ne-mī-shavad (interview, 03/19/97).
Résumé

The Solṭānʿalishāḥī order was confronted with oppression, but having switched sides before the revolution paid off. The Solṭānʿalishāḥīs sought legitimacy through mourning sessions for deceased notables and acted as a national patron of caritas. The Ṣafīʿalishāḥī order, to the contrary, was haunted by its Freemasonry reputation. The order lost the control over its lodge as it was occupied, and once it was recovered, its Sufis involved themselves in slander concerning financial morality.

While the Solṭānʿalishāḥīs enhanced their reputation through religious nationalism (externally), the Ṣafīʿalishāḥīs’ public and traditional, Shiʿite mourning ceremonies were deliberately kept apart from the lodge’s Sufi activities. They did not, therefore, improve on public Ṣafīʿalishāḥī legitimacy. While the Solṭānʿalishāḥīs retained unquestioned, hereditary leadership (internally), the Ṣafīʿalishāḥīs dissolved into small, rival groups over which the Board of Trustees retained only marginal leverage. In spite of multi-faceted adversity, however, Ṣafīʿalishāḥī (hi)stories tell one not of jurist-led state persecution but of accommodation. Through the lodge’s registration as an official religious property and the continuation of Shiʿite Sufi tradition in the peripheral branches, the Ṣafīʿalishāḥī order, too, survived the revolution’s purgatory.
Figure 8. Recent branching of the Šaff'ālīshāhī order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sheikhs in:</th>
<th>Board of Trustees (Hey'at-e Omana')</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kermānshāh, Khorammābūd, Sangesar/Semnān</td>
<td>Behnām</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shāhsavār, Sar 'ī, Shāhmirzād</td>
<td>Borhān, Vāli Dorostī, Nāṣer'ālī (Mahmūd Sangesarī’s son)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mīnār alīshāh</em> (Esfahān)</td>
<td>Abdollāh Entezām (d.1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>Žiyā‘ od-Dīn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehdi</td>
<td>(Rezā‘ alīshāh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheykh Bahā‘ (‘Afsār alīshah II)</td>
<td>(Sa‘īd alīshāh)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharāfīya</td>
<td>2) Ahmad Šafā‘ī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gholān‘abbās</td>
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<tr>
<td>Šafā‘ī</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Sharaf od-Dīn ‘Alī)</td>
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<td>Kermānshāh</td>
<td>Gheyrat (d.?)</td>
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<td>Khorammābūd</td>
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<td>Shāhmirzād</td>
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<td><em>Mīnār alīshāh</em> (Esfahān)</td>
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**Legend:** 〈····〉 cognomen; 〈····〉 genealogically independent; 〈···→···〉 authorisations and appointments; 1) Although Ma‘rūf alīshāh had soon given up his claims for the Šaff'ālīshāhī leadership, his sheikh Qisem Tāvāngar, and after him Mīnār alīshāh, did not follow their master in this respect; 2) I have not been in touch with the Sharafīya, but their existence was pointed out to me in a conversation about branching since Entezām; 3) Šaff'ālī was also appointed sheikh in Semnān by Hājjī Dādāsh. Other centres of the Society of Brotherhood (whose sheikhs are unknown to me) included Isfahan, Mashhad, Hamadan, Shiraz, Enzeli, and Shāhī (renamed Qiyāmshahr after the revolution).
After Khomeyni died in 1989, the Iranian state and society changed dramatically. State power weakened and gave way to a plethora of power centres, which benefited the resurgence of Iranian society. Another, related effect of these regime changes, consisted of an indirect and double rapprochement between Sufism and the state.

On the one hand, the state broadened its definition of legitimate religiosity, which brought Sufism closer to officially sanctioned, Islamic respectability. Even where Sufis remained passive, the regime changes were significant for Sufi practice: “transformations in the larger political arena in which […] performance takes place result in changes in what […] performance means” (VAN DER VEER, 1994: 82). The changes involved the state’s appropriation of mystical notions, in definitions which had been laid down in Khomeyni’s ‘erfân. Through ‘state mysticism’, Sufi performance approximated what SCOTT (1990) called the ‘public transcript’, of state Islam.1 As discrepancy between hidden and public transcripts accounts for the level of domination (1990: 4), one may conclude that state mysticism lessened the domination of Sufism.

On the other hand, “the position of religious regimes in political arenas is […] effected by the type of ideology […] espoused” (THODEN VAN VELZEN, 1992: 203). The themes of social service, sacrifice and mystical martyrdom - state concerns as well - marked Sufi discourse in both Ne’matollâh orders. But beyond this, the Şâfi‘alishâhîs and Solţân‘alishâhîs tapped different repertoires in relating to state mysticism, and they accommodated differently. For the Şâfi‘alishâhîs, bonds of allegiance to the clerical state elite - whether they existed before or not, being either imagined or real - did not restore the unified leadership. Sufis in the various branches reproached each other for either being related to the state, or for deviating from state Islam. There was a ‘double emulation’ in one of the Şâfi‘alishâhî branches: in its allegiance to (mystical) state Islam, it did not claim to embody, itself, any authority.

But in an affiliates‘ ‘hidden transcript’, it was the master‘s sovereign spiritual authority that mediated the state allegiance. The unified Soľtan‘alisalähís, to the contrary, felt strong enough to publicly proclaim a division of authority between the mystics and the jurists. In contrast to the covert nature of spiritual authority in the above Saľalähí branch, the Soľtan‘alisalähís‘ explicit authority division proved acceptable to some of the clerical elite, as they visited the lodge. For the Soľtan‘alisalähís, who could trace their allegiance to Khomeyni and his ‘erfān legacy back to the Pahlavi period, state ties strengthened spiritual authority, and benefited the order‘s religious reintegration.

In neither of these cases, however, would the meaning of Sufi performance be fully grasped as a “smuggling of portions of the hidden transcript, suitably veiled, onto the public stage” (SCOTT, 1990: 157). The public stage, in spite of its dangers, was much more than an arena for dissimulation. It was also the place where Sufis could, through various strategies, attain ‘authentically‘ wished for, Islamic respectability.

State interference into affairs deemed private was regarded a ‘nuisance’ (możahem) by many Sufis.³ Individuals were targeted in their private realms, but state interference was most visible in publications and audio-visual releases that entered into the public realm. In June 1996, a musical cassette came out containing ‘erfānī music by Azād (‘free’). A

³ Although it has been argued in the previous chapter that one would do better to focus on Sufism‘s accommodation rather than confine oneself to narratives of suppression, there certainly were great nuisances. LEWISOHN (1998: 461) mentioned that: “Harassment of dervishes by various armed representatives of the regime in various cities throughout Iran ranges from weekly interrogations by the police to varieties of psychological torture (such as surveillance by agents of the regime and verbal threats [...]”). However, his mentioning the “threat of expulsion from civil-service jobs should members not be willing to renounce their affiliation to the order” is questionable. There may have been such cases, but it is unlikely that they were part of a co-ordinated policy. The public functions of several Soľtan‘alisalähí notables provide counterevidence for that. My observation of several Basij in lodges (simply there to enjoy the congregation) and the reported popularity among the Basij of the Khāksār, moderate his statement that “the Islamic Republic’s distrust of, and hostility to the dervish orders is reflected in the fact that members of the armed services in Iran are not allowed to belong to any Sufi ṭariqa nor, indeed, to frequent khānaqāhs, since the intelligence service of the government considers the hand of America [...] to be directly behind the present popularity of Sufism in Iran and the West”.

STATE MYSTICISM
store-owner in a Tehrani suburb mentioned that in his area alone at least eighty copies of the popular tape had been sold, which to him implied a multitude of that number had been bought in the centre of town. After twelve days, it was forbidden. This was the year in which the 'war against the Western 'cultural invasion', which had become 'a pillar of official discourse in 1992', "peaked [...] with a series of television programs and articles in the conservative press, titled 'identity' (hoviyat)."

The climate had its effect on Mr Zanjári, rumours told. He was vaguely involved with Sufism, could foretell people’s future from the moment they walked through his door, effectively advice on how to circumvent it, and was a sought-after counsellor for these qualities. About March 1997, unexpected visitors made their entrance. It was the Revolutionary Guards, who held foretelling the future anathema to religion and thus explained the cause for Zanjári’s arrest. He was forbidden to take up counselling again and spent ten days in the infamous Evin prison.

More striking as an instance of state interference, however, was the slow and unannounced appropriation of mysticism by the state itself. The effects of ‘state mysticism’ were seen in 1997, for instance, when the state felt uninhibited to proudly invite 22 foreign ambassadors, on a trip to Kerman, to visit the mausoleum of the ‘famous mystic poet Shah Ne’matollah Vali’ (in Mâhân). In commemoration of his martyrdom, one national newspaper referred to Imam ʿAli as the emâm-e ʿârefân.

5 Conversation Žo’r-Reyášateyn Sufi, 12/04/96. LEWISOHN’s interview with the artist (referred to in 1998: 461) gave the context: “In June 1996, a cassette tape [...] by Dávood Ázad, a member of the order, featuring Persian verses of Dr Nürbakhsh [...] was published in Tehran [...] It unexpectedly caught the attention of a wide public and 10,000 copies were sold within a week. In late June 1996, shocked by such [...] high sales and the public’s welcome of this mystical music, the Ministry of Islamic Guidance recalled and banned the tape. The record company that produced it was then broken into by the Revolutionary Guards and all copies were erased. Permission for further sales was revoked and all the covers of printed cassettes were confiscated or defaced.”

MATIN-ASGARÍ, 1998: 59. MIR-HOSSEINI (1994, (1): 282) reported that in spring 1992, “in a national television program, a popular religious character condemned the Ahl-i Haqq dogmas and invited their youth to rise against their fathers’ archaic beliefs and become true Muslims.”

5 Tehran Times, 04/09/97; see Figure 2. There had been earlier rapprochements as well: “In 1987 a senior Tijáni, Shaykh Dahira Usman Bauchi, was invited to Iran to attend the eighth anniversary celebrations of the revolution” and “some of the Tijániyya in Tamale and Accra have become Shí’is with an ‘Iranian-sponsored school of Shi’ite piety’ being founded in Accra” (SIRRIYEH, 1998: 147).
And another deplored his demise, exclaiming: “Oh, Leader of the World of Mysticism! (Ey, moqtâdâ-ye ālam-e ‘erfân!)”.

Just after Khomeyni died in June 1989, his son Aḥmad had offered a mystical poem to the Iranian people as a token of gratitude for their massive presence during the funeral. The Imam’s relations to mysticism then came under national and international scrutiny. In winter 1989, Khomeyni’s mystical letter to his daughter-in-law was published, written three years earlier, which again contained Sufi references: “Oh Sufi, you have to polish the Armour of Love / and be faithful to the Promise you made / as long as you remain yourself, you will not reach Union with the Beloved / you have to annihilate your self, in the Way of the Friend.”

Beyond intellectual debt, Khomeyni’s relation to mysticism was ingrained in the collective Sufi memory of the Imam lashing out against the Ḥojjatiye Society - the staunchest ideological enemy of

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6 Keyhân, Resâlat, Bahman 11, 1375/January 3, 1997. The relaxation of legitimate religiosity was similarly evident in a recent congress on Shams-e Tabrizi in Khvoy (Tehran Times, 09/09/98).

7 Ter Haar, 1995: 91. The poem included the lines “Open the door of the tavern and let us go there day and night / For I am sick and tired of the mosque and seminary.” A commentator aptly commented (New York Times, 08/20/89) that on the one hand “These are classical images in support of religious fervour” but on the other, that “Such poetry had apparently not been prominent in the years since Khomeyni’s revolution, and [that] the poem’s appearance may even signal some kind of elaborate political manoeuvring among Khomeyni’s successors.” See below for confirmation of this view.

8 Rah-e esḥq, 1368/1989: 25. Mostly, as in Knysh’s eye-opener review (1992), an intellectual debt was stressed. The documented relations between mysticism and the Imam may be historically summarised as follows: From 1922, Khomeyni studied ‘erfân in Qom. From 1929, he wrote mystical treatises (Pâsdâr-e eslâmi, 1375/1997, 182: 29, mentioned Sharh-e dâ’-ye sabar, Miṣâb al-hidayâ ilâ al-khâtâf wa’t-wâlâya, and commentaries on the Faṣûs al-ḥikam and Miṣâb al-nes), in some of which historical Sufis were positively referred to. Thereafter he taught ‘erfân, but in the early 1960s, he cancelled his lessons, probably because political activities occupied all of his attention. But in his political lectures abroad, as in 1972, the Imam kept on referring to ‘erfân. After the revolution, there were televised ‘lessons’ from Khomeyni’s Taṣfîr-e sūra-ye hamd (Pâsdâr-e eslâmi, 1375/1997, 182: 30, erroneously claimed this was mentioned by Knysh). In 1983, a student in Hamadan found several of his mystical manuscripts (belonging to his collection raided by SAVAK in 1968), that the Imam allowed for publication the same year. In 1986, he wrote a mystical letter to his daughter-in-law. In 1989, he wrote a letter to Gorbatsjov that contained new references to mysticism, and until his death, he wrote mystical poetry. Cf. Vajdani, 1982; Fahimi, 1989; Pâkdâman, 1989; Rafsanjani, 1989, Ter Haar, 1995. Of Khomeyni’s political writings, Jehâd-e akbar yâ mobârâze bâ nafs (The Greater Jihad or the Struggle with the Soul) particularly stands out as mystical. Pâkdâman stated, with a bit of exaggeration: “He belonged to the ṭarîqât [...] and on this path he, under the designation of ‘morali-ties’, spoke words left unsaid that transgressed the limit of apostasy [...]” (1368/1989: 3).
Sufism\(^9\) - when in Paris. There were more physical connections as well. One observer felt it was not “out of context to mention [that] Khomeyni’s former residence and the place where he gave audience to his people in the north of Tehran [was] itself a Sufi mosque and sanctuary.”\(^10\) Sufis moreover claimed Khomeyni’s personal initiation, which he reportedly spoke about on television shortly after the revolution.\(^11\)

Khomeyni’s carefully construed hagiography as Master of the foqahā - already in wide circulation during his lifetime - was thus revised in an unexpected, mystical rapprochement to the ‘orafā. It is probably accurate to interpret these changes as events allowed to come into the open by some, which were nevertheless not foreseen by the regime. Rafsanjani, in any case, was quick to capitalise on them politically:

In November 1989, Rafsanjani presented a long eulogy in which he played down Khomeyni’s role as the charismatic leader of the downtrodden masses. Rafsanjani depicted him instead as a first-ranking theologian and philosopher, especially on mysticism, as a major scholar who had given ‘a new lease on life’ to the Qom seminaries, and as a world-famous figure who had restored Iran’s national sovereignty [italics mine].\(^12\)

However, the emergence of state mysticism knew more preconceived regime expressions as well. In the last months of the Iran-Iraq War, a Tehran University student and Basij war volunteer sent his family a letter from the front, published in the summer of 1989 under the title ‘Red Mysticism. A Basij student’s literary-‘erfān letter from the front’.\(^13\)

The Islamic Propagation Council (Shūrā-ye tablīghāt-e eslāmī), an

\(^9\) *Interview* revolutionary student, 02/27/97, cf. VALI and ZUBAIDA’s general account (1985: 161).

\(^10\) HAERI, 1995: 93. This observation has not to my knowledge been picked up in other literature.


\(^13\) SĀLĀRĪ, 1368/1989, ‘Erfān-e sorkh. Nāme-ye adabi-‘erfānī-ye dāneshjā-ye basijī az jebhe-ye jang. In February 1997, I was told at the Islamic Propagation Council that Sālārī’s Letter was out of print and that there were no back-issues. A copy was fortunately kept at Tehran University Library.
ideological watchdog, published it “on the occasion of the honouring of the week of victorious resistance and eight years of sacred defence.” The pamphlet’s definitions of ‘erfān melted mysticism with revolution and republican Islam. The title referred to the blood of Shi‘ite martyrs who had died in the cause of a ‘higher knowledge’. Ultimately, the student held, higher knowledge was obtained by ‘dying in God’ (p. 7), and its examples were, literally, provided by the ‘martyrs of Karbala’ (p. 8).

Poets explored the relation between martyrdom and mysticism on a regular basis in various national newspapers. Basij volunteers were reported among the Khâksâr. But Red Mysticism was also careful to distinguish between Wise Men and Sufis on the one hand, and militant mystics on the other. While “[Khomeyni’s] ‘erfān did not seek isolation and seclusion”, the sages and Sufis were reproached for “taking into hiding and intellection” instead of “choosing the open field of martyrdom” (the highest ‘station’, maqām, and ‘rank’, manzelat). This cowardly attitude designated their ‘yellowness’ (preface).

A newspaper instead commemorated a war volunteer in its rubric The Green Voice of the Basij. The label was descriptive of the martyr’s ‘erfān, in evoking the image of Islam having grown inseparable from his body. He had courageously defended Islam as if it were his own body, and finally sacrificed his body, with equal vigilance, for Islam. The prototype martyr for obituaries such as these, was Ḥoseyn

\[\text{14} \text{ Resâlat published} \text{ shahīyāt, ecstatic or even blasphemous utterances of divine inspiration for which Sufis had historically been executed (for instance: Mehr 15, 1375/October 16, 1996); Keyhān published poetry under the title kofrān-e ‘ēshq, ‘heresies of love’ (Khordâd 8, 1376/May 29, 1997).} \\
\text{15} \text{ Cf. Gieling’s ‘The Sacralization of War in the Islamic Republic of Iran’ (1998). I arrive at my conclusion of the} ‘erfān-war linkage’s unicity (among all other ideological linkages between the war and religious themes) because of the fact that Gieling hardly mentioned anything that could be interpreted in this direction. There is one mention of a wartime poster carrying the text sangar-e ‘ēshq (‘trench of love’) (op. cit., p. 82), the evocative significance of which doubtlessly derived, in part, from sang (blood, as part of sangar-e ‘ēshq). Somewhat related, the afterlife was referred to as diyār-e haqq, ‘the realm of truth’ in Sālām newspaper (Āzar 29, 1375/December 19, 1996).}

\[\text{16} \text{ Pākdāman, 1368/1989: 4.} \\
\text{17} \text{ Sālârî’s treatise was not straightforwardly in the radd-genre, however, and Sufism’s subjection to the higher scale of Red Mysticism by Sālārî was only a matter of degree, not principle. More importantly, he explicitly took historical Sufis such as Bāyezīd Bastāmī as role models for contemporary Islamists. Another of these models was the Sufi martyr Sohravardī, who, ironically, died at the hands of the Jurists, the Jurists in whose name the Basij fought their war of ‘sacred defense’.}

\[\text{18} \text{ Ėṭtelḵât-e haftegī, Esfand 15-22, 1375/March 5-12, 1997.}\]
Fahmide, the sixteen-year-old whom Khomeyni had declared Iran’s real leader, and who had sacrificed himself before an Iraqi tank. Fahmide, Sufis recollected respectfully, had carried an ʻerfân text on his trousers that spoke of his longed for reunion with God.¹⁹

As martyrdom was all encompassing, it extended beyond the warfront when the war ended. “The war with ʻattâd”, Khomeyni had proclaimed, “was only a part of this struggle. Our struggle was the fight between Truth and Falsehood, which has no ending [...]”²⁰ Sâlâri’s pamphlet on Red Mysticism had similarly stressed - in a post-war preface - that “although today, our eight-year war with all its ups and downs [has come to an end], one should not render the values of this Way (râh) [...] into oblivion”.²¹ Mystical martyrdom, that is, was to be transformed, sublimated into moral acts, a militantly cooperative spirit towards the leadership of the Islamic revolution and social sacrifice in Iranian society - the greater jehâd.²² When Iran’s spiritual leader, Khamene‘i, praised the mystical quality of ‘asceticism’ in Imam ‘Ali, he explained that ‘lack of worldly attachment’ had been accompanied by

¹⁹ In Ėptelâ‘ät (Khordâd 8, 1376/May 29, 1997) it was held of a ‘lover of martyrdom’ (āsheq-e shahâdat) that “they had blended his being with love for the People of the House (ahl-e beyt).” On Behesht-e Zahrâ I spoke to a Pâdar-officer who had lost his brother in combat. Upon learning I engaged in Persian Studies, he stressed I should pay special attention to ʻerfân. “I’ve had quite some experience with ʻerfân-e nazarî va ʻamali (ʻerfân in theory and praxis). My brother appeared before me in a dream. He said: ‘I am able to have contact with you, on condition you don’t drink and do not have unlawful relations with women’. I did neither. When I stood at his grave, contact was established” (06/07/97).

²⁰ Pâkdamân (1368/1989: 6), citing a message of Khomeyni’s, which was delivered to the clergy (on Esfand 3, 1367/February 22, 1989), and printed in Keyhân, Esfand 6, 1367/February 25, 1989.


²² Iran’s martial arts magazine Razm-ávar, for instance, which was dedicated to “knowledge of the true values of sport in Islamic Iran” (1375/1996, 18: 5), contained articles that addressed ‘militancy’ and ‘the fighting mentality’ in a largely metaphorical sense. It was critical of sports in their conventional meaning, as “it is one of the functions of showing sport contests, particularly in third world countries, to keep the people ignorant of their political fate and political currents in their countries” (1375/1996: 37), while ‘imperialist politics’ exploited sports economically (1353/1996: 18: 8). Razm-ávar, therefore, paid attention as to how sports could communicate the message of the revolution (1375/1996, 18, pp. 8-9). One of Iran’s leading karate experts, a Basij commander, “demonstrated his skills [...] commemorating Tehran’s 36,000 martyrs of the imposed war” (Iran, 06/29/97).
While rumours spoke of draconian and unremitting repression, concerning, for instance, the closing down of a Qâderî lodge in Tehran in August 1996, many Sufis managed to accommodate to the new regime religiosity. A new, post-revolutionary climate was witnessed among Sufis, inversely, in that several affiliates and observers held Sufism to be immersed in a process of réveil: mystic, Shi‘ite religiosity not only offered but was itself on the ‘Way of (ethical) Reform’ (râh-e eslâh). When confronted with the enemies’ traditional reproach of (idle) ‘as-ceticism’ (zohd), one Sufi responded in irritation that “worship does not go without service to the people” (ebâdat be-joz-e kheâmat-e khalq nist). Traditionally, ‘social service’ was a Sufi act that would especially


24 An undated overview by Malik Carn contains important but sometimes unsubstan-
tiated or erroneous information (downloaded on 12/31/99 from [www.wco.com/atl/sufipers.html](http://www.wco.com/atl/sufipers.html)). It claimed that in 1997, the Intelligence Ministry presented a video with coerced confessions and alleged evidence of shari‘a-violations to the Leader, asking for his anti-Sufi fatwá. Thereafter, Ayatollah Rajâ‘i declared that “anyone who kills a sufi student will go to heaven.” Tehrani informants spoke of the Qâderîya as a politically charged and persecuted, ethnic Sufism - because of its ties to the Kurdish guerrilla. *Mideast Mirror* reported that “The sheikh of the Naqshabandi Sufi tariqa, Othman Serajejîdîn, was forced into exile” (09/09/94 (Section: The Arab/Islamic World), vol. 8, no. 174), but did not specify when. The Dutch [ša‘h leader](http://www.wco.com/atl/sufipers.html) claimed his lodge in Isfahan had been destroyed by the state.

25′Abdollah Ente‘mî/ Āzâde’s Na‘zarî tâze be ‘erfân va ta‘savvof (1363/1984) was a precursor of the ethical reformulations: “The breaking of promises […], being recalcitrant […], dominating, shortcomings in the accomplishment of obligations and hundreds of other unpraiseworthy characteristics are the agents of decay […]. Dervishhood and Sufism do not mean laziness. In all eras, Sufis have been men of work and in the Holy War they have not refrained from sacrificing their lives […]. *The Ministry of Culture […] could […] in co-operation with radio and television, offer educational programs in support of the thought of Sufism*” [my emphasis] (op. cit., pp. 113, 112, 113). Furthermore, the text stated that “I am certain that if this school [of Sufism] finds expansion, in such a way that from various classes of people a number worthy of consideration will turn to following it, then it will change the sort of morality and thought [now current] in our society” (op. cit, p. 8). Not everybody was convinced of ‘erfân’s legitimacy. Ayatollah Āzâd held that “in the meaning of Knowledge of God, it is fine. But in these last years a different kind of ‘erfân has come to the fore that has non-Islamic, Christian and Greek roots, and we cannot, therefore, accept it in this form” (interview, 06/07/97).

serve one’s individual, spiritual progress. Here, however, it assumed an ethical quality in itself, separate from the goal of spiritual progress, and concerned with Iranian society at large. It derived from the politicised injunctions of the *shari‘at* - not the spiritual requirements of the *ṭarīqat* - and it went a long way, in particular, from *Ṣafarīšāh’s* aristocratic maxim that said “in Sufism, the foundation of deeds is service to the spiritual leader” (*dar ṭasavvof aṣl-e a’māl khedmat-e pārast*).²⁷

Sufis sought to join the heart of the ‘public transcript’ - that built on Khomeyni’s mystical charisma - in presenting Sufism as a law-oriented Path, both mystical and militant. A Khāṣṣār Sufi showed me a series of liturgical objects. He presented his axe (*tabarzīn*) - otherwise a metaphor of spiritual combat - as if it were a material weapon in the holy war, the double-edged sword of ‘Alī (*ziř-faqār*) not as a symbol of spiritual chivalry but of communal defence. The horn (*bīq*) that used to warn fellow Sufis of enemies,²⁸ blew in defence of Shi‘ism for him.²⁹ Transcend-

Sufism represents in many ways the opposite ethos, it was surprising to encounter a Sufi’s sardonic wisdom that suggested ethical *réveil*: “the people of Iran, we are Professors in the Killing of Time” (*mardom-e Iran, ostād-e vaqtkosht hastīm*) (07/10/97). The place of ‘service’ in the Islamic Republic is for instance seen in the views of *Bēheshti*, the chief architect of the Constitution [who] argued that the Koran and the Shi‘i traditions protect legitimate wealth [...] for the simple reason that human labor was the source of all such property. This labour, he explained, was physical work, mental work, such as accountancy, or public service (*khedmat*) (ABRAHAMIAN, 1993: 43).

²⁷ ḤOSEYNI, 1377/1998: 16. The context for this citation proves that the translation must be ‘service to’, not ‘service of’. Things had been similar in the Ne‘matollāh’s order before *Ṣafarīšāh’s* rise to fame. In 1851, Lady SHEIL wrote, on the basis of her experiences with Sufism in Tehran, that “Among the Ni‘mat-ollahees the novice must present the moorshid, in addition to the sheereenee [sweets], with a coin called an abassee, on which are engraved the words ‘La illāh illallāh’ (There is no God but God). The moorshid repeats to him an ayah, or verse, of the Koran, to be recited daily. In performing every act, the mooreed, or disciple, must meditate on the moorshid” (1856: 195).

²⁸ Jalālī Sufis in eighteenth century Isfahan blew trumpets to celebrate the ruler’s defeat (ROYCE, 1979: 137), but in the Islamic Republic, any practical uses of liturgical objects were wisely avoided.

²⁹ One witnesses a parallel accommodation technique in ĀZĀDE’s ‘New Perspective on Erfān and Sufism’. The book is a pseudonymous, unmodified but post-mortem (and post-1979) edition of ‘Abdallāh Enteīm’s newspaper essays, which legitimises a comparison with other Sufi literature in the Islamic Republic. (The publisher of) ĀZĀDE criticised the unlawful use of Sufi symbols, and subsequent misconceptions regarding the true nature of Sufism: “That faulty rumour which has made the Sufis known for their laziness is the work of [...] parasitic beggars posing as dervishes, who presented themselves for pretense, in appearance, in the clothes of the dervishes. With wine and [...] the begging bowl (*kashkāl*) they were pretending to spiritual poverty (*faqr*) and Sufism. What do these impostors have to do with the world of Sufism?” (1363/1984: 112).
ing ‘yellowness’, a Sufi who claimed heroism as a revolutionary explained that ‘becoming not, in God’ (fanāʾollāh) - mostly conceived of symbolically - was to be taken literally; as Sufism in essence.30

Khomeyni had been influenced from an early stage by Ibn Arabi’s mystical concept of the Perfect Man (ensān ol-kāmel). Several Sufis whom I met, in their turn, projected into Khomeyni an immaculate qoṭb, who had been surrounded, however, by evil courtmongers. These men of politics had kept him from revealing his true identity. Wretched and ignorant courtmongers, they said, accounted for Khomeyni’s silence during the era of revolutionary violence and repression.31 Echoing Āmolî’s ‘true Sufi Shi’ite’, they stressed the difference between the mosalmān, i.e. the outwardly conformist Muslim, and the moʾmen, the believer who touches upon the essence of religion.32 They represented themselves to be, as Khomeyni was, a part of Shi’ism’s moʾmenīn.

In written response to a set of questions on Sufism that I put to him, the (office of) ʿayatollāh ol-ʿozmā Nāṣer Makārem-Shirāzī held Sufism generally to consist of illegitimate aberrations.33 The (office of) Source of Emulation ʿayatollāh ol-ʿozmā ʿAbdolKarim Mūsavī-Ardabīlī, however, responding to the same set of questions, wrote that:

jurists who are not without interest in these sciences, who have sufficient knowledge of them, and have worked in them, they criticise the ‘orafāʾ and the Sufis less: except for some of their issues which cannot in any way be brought in accordance with the mahkamāt-e sharʿ [parts of the sharʿa not admitting of allegorical interpretation] they do not oppose the rest of their words [my insertion].34

30 Interview Ṣafi’alishāhī Sufi, 03/09/97. Ḩāmadi held the Sufi concept of fanāʾ (among others) responsible for the lack of individualism in Iranian society (1375/1997: 52), which explains precisely why ‘dying in God’, in its literal reformulation, was such an apt doctrinal support for martyrdom.
31 Interview Ṣafi’alishāhī Sufi, 12/19/96. I asked this Sufi whether much had changed since the revolution. He said: “Yes, nowadays it is about cleaning one’s soul (pāk kardan-e jān), about ultimately becoming an ensān-e kāmel, and I feel much cleaner now.” In a newspaper defence against an attempt to delegitimise mysticism, it was written that “[Khomeyni] says, in his Ḥāmid Sura exegesis, that ‘prayers and the Qur’ān are one; ‘orafāʾ and ‘āref poets and philosophy, etc., all speak of one subject, […] only the […] languages are different” (Jomhūrī-ye eslāmī, Mehr 8, 1375/ September 29, 1996).
32 Interviews independent (unaffiliated) Sufi, 10/29/96; Ṣafi’alishāhī Sufi, 03/06/97.
33 Correspondence, 08/23/97.
The Šafī‘alishāhī order

The Board of Trustees retained its nominal rule over the Šafī‘alishāhī order. It sought legitimacy in Šafī‘alishāh’s charisma, while the rebellious satellites remained dedicated to traditional, sheikh-centred spiritual authority. Both the Šafī‘alishāhī centre and its peripheries, however, absorbed mystical regime religiosity (though in contrary ways).

The informal leader of the Board of Trustees had no pretensions whatsoever of being a sheikh. He dressed soberly, as is ideally required of Muslims, and he abhorred the Sufi regalia that some of his more traditional subjects carried. Rebel sheikhs pointed at this not only to condemn the Board of Trustees’ illegitimate innovation of Sufism, but they also interpreted it as a sign of secret state affiliations. One of the board members, they pointed out, had been a Revolutionary Guard during the revolution, and later on become an employee in the Ministry of Education. A member of the Endowments Organisation was on the Board, and there were financial transactions between the two. When I pointed at a damaged painting in the erstwhile library, the informal leader told me a state institution (the Sāzemān-e ʻershad) was called upon to repair it, and many suggested the lodge’s property was now owned by the state.

Given these relations, there would be no room for alternative spiritual authority, independent of the state. The absence of any sheikh on the Board corresponded to its claim of being void of spiritual authority itself. However, the presence of a sovereign spiritual guide had traditionally been seen as a necessity, both cosmologically and for individuals. Blessing could come from the master only, as without him, the world would lose its balance and novices ran the risk of great spiritual harm.

Among the larger and older Sufi orders, spiritual authority, although mediated by sheikhs and kholafā‘, had often come to focus on a legendary founder. Among the Ne‘matollāhī orders, the Zo‘r-Reyāsateyn have most explicitly revered Shāh Ne‘matollāh Valī. The Soltān-‘alishāhī order upkeeps an extensive spiritual genealogy, but concentrates affiliates’ devotion in the figure of the present, living pole. The redefinition of spiritual authority under the Board of Trustees, however, represented a unique development in between these types. Religiosity changed its focus, from the narration of Ne‘matollāh and Šafī‘alishāh traditions through a medium-sheikh, towards an unmediated focus on the life and works of Šafī‘alishāh himself. “We are just”, a regular visitor explained to me, “a religious circle for the devotion of Šafī‘alishāh.”
In 1995, the Board of Trustees unexpectedly found a source of legitimisation when one of the granddaughters of Şafiişâh, Şafiya-ye Neshât, returned to Tehran from Switzerland. While she disliked narrow-minded mullahs who deny people their right to cry, she admired the tellement sympathique Şufi, monsieur Khomeyni, who had read all of Şafiişâh’s œuvre and whom, she claimed, she had visited several times in Paris before the revolution when she lived in Geneva.35

In an historical reparation of relations between the lodge’s leadership and the heirs of Şafiişâh, she reportedly contributed to the Board of Trustees, financially, to some considerable extent.36 But she was important for other reasons as well, as Şafiişâh’s spiritual authority radiated through to the present day. Despite the unitary enforcement of state-Islam, one street away from the lodge one walked in ‘lodge-alley’ (küche-ye khânaqâh). The lodge itself, situated along boulevards and squares the names of which were ‘cleaned up’ during and after the revolution, the lodge remained in Şafiişâh-street (khvâbân-e Şafi-‘alishâh).37 Young Sufis carried plastified pictures with them, not of some qoḥb, but Şafiişâh. Despite the fact that he detested Sufis, a Tehranî Hojjat ol-Eslâm felt that Şafiişâh, who had uniquely composed a Qur’ân Commentary in rhyme that several in his day and some to this day found blasphemous, had been “a great man.”38 It was the tafsîr that the Board of Trustees had been after, first demandingly and then, when Şafiya-ye Neshât did not give in, politely. After initial reluctance, Neshât gave her permission for a new print.

In the last instance, the religious significance of Şafiişâhâh derived from his rapport to the Imams. An eye-catching poster adorned the outside wall of the prayer space in the courtyard. Its significance was unmistakable for outsiders as for insiders, as it embodied ‘raw, melancholy

35 Interviews 03/09/97; 07/20/97.
36 Interview Sufi affiliate and friend of Mrs Neshât, 03/09/97.
37 Only a bookstore named Şafişâh Ko (mentioned by GRAMLICH, 1976: 148) has disappeared.
38 Interview, 02/10/97. One Sufi warned me not to attach too much importance to ‘form’, as “the first tafsîr came from the devil”, and “Shemr too [Imam Hoseyn’s murderer] was an interpreter” (interview, 02/09/97). In the Anjoman-e oikhov-vat, Khosravi had produced a tafsîr as well, which, a Sufi in Žahir od-Dowlö’s lodge said, “of course does not match the greatness of Şafiişâh’s tafsîr” (interview, 05/11/97).
passion (sūdā'-ye khām). It depicted Imam Hoseyn’s military camp, surrounded by Yazid’s hostile troops. Hoseyn was about to be martyred. The idea of martyrdom’s religious significance was nothing of a novelty, but it had not before replaced the centrality of ‘Ali in Ṣaffā’alishāhī religiosity. One affiliate who had left Iran after the revolution and had now returned from the United States said, disapprovingly: “This is not Sufism, with all these celebrations for Hoseyn.”

However, on January 30 and 31, 1997, ‘Ali’s centrality was temporarily restored. January 30 was the Thursday night session immediately preceding the commemoration of ‘Ali’s martyrdom, on the 31st. The usual sermon in the salon which preceded the Ṣaffā’alishāhī ḥekr, was exceptionally tense. The khatib cried incessantly, alternating pretense sobs with genuine tears, interspersing laments, hitting his chest and successfully moving his crowd. In front of his pulpit, the audience was moved to convulsions. The massive drone of chest beating (sīne-zānī) made the stained glass windows tremble.

The 31st brought some estimated 1000 people to the khānaqāh. Not everybody had come solely for ‘Ali. This was also the day on which Khomeyni had returned to Iran, and, more importantly, it was the first day in a series of ten, which commemorated the Fajr-offensive against Iraq. The day after, martyrs’ coffins were being paraded in the streets of Tehran. On the 31st, several soldiers had made their presence, too. The subtext which was being performed on these days, as forceful as any ‘celebration for Hoseyn’, pointed to mystical martyrdom, under the surface of traditional Sufi/Shī‘ite laments:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gedā-ye to / fadā-ye to / bi navā-ye to / yā ‘Ali} \\
\text{(I am) your beggar / (I am) your devotee /} \\
\text{(I am) helpless without you / Oh ‘Ali} \\
\end{align*}
\]

* * *

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Man-am, man-am, gedā-ye to / man-am, man-am, gedā-}
\text{‘Ali ‘Ali ‘Ali!} \\
\text{I am, I am, your beggar / I am, I am, your beggar /} \\
\text{(I am) your helpless beggar / (Oh) ‘Ali!}
\end{align*}
\]

Regeneration in the Society of Brotherhood

Although the Anjoman-e Okhovvat could historically document its legitimate representation of Šafi‘ alishāḥ’s line, the Board of Trustees had nothing to fear from the disreputed Society of Brotherhood. When asked, Tehranis would tell of some formerly influential, pre-revolutionary organisation afterwards closed down. Freemasonry charges having stuck to it, they considered it a relic of the past. Enemies, including differently affiliated Sufis, moreover conveniently projected the Freemasonry history upon the order at large. But the Society had survived the purgatory of revolution.

On my way to the old quarters of the administrative centre, I was unexpectedly led from a busy street into a quiet hallway. What first met the eye was neon-advertisements. Behind them, clearly visible, was a cast-iron gate displaying unremoved Sufi stigmata: Crossed axes, a begging-bowl and the founding date of the Society of Brotherhood. Behind the iron construction, a stained glass plate was in place, broken in some places and patched up with pieces of wood. Behind the gate was a yard that contained the living-quarters of, reportedly, the sole survivor and keeper of the Society of Brotherhood. The centre in arrears was only one of its heirs, however.

40 ‘Jān’ carries the double meaning of ‘dear/beloved’ and ‘soul’. Gramlich (1981: 33-8; 1976: 405-8) gave extensive descriptions of Šafi‘ alishāḥ’s zekr, but did not mention these texts, which suggests they were specific to this commemorative occasion.

41 The Soljn ‘alishāḥ’s considered Šafi‘ alishāḥ an illegitimate usurper, and Šah od-Dowle responsible for the order’s final degeneration. Of Šah od-Dowle it was claimed that he i) married Sufism and Freemasonry and ii) never appointed a successor as he understood Šafi‘ alishāḥ himself had made a false claim (Esfahānī, 1372/1993: 26; 47). Although Soljn ‘alishāhs were exceptionally active in historical publications, they denounced the jang-e khaṭṭī (op. cit., p. 29). A rebel sheikh in Šafi‘ alishāḥ’s main lodge said venomously: “We have nothing against Šah od-Dowle’s lodge, only it goes without saying that it is not a khānaqāh in the first place, but just a burial site, and its goth is obviously an impostor who accepted money” (interview, 05/19/97).

42 Interview Sufi in Šah od-Dowle’s lodge, 05/24/97. From the fact that Sufis in the lodge knew of the administrative centre’s continued existence but were not in any regular contact to its keeper (an old affiliate), I infer that the Society of Brotherhood has split into many centres as well.
After the revolution, various Freemasonry centres had been closed down, but not any of the branches of the Anjoman-e Okhovvat were reported among them. Several went on independently. Zahir od-Dowle’s Šaf’alishâhî lodge in northern Tehran - the third most important place for the Society of Brotherhood, after the administrative centre and the lodge of Šaf’alishâh - assumed a second life. The present leader stressed spiritual, genealogical continuity from the Society of Brotherhood without apologising, and upon a first visit in May 1997, the sheikh’s brother assured me that I had been right to come, as this place - small to all standards - was ‘the national centre of the Real Sufism’ (in Iran). The last pre-revolutionary leader, ‘Abdollâh Entâm, had been succeeded by ‘father’ (bâbâ) Rezâ’alishâh Şaf’âî, (Darvish Rezâ).

Rezâ’ali came from a famous family in Yazd. He had two paternal uncles who were wandering dervishes (qalandars), Darvish Hoseyn and Darvish Khorram, one of whom planted a tree in Šaf’alishâhî’s khânaqâh. Being attracted to Sufism from an early age, and seeing the example of his uncles, he came to Tehran, on foot, to meet the fogařâ. He made the journey seventeen times. Rezâ’ali was spotted by Zahir od-Dowle and allowed to live in his house. He developed into a prominent Sufi in the Society of Brotherhood, and became its sheikh in Yazd. During the seventeenth journey, Rezâ’ali had become a man of age, and he decided he would permanently reside in Tehran. After the revolution, he assumed the leadership, and his two uncles remained ever faithful to their inspired nephew, and they kept on treating him respectfully.

After Rezâ’ali died in about 1988, he was succeeded by his son Ahmad Šafâî, the present pîr, who was in possession of his father’s ejâze. His rule of Zahir od-Dowle’s lodge visibly contrasted with the supervision over the lodge of Šaf’alishâh by the Board of Trustees.

It was common knowledge among the followers of the contemporary successors of Zahir od-Dowle that “they say the mosque is the House of God, while for us the House of God is in the heart.” However, one would misread this adage if conceived as an attempt to take away the legitimacy of the mosque, and in this sense these followers compared to the Solţân’alishâhs. The formulation highlighted Sufism’s proper re-

43 Interviews Šaf’alishâhî Sufis, 06/19/97; 04/18/97. My interviewees were long-time affiliates of the Society of Brotherhood, who accepted the lodge’s post-revolution leadership as legitimate.

44 Interview Sufi in ‘Zahir od-Dowle’s lodge, 05/11/97.
ligiosity, simultaneously downplayed its material referents, and so lessened vulnerability. There were other safety-valves as well.

There was a little wooden frame, stuck to the lodge’s entrance, which contained a sheet of rules specifying - in addition to the sheikh’s spiritual authority - that no-one was allowed in who did not observe the social order. At first, nobody wished to discuss the rules, trying - despite their eye-catching display - to convince me they meant nothing. Later on, the official reply held that: “if people come from the outside, ignorant as to what goes on inside, they have to be informed as to what constitutes proper behaviour.” In the end, however, and in private, a Sufi told that basically the rules were for protection. ‘Protection’ was for outsiders - for them not to project into Sufism anything like anti-regime religiosity - as for insiders, “the real adab are a matter of the heart.”45

Contrary to the lodge of Šafiʿalishāh, which was proverbially open all day and night, the gate of Zahīr od-Dowlé’s khānaqāh usually remained closed until the commoners’ preparations for the majles started: cleaning the yard, sweeping the congregation room, checking the stereo equipment, and preparing tea and sweets.46 In the lodge of Zahīr od-Dowlé, in other words, there were presumably many things to guard.

People in Šafiʿalishāh’s lodge usually kept a low profile. While freely accessible, and visible from all sides, a Sufi proudly remarked that “only a few of the neighbouring people are probably aware of the existence over here of a lodge.”47 In a bird-eye’s view of the yard from one of the surrounding flats, one would indeed meet with little Sufi stigmata, except for ritual greetings (moṣāfaḥa) and only incidentally full Sufi dress.48 In Zahīr od-Dowlé’s lodge, however, the Sufi stigmata and regalia were more fully, though still cautiously, observed (as they were among Vali Dorost and the followers Monavvaralishāh). During ‘Ashūrā, a guest singer had introduced his performance in the lodge with a moving ‘pointe’ (nokte) on transhistorical charisma: “some time ago I crossed the street and I saw three little boys playing, staging Kar-

45 Interview, 06/19/97.
46 A Sufi told me that the gate used to be open all day. He unconvincingly claimed there were no political reasons for the closure: it had to do with protection of the graves (conversation, 05/06/97).
47 Interview Šafiʿalishāh Sufi, 03/06/97.
48 There was a morīd of Hāji Dādāsh in the lodge (‘sheikh Rokhsar’) - with axe, cap, manteau, begging bowl, and small zol-faqr - whose provocative outfit was on everyone’s mind (05/01/97).
balā. And I asked myself: Who is this Hoseyn, who, 1000 and some-
thing years later, still manages to enrapture young boys.” In an outfit
that bore public witness to a double, Sufi Shi‘ite affiliation, a black-
dressed affiliate who was continuously moved to tears because of the
guest singer’s Karbalā-narration, incessantly rolled the beads of his ‘Sufi
rosary’ (tasbih-e ūāfiyānē), which held two tabarzīns and one kashkūl.

The lodge was only once open all day, during a religious commemo-
ration that provoked my amazement and curiosity. “Why does Kho-
mayni’s portrait hang over here?” I asked. Due retribution for a stupid
question, it was responded: “Because we commemorate his demise.”
That was perfectly reasonable, but what did his demise have to do with
Sufism? “Nothing,” my interviewee said, “we just have a special ses-

Two years ago, another visitor told me, the leader
had performed a similar act of accommodation. He had changed cus-

Now I understood the impeccably dressed man, who, on another occa-
sion, had started to undress in the lodge. He had first taken of his shirt,
then his trousers, and underneath, to my surprise, had appeared a folded,
long, white robe. He saw me watching him and explained: “I couldn’t
do this in the street.” Just to make sure, I asked: “You’re wearing a
kafan?” “No”, he said, “just the dervish clothing (pūshesh-e darvīsh).”

A glimpse of the things that were being avoided once became visible
in advance of the religious sessions - which were invariably preceded
by generally Shi‘ite prayer (namāz) - when a politically charged debate
ensued in the yard. A novice apparently unaware of any danger, said:
“We don’t agree with the way things are now, this [the Islamic Repub-
lic] is not real Islam.” Then someone from the lodge - only recently
purged with respect to clothing - probably worried about my observa-
tions and quickly corrected, by arguing with sweet reason: “No, no,
please: things are not that simple. If the state closes down lodges be-
cause women don’t wear the ējāb, then this is legitimate.”

49 Interview, 06/19/97.
50 It was reported of the pre-revolution Zahabiya, inversely, that they “tragen in [...] Versammlungen nur Derwischhut und Mantel [...] über der Zivielkleidung (GRAM-
LICH, 1981: 3).
51 Conversations, 07/10/97; 06/19/97.
52 As all public or semi-public lodges, ūāhir od-Dowle’s khānaqāh had a separate
women’s section, which was reached from the men’s section (by the sheikh) through a
The master reinterpreted history to the demands of ethical réveil by mentioning Zahír od-Dowle not as a Freemason - as some affiliates, many differently affiliated Sufis and any non-Sufi continued to do - but as a “renewer of Sufism who placed morality at the centre of it.” Furthermore, one had to reckon that his assembly simply had a Congregation for ‘Alí (Hey’at-e ‘Alí ibn-e Abí Tāleb).53 But the most striking element in the yard in which we had our conversation, was the unremoved Freemasonry stigmata on the grave of Zahír od-Dowle. The master’s innocuous discourse - prescribing general, mystical Shi’ite religiosity, in neglect of the Freemasonry signs, the contestations of illegitimate innovations in the Pahlavi era, or the Society of Brotherhood’s proximity to the Monarchy - had left its mark on the world outside the lodge. In response to the question what brought him on the track of Sufism, one faithful affiliate - always present in the lodge - decided to entrust his life-history to me, which did not contain any reference to these stigmatising backgrounds:

My ending up here has a story to it. I was in a theatre-school, where I met with a woman I grew very fond of. It was not being in love, just being very fond of her. Then I began reading Hāfez and Mowlānā, who touched me very deeply as well. But then I got into trouble and I ended up in prison. I was desperate, until Hāfez appeared before me. This gave me an enormous strength. When I was released from prison, I made the pilgrimage to Mashhad. Once again, Hāfez appeared before me and he told me there was an organisation in Tehran named Anjoman-e okhovvat, opposite Mellī Bank. Having reached it, they told me I should get it all out of my head, but I held tight and finally they said: ‘All right, go to the North of Tehran’. I went to take a look, I went from house to house and every time I asked, people told me it was not there. But I did not give in and after a long time I again asked someone: ‘ Ağā, where do the dervishes meet over here?’ He pointed at a spot right in front of him, and that was the khânaqâh of Zahír od-Dowle. That was eleven years ago.

The most important contrast between the two Ṣafí’alishâhî branches, however, involved spiritual authority. Contrary to the Board of Trustees, the striving after respectability in Zahír od-Dowle’s lodge did not include an abstention from alternative spiritual authority. Only, it was

microphone and speakers. In advance of the sessions, however, men and women rather freely mingled (as in other lodges).

53 Conversations, 07/10/97; 07/17/97. Similar stories probably underlie LEWISOHN’s claim (1998: 456) that: “the Anjuman-i ukhwawat was forced to change its name to ‘Maktab-i ‘Alí b. Abí Tāleb’.
mostly outside the formal, ceremonial life, in informal gatherings in the yard, that inhibitions concerning its expression would lessen.

The master and his affiliates made a point of his spiritual authority. As soon as he made his entrance, people humbly rushed forward and bowed to kiss his hand - which, an affiliate said without hesitation, “compares to the oath of allegiance to Imam ‘Ali’ - and take any order from him.”

“I am a sick old man now”, a Sufi stated in advance of religious sessions, “but if the revered qotb requests my presence, then of course I will appear.” I asked a Sufi why he had not married - a religious expectation for young men his age - and he explained that “one of the reasons is: the sheikh has not yet given me a sign to do so.” Then he cited the Sufi dictum that the affiliate should be towards the sheikh as “a corps to the hands of the washer of the dead.”

Complementing the master’s public, Shi‘ite respectability, a visitor privately lectured me on the fine points of reincarnation, one person admiringly mentioned his wife’s Roman Catholicism, another felt a direct spiritual tie to ‘the first real Iranians, the Zoroastrians’, and one Sufi confided to me that he tried his luck in magnetism and hypnosis sessions.

It was in Zahîr od-Dowle’s graveyard that affiliated Sufis expressed the significance to the collective memory, taking me along the graves and recounting their good deeds, of Zahîr od-Dowle, Farajol-lâh Aqevlî, the Entcâms, and their discredited Society of Brotherhood.

A martial arts specialist and Basîj survivor joined in the discourse of state mysticism with ambivalence. “The essence of higher knowledge is realised once bodily integrity is beyond one’s care.” This had applied to Owrangiyân, the militant war singer, hated by many for inducing their sons to martyrdom on the battlefield, but here held in high esteem.

54 Interview Sufi in Zahîr od-Dowle’s lodge, 05/16/97. MEIER (1976, (1): 24) claimed of the Gonábâdî (Solţân’alîshâhî) order that “Der Leiter […] fühlt sich als Vertreter dieses zwölften Imams und nimmt sogar Huldigungseide für ihn ab.” Given the date of publication, this must have referred to ‘Rezâ’alîshâhî. It should be noted, however, that ‘Rezâ’alîshâhî promoted a strict division of realms of spiritual authority between the jurists and the gnostics, in the Pahlavi dynasty as well as in the Islamic Republic. He was very explicit in favouring jurist rule (indirectly if not directly) in worldly affairs, and did not conceive in any way of his mystic authority as an infringement on jurist authority (or vice versa). More inclusive conceptions were rather found in the above cited Sufi in Zahîr od-Dowle’s lodge.

55 Interview, 10/22/96.

56 In Şaf‘îalîshâhî’s lodge, to the contrary, a novice had exclaimed (this corresponded to some extent to general sentiments throughout Iranian society) that “Magnetism and Spiritism are British plots!”
“This power transcends all technology, it is the power of the heart.” 57 The comparison was also embodied in Ḥallāj, the Sufi martyr who had proudly reddened his face with blood from what had remained of his arms after his hands had been amputated. Allegiance. Ḥallāj had shown towards God alone. Allegiance, the martial arts specialist stated, he too owed to God alone, but only through his master’s mediation. Here, a double emulation defined Sufism in essence. “Nothing transcends the Sharīa,” he said in a voice that left no room for doubt, “but if the qoṭb orders me to drink wine, I will do so without hesitation.”

“I don’t say that all other orders are completely wrong,” another affiliate said. “But some of the Ways circle and circle and hardly reach their destination. This way of ours is the Straight Way to God”. He then showed me a book held precious by all who shared in the Neʿmatollāhī legacy (Shervāni’s Riyāż al-siyāḥā). He felt this particular configuration of Sufīs in northern Tehran to be its exclusive spiritual heir, because it contained “the answer to the world.” To Sufīs in Zahir od-Dowlė’s lodge, this Tehranī congregation was, rather literally so, the Axis of the Universe. 58 Nevertheless, it was reported in Tūs newspaper on August 16, 1998, that “the garden and the graveyard” of Zahir od-Dowlė had been “registered under nr. 2001 on the National heritage [...] catalogue,” implying that the lodge had been brought under the state control of the Cultural Heritage Organisation (Sāzemān-e mīrās-e farhang).

**The Soltānʿalīshāhī order**

It was written in 1997 that “disputed lodges confiscated during the revolution [...] are now continued under state supervision, and other lodges have, bit by bit, obtained their second life.” 59 While the reproach of state supervision worked to the detriment of the Ṣafʿalīshāhī orders’ legitimacy and unity, Soltānʿalīshāhī masters remained in undisputed command through consolidating their order’s accommodation to state Islam, the foundation for which had been laid, since 1968, by Rezāʿalīshāh.

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57 *Interview*, 07/17/97.

58 HODGSON (1974, 3: 40) described early Safavid concepts of Sufi power as a ‘secret ruling of the whole world’, which perhaps applies to Islamic Sufism at large - but certainly Shiʿite Sufism.

REFORM(UL)ATIONS

(6) Häjj ʿAli Tābande 〈Maḥbūbʿalīshāh〉

Maḥbūbʿalīshāh (1945-1997) was widely appreciated as a friendly person. Sufis in the hoseyniya often stated their allegiance to him more emphatically than they did towards his somewhat more distant and severe father. Despite the fact that he did not possess much religious status (he ‘only had a loose sleeveless cloak, ʿabā, and no turban, ʿam-māma’),60 he was as respectable a Sufi as the order could wish for: “Unity […] around the flag of Islam”, he had admonished the for-qarā, “is the sole bulwark of salvation in today’s world.”61 He had published several ‘memoranda’, which had advocated “the unification of the ordinances of the shariʿa and the tariqat.”62 Joining his sessions for the first time, it took me a while to realise I was not in a mosque. The opposite of the Sufis’ popular image of ecstatic dervishes, the Solṭānʿalīshāhs had their ‘silent ʿekr’, the ʿekr-e qalb. In the lodge of ʿṢafʿalīshāh, notables had claimed a similarly respectable ‘mental ʿekr’ (ʿekr-e pendārī), but their sessions were a struggle to contain rowdiness. Some had cited the maxim of ʿṢafʿalīshāh that “during the ʿekr one ought to focus on the figure of the qoṭb”. Given the general Shiʿite conception that all legitimate prayer must have God as its object, the ʿṢafʿalīshāh ʿekr-e pendārī was infinitely more dubious than the regular and quiet Solṭānʿalīshāh ʿekr-e qalb under Maḥbūbʿalīshāh.63 The Solṭānʿalī-

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60 Interview Solṭānʿalīshāh Sufi, 10/09/96. He did study religious subjects privately, under the guidance of the order’s sheikh Jaʿzbi, ʿṢāberʿalī, but apparently did not achieve any official degree (see biography, in 〈MAḤBŪBʿALĪSHĀH〉, 1376/1997: 71).
61 In PAZŪKI, 1997: 6. It may have been this undeniable legitimacy which explains why the Sufi researcher Chahārdah, who had been especially critical of the Solṭānʿalīshāhs as a pupil of the ‘excommunicated’ sheikh Keyvān Qazvīnī, had written a ‘letter of remorse’ (towbe-nāme) to ʿRezāʿalīshāh and apologised to the order as a whole for his unsympathetic writings (a copy has been published in Tīq-e Boranda, p. 94). Qazvīnī is fiercely resented to this day by both ʿṢafʿalīshāhs and Solṭānʿalīshāhs. The sheikh in ʿZāhir od-Dowle’s lodge told: “They don’t ever mention his name and neither do we, our predecessors considered him dead and so do we” (interview, 07/17/97).
63 ʿEkīr-e pendārī, in turn, strikes one as fairly orthodox in comparison with traditional Ahl-e Haqq doctrine as documented by MĪR-HOSSEINI (1994, (2)). She held the
shâhi order’s undisputed, hereditary leadership structure remained intact and there were tens of thousands of affiliates in Iran and world-wide.  

Under Mahbûb’alîshâh, the Solûnîshâh order managed to consolidate its ‘second life’ - after the troubles of Rezâ’alîshâh in Beydokht, the arson attack on the Tehrani lodge during his reign, and a third incident of grave implications that reportedly took place in the early 1990s.

A recent hagiography provided the outside world with his life history. Mahbûb’alîshâh had pursued ‘religious and literary sciences’ at secondary school, which resulted in graduation in 1963. The following year was marked as his entrance on the Sufi path, and in 1966, he had undertaken the hajî. He then took up studying in Mashhad and Tehran, and graduated in Persian literature (adabîyât-e fârsî) in 1969. In order to pay for his livelihood and education, sources obliquely mentioned, he taught in primary schools. After university studies, in 1976, he visited the Iraqi Shi’ite holy places in the service of his father and in order to meet with the Sources of Emulation. Being judged a worthy Sufi in stable progress, his father allowed him to lead the Solûnîshâhî Sufis in congregational prayer in 1981. In 1985, he obtained a general authorisation to lead the Sufis, and his Sufi cognomen (Mahbûb’alî(shâh)).

After university graduation, in 1972, Mahbûb’alîshâh had joined the National Iranian Oil Company, “to earn his livelihood from his own labour.” He remained in its service up to 1989, when “he wanted to direct all his attention to [...] the order.” Rezâ’alîshâh had by then become a man of afflictions, and the motive for resignation attributed to Mahbûb’alîshâh is therefore perfectly plausible. But it remains unclear why he came to work for the Oil Company in the first place, as there is noth-
ing in his education to suggest he had an interest in oil, economics, business administration or geology, or obtained knowledge relevant to his job. The eighteen-year interlude dealt with in two lines, then, is enigmatic. One may, however, try to interpret it in the context of Reżā’alishāh’s management of the order. Religious integration had been served by introducing Mahbūb’alishāh to the Iraqi marāje’-e taqlid and to various Iranian, Shi’ite jurists, among whom was Imam Khomeyni. It was the Oil Company that is likely to have served the other professed aim of Reżā’alishāh - societal integration - and he had chosen a particularly strategic locus. The Oil Company embodied the Iranian nation across its divisions: for both anti-royal nationalists and the Shah at first, and then for any Iranian, during the Islamic revolution and the Gulf war - when its infrastructure was being shelled. Secondly, various Solṭān’alishāhi affiliates had high-ranking jobs in the Oil Company, and it was at the invitation of one of them that Mahbūb’alishāh had joined in.

In 1986, Mahbūb’alishāh was appointed to the order’s viceregency (khelāfāt). His father’s decision had been informed by divine sanction and by the forebears’ consent, but its narration also evidenced worries about whether his precautions had been enough to protect his son:

One night in Kashmir, I had a dream. I was with Sāleḥ’alishāh and with hot temper he said: ‘Why do you not authorise ‘Ali [Mahbūb’alishāh]?’ I responded: ‘I authorised him by naming him Mahbūb’al.’ He said: ‘Yes, I know that. But why don’t you write the authorisation for the viceregency?’ I answered that perhaps they will act with hostility towards him and there might be dangers of the soul lying in wait for him. He stated: ‘God and the twelve Imams and the Friends of God and We ourselves are his protectors’ [insertion mine].

On several occasions thereafter, Reżā’alishāh proclaimed Mahbūb’alishāh his successor, in speech and writing. None of the order’s affiliates, consequently, could reasonably object when Mahbūb’alishāh succeeded his father as qātb on September 9, 1992, when Reżā’alishāh died.

After the funeral, Mahbūb’alishāh travelled to Beydokht to introduce himself anew as the Solṭān’alishāhi master, lead various religious sessions that marked his assumption of the leadership, and accept oaths of allegiance by sheikhs and commoner affiliates. These initiatory gather-

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67 Correspondence Solṭān’alishāhi order, 07/19/1999.
68 Correspondence Solṭān’alishāhi order, 07/19/1999.
70 Biography in (Mahbūb’alishāh), 1373/1994-5: 859.
ings were repeated once more in Tehran, and finally, Maḥbūb-ālishāh proclaimed a series of fourteen (new) rules for Sufi conduct. Except for the above mentioned call for ‘unity around the flag of Islam,’ these included general prescriptions that were - like the edicts of his father and grandfather - hardly distinguishable from other, non-Sufi calls to Shiʿite piety. Their main points included: permanent remembrance of God (yād-e khodā), kindness to God’s creatures (shafaqat-e khalgollāh), care for the body from one’s own labour, meditation and reflection (zekr o ḡebr), according the light of reason (nūr-e ‘aql) a central place, taking the ordinances of the holy law (aḥkām-e shariʿat) before one’s eyes as a model, reading Pand-e Šāleḥ, avoidance of conflict (ekhtelāf), care of one’s family, and the faithful execution of all of these points.\textsuperscript{71}

Little was known among the affiliates - and neither did hagiography help in this respect - about the period between his assumption of power and untimely death on January 16, 1997. However, it was generally felt by the foqarā - hagiography confirmed - that Maḥbūb-ālishāh had been “kind and polite with his own, and moderate with the enemies.”\textsuperscript{72}

Attraction to Maḥbūb-ālishāh’s personality played into the consternation that evolved after he died. “All great Islamic personalities die a martyr’s death, and Maḥbūb-ālishāh surely was a martyr”, an affiliate wept. A Sufi took me aside and whisperingly proclaimed: “Maḥbūb-ālishāh was killed!” A week before, foqarā hummed, he had been visited by Nīrū-ye entezāmī, order troops. They had beaten him and assured they would deal likewise with all Sufis. The story had been broadcast on a Swedish radio station the day after, and would be repeated in various versions in foreign media. Gruesome details began circulating among the believers. “When Maḥbūb-ālishāh was buried, people saw blood dripping from his mouth. This could not have been, had he died from a heart-attack, as the official versions have it.”\textsuperscript{73}

One of Maḥbūb-ālishāh’s confidants then confirmed that indeed, the Leader had been visited by the Nīrū-ye entezāmī, but not for the reasons assumed by the foqarā. His living quarters lay opposite a large military training camp and as religious sessions were held in it, early in the morning, twice a week, and many Sufis would flock the alley, the commander felt they constituted a safety-danger. He requested the master to

\textsuperscript{71} Biography \textit{in} (MAḤBūB-ĀLISHĀH), 1373/1994-5: 867-68.
\textsuperscript{72} Biography \textit{in} (MAḤBūB-ĀLISHĀH), 1376/1997-8: 69-77, citation on p. 73.
\textsuperscript{73} Interview, 03/02/97.
relocate them. Maḥbūbʿalishāh answered he understood the complaint but could not meet it, as this was the House of the Pole (khāne-ye qoṭb). This, request and denial, had occurred twice, but the boundaries of politeness had not been breached. Another, coincidental event had been the accusation of ‘immoral activities’ leveled against the order by the police. Maḥbūbʿalishāh’s confidant nevertheless smiled through his grief for the deceased master when I put the murder story to him. “No”, he said, sighing calmly in denial, “the foqarā will make up anything.”

The day after Maḥbūbʿalishāh’s demise, his body was carried amongst a crowd of inconsolable mourners, and then he was buried in Beydokht, in a grave next to his father’s. Subsequent events bring to mind the legends of Solṭānʿalishāh and Nūrʿalishāh, who had predicted their own martyrdom in, respectively, 1909 and 1918.

Several weeks before he died, Maḥbūbʿalishāh had reportedly announced - foretold - his own death, and written the text for six telegraphs to various sheikhs in and outside Iran, which explained his condition and contained instructions for the sheikhs’ acceptance of a successor (jāneshān). These documents, which had been “delivered to one of the foqarā in two closed and sealed packages to be dispatched after his death,” now became public. They authorised a smooth leadership transition, and a reproduction of the Solṭānʿalishāh organisation - Solṭānʿalishāh order. The telegraphs’ instrumental function had moreover mixed flawlessly with doctrinal concerns. The disaster of Maḥbūbʿalishāh’s untimely demise had found its place in a Sufi plot-structure prevalent among the affiliates, which postulated an historical continuity of saintly, Islamic martyrdom, foreseen and predicted by their victims, in the Solṭānʿalishāh order. Conveniently adding to the depth of sentiments, it also included a political subtext, for some, who took the prototypical figure of Islamic martyrdom literally.

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74 Lewisohn (1998: 453) cited London-based Nimruz (Bahman 5, 1375/January 24, 1997): “Approximately two weeks prior to his heart-attack, in order to curb the growing popularity of the order, police [...] concocted the excuse that, inter alia, the dervishes were engaging in immoral activities (lahw wa laʿb). This is an entirely new tactic used by the Islamic Republic to subject the Gunbūd dervishes to psychological pressure and thus expel them from the public arena.” A prominent Solṭānʿalishāh confirmed (correspondence, 07/19/99) that such had indeed been the case.

75 Biography in Mahbūbʿalishāh, 1376/1997-8: 77.


77 The event is referred to in Mahbūbʿalishāh, 1376/1997-8: 76. The telegraphs’ texts, kindly put at my disposal, have so far remained unpublished by the order.
Figure 10. Alphabetic letters of succession.
The Soltan‘alishah is forcefully denied that the matter of succession had become a family business, a reproach against them heard from non-Sufi and Sufi outsiders alike. “We are not a Monarchy”, the new leader’s brother explained, on the defensive. But whether it was for a lack of suitable candidates or other reasons (Majzub‘alishah’s two sons were not at a suitable age to succeed their father), it was Majzub‘alishah’s uncle, Reza‘alishah’s brother, the closest Sufi family member, who assumed the leadership. Unlike his predecessor - who had according to the telegraphs assigned Majzub‘alishah as his successor - the new leader’s personal piety radiated from a physical stigma: A small, purplish spot on his front, that evidenced many years of unabated prayer.

Majzub‘alishah was generally known for his proximity to the Nehzat-e Azadi, Bazargan’s Freedom Movement, and his activism during the Islamic revolution. However, he went at length to moderate the connection to the Freedom Movement. “I’ve never been a member - being a judge in public service - but just on good terms with some of its personalities.” His public function in the Pahlavi era and his societal career, he explained, had been severely limited because of his connections. Nevertheless, these had been primarily ideational. They also extended to Sufism: “Ebrahimi Yazdi once held a speech in which he reproached ‘idle dervishhood’ (darvishi va qalandari). I fully agreed with him, because we ourselves are on the track of ‘erfan’.

Whatever its precise nature, the connection dated from the pre-revolution era when Majzub‘alishah’s brother Reza‘alishah had sought allegiance to Khomeyini, and it reminded of an outlived Soltan‘alishah dual

78 Interview, 01/31/97; Interview differently affiliated Sufi, 04/04/97.
79 This physical stigma, caused by the small, inscribed prayer stone to which believers bend in prayer, is a general Islamic sign of piety. But it is especially associated with those who are ‘dry by religion’ (khosh-e mazhab). In explaining to me why she feared the presidential candidate Nafeq-Nuri, an Iranian woman pointed to his spot.
80 MADANI, 1376/1997: 162, mentioning what was common knowledge to many.
82 Interview ‘Majzub‘alishah’, 05/07/97.
containment. There was no reason left for Majzub‘alishah in 1997 - in undisputed command of the Soltan‘alishahi order, in a stable Islamic Republic - to boast of the rather marginal, ‘liberally-Shi‘ite’ Nehr-e Azadi, which, since Bazargan, had been opposed to velayat-e faqih.83

The new leader’s first public act, the day after his nephew’s death, was proclaiming a decree with five rules of conduct. It was based on his grandfather’s Pand-e Saeleh, allegedly in a perfect, essential unity with it. Two elements strike one in contrast to the rules of Mahbub‘alishah. First, they contained more specific prescriptions. Majzub‘alishah thus took care of accommodation by closing interpretive space between general Soltan‘alishahi rules and specific socio-political reality. Secondly, the rules also contained a worked-out division of spiritual authority:84

1) [...] the observation of the Islamic hejab [...] is a necessary condition for individual and societal chastity, and, likewise, pay abundant attention to the honouring of piety for men.

2) [...] for the first time for over one hundred years ago, Soltan‘alishah forbade the use of illicit drugs, and even opium addicts [...], and he did not favour cigarettes [...].85

3) The fixed obligations (va‘az-e moqarrare) in the holy Islamic religion have, by the high-placed ‘orafah, been implicitly divided according to kind. Rulings (akhâms) of the holy law [...] one must emulate from the [...] mojtahed [...] Rulings of the qat [...] are received from the Great One of the Age, and ‘erfan instruction has also been deposited in the books of the Great ‘orafah.

4) [...] involvement [...] in social issues is not within the jurisdiction of the qat and the foqar must not expect the Great Ones to direct them in this sense [...], non-involvement in social issues will be observed as it was before.

5) The observation of social order and respect and watchfulness with respect to the law, we must historically learn from Socrates [...] The observation of the communal law is respect for oneself and others. Pay grave attention to this.

83 In a 1988 pamphlet, The Explanation and Analysis of the Absolute Governance of the Jurist, the Freedom Movement had equated Khomeiny’s innovation in the doctrine of velayat-e faqih - to include the jurist’s ‘absolute’ mandate - with kofr, heresy, and sherq; blasphemy (cf. ALINEJAD, 1988: 41-6).

84 A translation of the rules in English (Pazuki, 1997) is about to be published. Apparently to ensure Soltan‘alishahi respectability abroad as well, the rules were also published in Nimruz (Bahman 12, 1375/January 31, 1997) (LEWISOHN, 1998: 453).

Figure 12. The rules of Majzub'alishah
Whether Solṭān‘alishāhī affiliates privately agreed of not, it would not under any circumstance be publicly heard from their ranks, as a differently affiliated sheikh once nonchalantly stated, that “the Qur‘ān is (but) a language of images that lacks a referent in the material world.”

In an interview, the Solṭān‘alishāhī leader defined as his two respectfully Islamic, and worldly future tasks: ‘erfān instruction (tarbiyat-e ‘erfān) and ‘service to the people’ (khedmat be mardom) (cf. rules 3 and 5).

The Solṭān‘alishāhī stress on the order’s fundamental continuity regarding respect for the social order, from Pand-e Šāleḥ to the present, was to some extent justified. But as the social order changed its shapes, the rules’ content changed as well, as much as the meaning of performance changes through transformations in the political sphere. ‘The observation of the Islamic ḥejāb,’ for instance, was a new prescription (though old practice) that one encountered in about any restaurant or post-office as well. In comparison, Pand-e Šāleḥ contained a short section on ‘clothes’; a minimal prescription only, and nothing on the ḥejāb: “And [the believer] should not be extravagant with his clothes, nor should he be too spartan with himself” (p. 88).

Even more striking, however, was Maj‘ūb‘alishāh’s division of spiritual authority. Another sheikh unrelated to the Solṭān‘alishāhīs once privately told me: “What bothers us is velāyat-e faqiḥ, in which there is no place for the ‘orafā. Many ayatollahs themselves disagree.” The ‘orafā, he meant, constitute legitimate power appropriated by the foqahā.

Whether or not Solṭān‘alishāhī conceptions were privately similar in

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86 “If you tell a six-year-old child something is ‘impure’, it will ask: How, what? If you are then unable to explain that ‘impure’ is a symbolical construction, it will ask: Where are the microbes? If it then sees you cannot produce them, then this is the way religion is lost” (interview, 03/13/97).

87 Interview Maj‘ūb‘alishāh, 05/07/97. ‘Order’ was another central, but unofficial concern in the organisation. When I asked him about the ḡekr and its regulations, Maj‘ūb‘alishāh said: “If thefaqir is unable to contain himself, then the ḡekr is not a good one.” In its definition and practice, Solṭān‘alishāhī ḡekr seemed to correspond flawlessly to a recent publication on ḡekr Allāh from the Theological Seminary in Qom (TAQAVI, 1375/1996). How, I asked the Leader, is it possible that the leaflet omits any reference to Sufism? “‘A treatment of ḡekr Allāh without Sufism’”, he responded forcefully, “is a sign of the fundamental fear which reigns in Qom.”

Sufi ḡekr and Shi‘ite prayer were differentiated through at least one structural feature (see also chapter 7) that was not to my knowledge, however, held against Sufism. Maj‘ūb‘alishāh explained that ḡekr is internalised by repetition, so that remembrance of God is realised through God (he spoke of a ‘Pavlov-reaction’). Etefelāt, however, warned its readers that “prayer is not repetition” (Khordād 1, 1376/May 22, 1997).
essence, there were no public statements that could pin down the order for it. While the ‘orafā’ constituted the legitimate succession to the twelfth Imam in spiritual terms, the foqahā were to be followed in worldly affairs (rules 3 and 4). Respect for the social order - which happened to be determined by foqahā - was a religious obligation (rules 1 and 5). Despite the fact that all of this sounded perfectly obedient and respectful, the rules simultaneously marked a daring innovation. They publicly carved out, for the Soltān’alishāh order, for the first time in the Islamic Republic, a spiritual realm in which it alone could legitimately claim sovereignty (rule 3). In comparison, such open assertion sharply contrasted to ‘double emulation’ in the lodge of Zahir od-Dowle, and with the Board of Trustees’ ‘circle for the devotion of Šafi’alishāh’.

There were setbacks: Maj’ībāl’shāh was once requested by the Islamic Republic’s Islamic Human Rights Commission to send a copy of Rezā’alishāh’s treatise, from the late 1960s, on Islamic human rights (Naẓar-e mažāhib be ʿelāmiye-ye hoqūq-e bashar. Negāresh-e Soltān-ḥoseyn Tābande Gonābādī). When the state commission found out about the source, i.e. that it came from ‘those people’, it was sent back. Nevertheless, Soltān’alishāh respectability under Maj’ūb’alishāh, who kept the order from darvish va qalandar and reimposed his grandfather’s edict against drugs (rule 2), allowed for mullahs to come and visit the morning sessions in his private house.

Some of the foqarā had an additional reason, a secret history to account for clerical rapprochement: “Maj’ūb’alishāh’s brother - Rezā’alishāh - had requested the authorities’ permission for a visit to the foqarā in Isfahan. This was refused. Then Ahmad Khomeyni had stepped in and written a letter which said: ‘Do not hinder these people in any way, because me and my father, we have been ‘dervish people’ (ahl-e dar-
Like Maḥbūb’alishāh, Ahmad Khomeyni had been the object of many reverential rumours in Iran. A few days before he died, these rumours said, he had threatened to speak out publicly, naming names, on corruption and other excesses of government. Therefore, a Sufi confirmed, he had been poisoned, in March 1995, dying a martyr’s death. In a recent defence of the order, ayatollah Khomeyni’s legitimisation of (Solayn’al-shāh) mysticism was once again emphatically referred to:

 [...] They base themselves on the treatise of [...] ayatollah ol’-ozmā Mr Khomeyni, claiming he criticised the cognomina Majūb’alishāh or Mahbūb’alishāh. One must pay attention to who had the cognomina Majūb’alishāh or Mahbūb’alishāh when he wrote on this matter. He aimed at that [particular] group and those [particular] persons. His eminence Mr Khomeyni bestowed honour upon the late Ḥājī Mollaṣoltān and he cited him often in his books, and in the Taṣfīr-e sūra-ye ḫand he often spoke appreciative words about his Qur’ān tafsīr.

During the new leader’s second public act - presiding over his nephew’s burial - one event clearly illuminated Maḥbūb’al-shāh’s consolidation of Solayn’al-shāh legitimacy. The mourning affiliates were accompanied by the presence - publicly announced in the lodge - of Ayatollah Shar’atmadar and the son of Ayatollah Pasandide - a nephew of Khomeyni, the ‘āref and personification of velāyat-e faqīh in one.

91 Interview, 02/21/97.
92 Parishānžāde, A. 1377/1998. Goshāyesh-e Rāz (Pāsokh be ketāb-e Rāz-goshā-ye Keyvān Qazvīnī). This book contained a refutation of Keyvān Qazvīnī’s recently republished Rāz-goshā, which attempted to delegitimise not only Solayn’al-shāh and Nūr’alishāh, but also the present Solayn’alishāh leaders. This sheds light on the contemporary relevance in the historical discussion (in both treatises) of Mahbūb’alishāh and Majūb’alishāh.
93 Personal observation, 02/21/97. Khomeyni’s elder brother Ayatollah îoseyn Moṣafvī, or Sayyed Morteṣ, Pasandide died in November 1996 (Jomhūr’ye eslāmi, Abān 28, 1375/November 18, 1996, Salām, Abān 24, 1375/November 14, 1996). Shar’atmadar is not to be confused with the famous Azarbaijani marja’-e-taqlīd Ayatollah Shar’atmadar (d. 1986). Pākdāman mentioned Khomeyni as an ‘āref-faqīh (1368/1989: 4) and fascinatingly suggested a mystical element in velāyat-e faqīh, the ideological core of state Islam: “it is not clear whether [...] any marja’-e-taqlīd is fit to occupy the position [...] or if the privilege is confined only to that group of the ahl-e ‘amānu who are inclined to emulate [both] shari’at and the tariqat” (1368/1989: 7, cf. Ter Haar, 1999). Abdolkarīm Soroush, too, stated that ‘erfūn is part and parcel of velāyat (in Kiyān, 1375/1997, 6, (34): 58, cf. Matin-Asgari, 1997: 109). In contradiction to his order’s official doctrine, an affiliate held there was no meaningful difference between ‘erfūn and Sufism (Interview, 02/21/97). There is an interesting parallel here with an observation of the order in the early twentieth century. One affiliate then felt that the leader had “a divine side and a human side just like all prophets; at times he
Khomeyni’s brother Ayatollah Pasandide, a Soltān‘alishāhī affiliate held, had been a Sufi in reality, “but he could not speak about this in public, for they would have killed him for that.” His son’s attendance to Mahbūb‘alishāh’s funeral, however, like Shari‘atmadari’s presence, could hardly be interpreted other than as an unconcealed legitimisation of the Soltān‘alishāhī order. While hostile rejections were certainly not a thing of the past, the two notable clerics’ presence bore witness to the effects of a broader, regime context of state mysticism, which had allowed for its occurrence.
Résumé

After 1989, an ideological rapprochement occurred between Sufism and the state. On the one hand, this was caused by the emergence of state mysticism, and by Sufism’s continuous ethical réveil on the other.

The Ṣaffa’alishāhī Board of Trustees considered itself devoid of any spiritual authority and focused, neutrally, on the image of Ṣaffa’alishāh. The central order’s public, external performances pointed to the politicised context of mystical martyrdom in Iran, under the surface of traditional Sufi/Shi‘ite laments. In Zahir od-Dowle’s lodge, outward behaviour was prescribed by rules that demanded respect for the sociopolitical order. But in informal gatherings, Sufis upheld continuity in remembrance of the discredited Society of Brotherhood, and a sovereign sheikhal authority. Spiritual authority in the lodge of Zahir od-Dowle, therefore, was marked by an ambiguous, ‘double emulation’.

Among the Solṭan’alishāhs, internal order remained uncontested. The leadership of Mahbūb’alishāh had been authorised by divine sanction and his father’s meticulous preparation for it. His death presented itself in a similar historical continuity, of saintly, Islamic martyrdom. This religious frame of reference enhanced the spiritual significance of Mahbūb’alishāh’s visionary letters of appointment, and vice versa. Majżūb’alishāh’s new proclamation of allegedly old rules - for external as much as internal consumption - outlined meticulously detailed sociopolitical modesty, but - as if in exchange for it - also circumscribed an exclusive realm of Sufi spiritual authority. A barometer of strength and confidence, the formality of these assertive Solṭan’alishāhī rules tellingly contrasted with the silent ambiguity of ‘double emulation’ in Zahir od-Dowle’s lodge. The Solṭan’alishāhīs effectively argued the legitimacy of their spiritual realm in references to Khomeyni. Their success, and the effects of state mysticism, were witnessed in 1997, when Khomeyni’s nephew, Shari‘atmadarī and several other clerics paid their respect.
PART FOUR

Afterthoughts
CHAPTER SEVEN

SUFIISM, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE

The following seeks to treat the foregoing explorations of comparative social development and cultural performance on a broader theoretical plane by confronting these with discussions concerning ‘civil society’.

Regarding the classical definition of civil society - civility and associational life beyond primordial attachments, significantly independent from the state - the mystic regimes have not been a clear referent. They do function in ways, however, that resemble the history of emergence of Western civil societies. On this comparative basis, one may identify mystic regime contributions to the emerging civil society in Iran, which mainly consist of Sufi competition for spiritual authority with the state.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE SECOND AND THIRD REPUBLICS

The Islamic Republic has often represented itself as a total power, but it has hosted many conflicting bases of domination that have diminished effective centralisation. Factionalism, a keyword in many analyses of the Islamic Republic under Khomeyni, was a strategic asset enhancing divide and rule, but more important, pervasive in the state machinery, it testified to the limits of centralisation. Factionalism remained endemic after the Islamic Republic Party’s dissolution in 1987 and Khomeyni’s demise in 1989. Thereafter charismatic state authority waned and Iranian society saw signs of civil assertion that prompted analysts to speak of a ‘second republic’ in which “dialogue is the key word.” State mysticism was another aspect of regime change. Rafsanjani furthermore introduced a ‘business cabinet’ and there was a broadening of freedom, which has exponentially expanded in the ‘third republic’ under Khatami.

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1 I am referring to the long tradition of thought whose origins lay in antiquity and whose modern representatives included thinkers such as Montesquieu, Smith, Hegel and Weber (cf. SHILS, 1991).
“Though not always easy to perceive in Western news reports,” it was claimed, “the absolute monarchy and the terror that followed it have gradually given way to a system that tolerates peaceful political and economic struggle.” It was felt that “associational life is reviving and elections are technically fair, if still ideologically constricted.” In 1992, the thriving of associational life was seen to cause a situation where “power is not concentrated enough in the hands of the government to liberate it from the influential sectors of civil society.” Civil society was conceived of as a plethora of non-governmental organisations, and observers of the Second Republic identified many secular as well as Islamic ones. A testimony to their significance, they were not referred to as leisure groups or friendly societies, but ‘interest groups’.

In 1994, it was held of the Second Republic that “while the law permits no criticism of Islam, [...] Khomeyni, or his successor as Iran’s religious leader, on all political [...] points there is freedom of religious worship, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press.” The reported freedom was seized primarily by intellectuals who were loosely united in a network of magazines and newspapers, the forum for their ‘different thought’ (andishe-ye digar). A major, new publication was Gofte-gü, ‘Dialogue’, founded in 1993, whose ambition was “triple dialogue: between Islamists and secularists, among secularists of diverse ideological currents, and between representatives of civil society and the state.” Among the issues debated were “various freedoms [...], pluralism, and multi-party politics [...]” It attracted the sectors of (civil) society that “rail against censorship (journalists and publishers), [and] pressures, intimidation and harassment (intellectuals and academics) [...].”

Public criticism of the regime did not always shy away from addressing the sensitive issue of The Rule of the Jurist. The Freedom Movement, Iran’s only political party up to 1997, Majzub‘alishah’s former political affiliation and an intellectuals’ refugee, openly opposed exclusive jurist power. In the religious hierocracy, velāyat-e faqīh was op-

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4 ASKARI, 1994: 51; cf. ROULEAU, 06/19/95.
5 NORTON, 1995: 2.
6 SIAVOSHI, 1992: 49.
8 SIAVOSHI, 1992: 28
9 ASKARI, 1994: 52.
posed from the early day Republic by leading jurists such as ayatollah Shari'atmadar'i, while renowned ayatollahs such as Montazeri and others under house arrest, have for long called for reform. Public criticism of state Islam was often levelled from jurist networks that conveyed the voice of an old, silent clerical majority.13

When four Abbas Kiarostami won the Film Festival of Cannes in 1997, attention to the role of artists in the Iranian civil society refocused in the international media. In 1996, 200 movie directors had signed a petition against government interference, and there were various attempts to re-establish the old artists' unions. In 1995, 85 intellectuals had petitioned for an extension of the freedom of expression, and had so striven to extricate art from the double Pahlavi heritage of censorship and symbolism.14 In 1994, 134 writers had protested censorship. These events were seen as an awakening of dormant civility, and observers referred to it as an Iranian glasnost. Tehran's mayor Karbaschi, who founded Tehran's daily newspaper Hamshahr'i ('citizen') and worked to rationalise and to some extent secularise city government, enthusiastically declared: "We want to teach people what it means to be in possession of citizenship."15

Mohammad Khatami, Karbaschi's old friend and an exceptionally liberal Minister of Culture up to his removal in 1992, made civil society a central issue in his presidential campaign, up to May 1997. His 20 million votes derived in large part from youth and women, two of the major groups to benefit from the civil society. In his first speech in office the new president pledged, later on often echoed by the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohajerani, that he would keep his promise and see to the development of a civil society. In September 1997, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kharrazi, "emphasised the theme of civil society" during his first address to the United Nations.16

The euphoria in Iran was witnessed in the emergence of a series of new magazines and newspapers that further stretched the margins of legitimate publicity, and organised a vigorous political debate. Some in

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13 If one accepts oppositional acts and attitudes by jurists - such as the above - to be part and parcel of civil society, then, contrary to Gellner's notion (1991), they support the view that an example of the historical legitimacy of civil society is the role played by the 'ulama' (Moussalli, 1995: 84).
15 Interview in NRC Handelsblad, 09/20/95.
the clerical establishment subsequently brought their views in line with the new religious climate.\footnote{In November 1997, Ayatollah ˘zari-Qomí (d.02/11/99), who had staunchly supported regime positions, publicly questioned the ‘absolute rule of the jurist’ (which led to his house arrest).}

\section*{In A State of Bliss}

In spite of a certain Western intellectual consensus on the Iranian civil society’s significance, several leading Iranian intellectuals (in Iran) have not shared in the enthusiasm. Whether or not cultural magazines hosted certain confined discussions, an intellectual complained that “the political order in Iran [still] thinks itself to be the society.”\footnote{\textsc{Mohammadi}, 1375/1997: 35; cf. \textsc{Ashraf}, 1375/1996-7; \textsc{Kazemi}, 1996: 122, 125.} Intellectuals have been up against unabated attempts at state centralisation in cultural affairs - the content of which is a fervently debated issue in the Iranian polity, which testified to the overall illegitimacy of a ‘civic culture’ vis-à-vis state-induced ‘mass-culture’.\footnote{For the distinction between ‘civic culture’ and ‘mass culture’ in Iran, see \textsc{Mohammadi}, 1375/1997: 35. For the political significance of ‘culture’ in the Islamic Republic, see \textsc{Buchta}, 1995, cf. \textit{Ettele\'at}, 12/11/96, on the “Command of the High Leader of the Revolution for the Foundation of a Centralised Leadership in the Nation’s Cultural Affairs.” Enthusiasts were wrong to see the vigilance of civil society in the number of publications (cf. \textsc{Kazemi}, 1996: 141).} The societal opposition that proponents of a civil society were up against, was proportionally strong. It invariably incurred anathema on the ‘different thought’. In shrewd reference to Weber, who “regards civil society and the citizens’ community […] as exclusively Western phenomena”, an outraged editorial held:

What sort of a gift is the civil society, that we would need it now? The real nature of the Western civil society is revealed in the Vietnam war […] American blacks […] and the victims of atomic bombardments in Hiroshima have experienced with their own bodies the real logic and the true nature of ‘civil society’ […] From the Constitutional Revolution onwards, we have ourselves been the victim of the achievement of ‘civil society’: the Islamic Revolution […] was a fundamental protest against […] westoxication and its manifestation, which is to say bourgeois society […] Our surprise concerns a part of those who claim to be revolutionaries,
and make claims to religious thought, and claim to be ‘followers of the imam’s line’, and who have made civil society their motto.\(^{20}\)

Besides taking into account ideological opposition, one would do well to scrutinise the reported civil associations.\(^{21}\) First, the boundaries of legitimate social organisation are reflected in that the larger part mentioned is still named ‘Islamic association’ (anjoman-e eslami), as the state decided for them in 1979.\(^{22}\) This is not to argue an intrinsic contradiction between Islam and civil society, but to indicate the reported larger part of civil life in Iran does not allow one to identify unambiguously independent ideological space.\(^{23}\) Local, economic civil life that is not directly organised under the banner of Islamic associations often derives legitimacy from the values of state Islam (see figure 13) rather than from intrinsic social or economic identities.

Secondly, for paradigmatic mutual-interest organisations such as trade unions - which according to Tehran Times were among ‘the most advanced in the world’ in Iran - it has been largely unlawful to organise strikes, while their corporate leadership has been state-appointed.\(^{24}\)

\(^{20}\) Sobh, 1376/1997, 3, (69). It was written before the presidential elections, and targeted Khatami.

\(^{21}\) “In practice, most independent organizations are banned, co-opted by the Government, or moribund” (U.S. Department of State, Iran Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997, p. 9).

\(^{22}\) Cf. KAZEMI, 1996: 150, and MOHAMMADI’s insightful analysis (1996). State intervention in civil associations, is characteristic of a larger historical pattern in Iran. FLOOR (1971: 69) wrote of the Qajar era that “Persian guilds were not voluntary associations based on the assent and willingness of their members. Contrary to the situation in Europe where guilds grew into a force which has helped to build up a social structure by which they have been superseded [...] the Persian guilds were passive, loosely organized associations fostered and controlled by the government. Persian guilds therefore resembled the Roman classes rather than the European craft guilds in their hey-day, being only an extension of the urban bureaucracy. This being so, they had little access to political power.”

\(^{23}\) There have been, of course, Islamic associations that acted independently. The Anjoman-e eslami–ye dineshgaheh-e Tehrān, members of which supported intellectuals opposed to velayat-e faqih, provides an early example (HOOGlund, 1995: 3) that remains a powerful case to the present.

\(^{24}\) Tehran Times, 11/25/96. The High Council for Guilds was a partial exception in the Islamic Republic, although it did not, because of state co-optation, play an active role that would make it comparable to the guilds in the Western civil societies (ASHRAF, 1375/1996-7: 41-3): “Although the Labor Code grants workers the right to establish unions, there are no independent unions. A national organization known as the Workers’ House, founded in 1982, is the sole authorized national labor organization. It serves primarily as a conduit for the Government to exert control over workers. The leadership [...] coordinates activities with Islamic labor councils, which are organized in
While the Egyptian civil society found a forceful representative in its paradigmatic lawyers’ union, the role of lawyers in the Iranian judicial process, and in Iranian society at large, has been as insignificant as the role of trade unions in the economy.

Thirdly, several organisations are what Althusser called ‘ideological state apparatuses’ at best. The ‘independent’ Fānzdah-e khordād Foundation was (made) responsible for the maintenance of Khomeyni’s shrine; the ‘private’ Islamic Propagation Organisation was “created with large assets based on confiscated property.”

Many of these respectable organisations - from the point of view of state Islam, that is - were moreover supervised by the state’s ‘representative of the jurist’ (nemāyande-ye vali-ye faqih). When measuring with a classical definition, these features would plainly discard organisations such as the above as members of the Iranian civil society.

many enterprises. These councils also function as instruments of government control, although they have frequently been able to block layoffs and dismissals. Moreover, a network of government-backed guilds issues vocational licenses, funds financial cooperatives, and helps workers find jobs [...] The Government does not tolerate any strike deemed to be at odds with its economic and labor policies. In 1993 the Parliament passed a law that prohibits strikes by government workers [...] Workers do not have the rights to organize independently and negotiate collective bargaining agreements” (U.S. Department of State, Iran Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997, p. 15).

26 It was claimed that “anyone wanting to know what has been happening over the past few years in [...] the civil society, should start by visiting Qum” (ROULEAU, 06/17/95). A computerised research centre documented Shi‘ite texts and its director ayatollah ol-Kowrānī declared it ‘totally autonomous’ (cf. Time, 03/22/93). Since the revolution, clerical centres in Qom have, however, stood out as champions of Islamic state education, ideologically (if not materially) tied to the state. Contesting Iranian civil society, it was also observed in 1995 that “[s]ince the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran is one of the few countries to maintain a special department for the indoctrination
Beyond the formal, institutional life that many observers of the civil society focused upon, an Iranian newspaper cited a moderately phrased reflection on the last, thirteenth day of Nowruz (ṣīzdah-bedar), when families collectively leave their houses to picnic and socialise in parks:

“I always consider that the people, in festivities such as ṣīzdah-bedar, unconscious of themselves and their motivations, establish a temporary civil society (jame’e-ye madan-e ye movaqqat).”

Informally and beyond the reach of co-opted institutions, Iranian society facilitated sporadic civil eruptions - no enduring, public civic culture. The formal legitimacy of the reported civil society was, even in the Third Republic, fiercely contested, and its associational life to a significant extent, either materially or ideologically, dependent upon the state. Sufism’s relations to the Iranian state and civil society are explored to the background of these regime dependencies.

* * *

Sufism’s position vis-à-vis the state in the Islamic Republic has radically altered in comparison to the Pahlavi era. No Sufi leaders are known to be intimate with state leaders. Rather, the two parties are on a hostile footing or relate in attempted co-optation or accommodation (but not patronage). The mystic regimes are ideologically marginal: whether or not they forward themselves as an Anjoman-e eslāmī (as most do), most Iranians do not primarily recognise them as such.

Simultaneously, Sufism’s unabated popular legitimacy is witnessed by the position of the dervish as a cultural icon (and in this sense Sufism relates to Iranian culture as pars pro toto). Many feel that atten-
dance to Sufi lodges has increased since 1979 (at the expense of mosques), while ever new ones have been constructed. Sufi orders therefore appear to be - as carriers of generally perceived, alternative religiosity, significantly independent from the state - a part of the civil society.

Upon closer inspection, however, appearances turn out to be problematic. Kiyân magazine addressed cultural obstacles for the development of a civil society. It spoke of 'historical imprisonment', the substitution of the past for the present and the future:

It works merely in members of traditional organisations with historical roots (religious sects and circles, Sufi groups and their likes) [...] These organisations are independent and membership in them is voluntary. But internal relations are based on affection and they do not have a straight and transparent social outcome as concerns the interests of the individual. In part, these organisations are not against the society (and they have lots of positive works) but the exclusivity of relations between the individuals in them, and their being hidden or changed into exclusive societies, make them anti-civil. 29

An historical generalisation of the mystic regimes’ external relations to the state adds to the qualification. The renaissance of (Ne'matollahi) Sufism in Iran during the Qajar era occurred through the Qajar dynasty, in the wake of local Iranian rulers’ competition for the crown, and state centralisation, which enhanced Sufism’s royal patronage. Although the public preponderance of Sufism diminished in the late Qajar days and during the early Pahlavi period - when the Ne'matollahi path once more split in three and the Şaffa'lishahi and Solṭan'alişahi orders came into existence - regime connections remained, both materially and ideologically. Most notably, the Solṭan'alişahi ‘book of rules’ Pand-e Šâleh - more than an internal, disciplinary device for affiliates - had reportedly come about through the royal request of Reza Shah.

The late Pahlavi period ushered a new era of royal patronage for Iranian Sufis, in both material and ideological senses. While the Şaffa'lishahi order blended with Freemasonry and became absorbed in elite networks of royal patronage, Solṭan'alişahi ‘dual containment'
enabled a switching of sides, so that the order could join the ranks of the
clerical state to be. In the Islamic Republic, the mystic regimes again
sought legitimacy, this time not only to integrate and prosper, but sur-
vive, through expounding regime religiosity. The mystic regimes’ com-
parative social development as seen from the external aspect of regime
connections is depicted in the following graph:

Table 1. External regime relations of the Ṣaffā’īshāḥī and Solṭān’alishāḥī orders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>political regime</th>
<th>Ṣaffā’īshāḥī order</th>
<th>Solṭān’alishāḥī order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Qajar Dynasty]</td>
<td>+/+</td>
<td>+/+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pahlavi Dynasty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Islamic Republic</td>
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<th>power</th>
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(* The findings for the Qajar period are between brackets because the Ṣaffā’īshāḥīs
and Solṭān’alishāḥīs were not yet, for most of the period, established as independent
orders. ‘Power’ denotes objective (outward) socio-political regime relations, ‘value’
denotes Sufi ideology on regime relations (in general, not on the strength of the actual
relations). Relative values for power and value range from +/+ to -/-.

In the Qajar era, powerful regime relations were matched by manifestly
positive evaluations. In the Pahlavi era the power of regime relations
lessened, as did their evaluations. In the Islamic Republic the Ne’matollāhī orders nearly inverted their former evaluations of regime
ties, which was caused by changed power relations in Islamic Iran.
Nevertheless, the mystic regimes’ contemporary transformation into
socially neutral and/or politically insignificant organisations (to the civil
society and the state at large) has paradoxically been matched by the
unabated deriving of identity from state linkages - not independent,
social assertion - whether these linkages have been ideological or mate-
rial, wishful thinking or real. The state has remained, in the three politi-
cal regimes, a crucial parameter of legitimate identity.

This is to say: modern Iranian Sufism as represented by the Ne’ma-
tollāhī orders has been characterised by internal and external relations
that constitute a mirror image of the classical civil society. Internally, relations have been primordial - in the sense of exclusive and hidden face-to-face interaction that does not meaningfully extend beyond the proximity of direct communication. Externally, Sufi relations have been characterised by either ideological or material state affiliations.

The following further explores these internal and external relations, and their bearings on the question of civil society. First, Sufism’s relations to socio-political aims have now been severed, despite ideological state affiliations. Secondly, there have been similarities in the spiritual authority structures of Sufi orders and the state. In this respect, the mystic regimes compare to the Iranian state rather than to civil associations.

1. Although an ethical reinterpretation of Islamic mysticism characterised both regime religiosity and Sufism in the late Islamic Republic, the orders’ long-kept mystical depositories also represented a different tradition that juxtaposed ‘erfān and ‘orfan, ‘according to civil law’. A similarly traditional concept distinguished social from mystical, inner freedom. A non-Ne’matollāh master proclaimed: “Sufism does not go with the universality, it is the inner way” (tasavvof bā jāme‘iyat nīst, rāh-e bātēnī ast). While Sufis’ claims to mystical otherworldliness were contradicted by their (proximity to) social and political power in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods, the rules of Maj‘āz al-shāh - especially rule 3, that left social affairs to the jurists - testified to its reality in the Islamic Republic. All rules, in all Sufi assemblies, in various definitions pointed to a social space outside their jurisdiction.

Many of the dichotomous terms that positioned mysticism vis-à-vis other disciplines, notions and groups, described complementary relations. However, these were often cast in a hierarchical, triangular scheme, in which the third term synthesised and overarched the others. The Ne’matollāh orders respected ‘orfan and accommodated ‘erfān to regime religiosity. But the overarching spiritual way (rāh-e ma‘navi) belonged to the inside - in persons as in Sufi orders - in which things were hierarchically valued to the extent that they were secret. There was

no doubt in any of the Sufis that I met, that ultimate reality/truth
(\textit{haqiqat}) - the overarching term in a widely respected trinity with had
the holy law (\textit{shari'a}) and the Sufi path (\textit{tariqat}) as its bases - belonged
to their realm in particular, whether or not others could share in it.

“Mystics and jurists do not understand one another’s languages”, an
\textit{‘erfân} teacher said, in reconciliation.\textsuperscript{31} But Sufis stressed a contradiction
in terms in this man’s being a ‘teacher’, because “that which is worthy of
attention is secret and not for general transmission” (which implied he
had no secrets to share). After all, “he who finds a treasure, doesn’t
speak of it.”\textsuperscript{32} A Sufi less interested in crediting jurist claims, gave me a
rather subversive hermeneutical reading of Shi’ite history to argue that
the ‘\textit{olamā}’ had illegitimately appropriated the Hidden Imam’s authority,
it having been up to the ‘\textit{orafā}’ to distribute Imam ‘\textit{Ali}’s ‘friend-
ship/guidance’: “The source of Shi’ism was not theology (\textit{kalām}), it was
not jurisprudence (\textit{feqh}), but friendship/guidance (\textit{valāyat}). It is not
about being a religion (\textit{ma`hab}), but being an emulator of ‘\textit{Ali}.” I then
asked: “But surely this would have radical social and political conse-
quences?” He responded: “Yes, and I can not write it down like this.”\textsuperscript{33}

What distinguished Sufi from jurist Truth, was methodical and expe-
riential ‘witnessing and bearing testimony’: “\textit{‘Erfân} is the truth. That
which Mowlānā writes is no nonsense, I have witnessed many ‘impossi-
ble’ (\textit{gheyr momken}) things. It is all about testifying and being a witness
to \textit{haqq}, while the ‘\textit{olamā} only ‘know’.”\textsuperscript{34} In their testimony of witness-
ing, Sufis derived spiritual authority from dreams that eluded the jurists’
textual authority.\textsuperscript{35} Inversely, a cleric felt that “these Sufis are just sing-
ing a bit, \textit{lā ilāha illālāh}, but they have no idea what it means.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Interview}, 02/10/97.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Interview}, 06/19/97. “Whom they taught the secrets of Truth, they instructed by
[...] sewing his mouth” (TEHRANI, 1351/1953: 24). The latter saying seems to derive
from a repertoire shared by the Ahl-e Haqq as documented by MIR-HOSSEINI \textsuperscript{(1994,
(2): 213): “It was believed that whoever learned the ‘mystery’ as embodied in \textit{kalām}
[here in the sense of ‘sacred litany’] had their lips ‘sealed’ (\textit{muhr}).” MILLER (1923: 349)
stated of Gonābādi initiations that “The Qutb […] discloses to [the initiate] a mystery
which he may never reveal to anyone. And he is told that if he does so his head will fall
off. So greatly do [initiates] fear this awful fate that even the Sufi apostates never dear
to reveal the mystery to their most intimate friends.”
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Interview}, 03/07/97.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Interview} \textit{Sa`fi`alishāhī Sufi}, 01/02/97.
\textsuperscript{35} Generally, “Visions of the Hidden Imam in a dream are acceptable in Twelver
Shi’ism as a source of guidance on religious matters” (ALGAR, 1973: 220). EWING
considered Pakistani Sufi dreams of initiation from many angles, among which “how
The dichotomy of mystics and jurists was also structured in a hierarchy of knowledge that distinguished the ‘name’ (esm, or material appearance), ‘feature’ (šefat, having to do with its formal properties), and ‘essence’ (zāt, or first principle). Progressing from the first to the last element, one moved from the exoteric disciplines of the olamā to the esoteric realms of the orafā. It was moreover felt by a scornful affiliate that “although a mojtahed can become an āref, this occurs in the highest regions only. When he becomes an āref he is not a mojtahed anymore, because that stage is lower [...].” Ṣafī′alishāh, firmly dedicated to the trinity of truth, Sufi path and holy law, had worried about the legitimacy of his tafsīr for which, through royal intervention, he had nevertheless acquired a marjā′s seal. But he had also spoken, a Āfshā rich affiliate reminded me, of the ‘olamā′s ‘playing with the (literalism of the) holy law’ (šarʿbāzl) that kept the seeker from gnostic Truth.

However these notions and their frames were articulated historically - in politically assertive or subordinate modes - they all pointed to a mystical inner world that embodied the ultimate source of legitimacy, wholeness and Truth. The (outside) world, inversely, was a sphere of injustice, hardship and compromise, in which souls were cast, alienated and lost. A critical review of Iranian civil society testified to the wide distribution of these dichotomies in Iranian culture (and the trilateral concepts by implication), to their embedding in traditional Islamic mysticism, and to their negation of civil society:

In our culture, the oppositions of inside and outside [...], the self and the stranger, have always had a heavy presence. From [...] āfàn our culture has taken the wish, very evident in daily life, of returning to one’s house and refuge [...], as a safe hiding-place of sorts, and also its counterparts, which is to say fear of the strange, emigration and homelessness [...]. The outside world becomes the arena for the operation of power and bitter harshness, for insecurity and fear of the other and others, the arena of scepticism and mistrust for the wise ones who retain their silence, and of deception and dissimulation for the opportunists.

the interpretation of the dream facilitates the establishment of a new self representation and associated social relationships” (1990: 56). Because of this social power mediation, dreams are particularly crucial to Sufism, in Iran as elsewhere.

*Conversación, 02/10/97.
*Interview Ṣafī′alishāh Sufi, 01/02/97.
*Interview, 02/09/97. The Qajar king was Nāṣer od-Dīn Shāh (Zohdat ol-asrār, 1361/1982: 6).
*Farhādpūr, in Kiyān, 1375/1996, 6, (33): 6. Šahābī added, in reference to āfān′s sources: “In Neo-Platonism [the] idea [of civil society] has not been developed.”
Socially, the mystic regimes have taken refuge into their inner world in the Islamic Republic. In their Sufi political economies of meaning, formal and external aspects of communicative interaction—such as rules—became a play of either silence, dissimulation, or ‘authentic’ displays of Islamic respectability. But what was being shielded in any of these cases, was the higher, informal and internal, spiritual life. While in the Qajar era they did not shy away from explicit claims to worldly power, and in the Pahlavi dynasty they shared in it through royal patronage, Sufis now had a *sui generis* existence that was hardly stretched to the accomplishment of socio-political aims. Although Solṭān’alishāhīs engaged in charity during the war with Iraq and so enhanced social integration, and Ṣafī’alishāhīs aspired for political accommodation through regime religiosity, these activities did not extend social or political aims beyond self-preservation. They brokered Sufism in the Islamic Republic, but they did not mediate it towards the state as a component of the Iranian civil society.

In the Pahlavi era, antagonism in relations between Sufi affiliates, masters or orders was largely the result of ‘horizontal’ competition for spiritual authority. In the Ne’matollāhī orders, there has been no self-representation as a part, section, stratum, group or sect within the larger community of Sufism. Rather, Sufism has been held to manifest itself in essence in the particular part, section, stratum, group or sect that the speaker belonged to. “Yes, there are different *khānaqāhs* but there is only one *selsele*”, a contemporary, Tehrani Zahabī leader said, in a definition that should not be mistaken for pluralism: “We do not agree with the other groups, who say that they are Sufis while they are not even Shi’ites.” Majzūb’alishāh said: “We are the representatives. Of most

**Ahmādī** reckoned the Sufi concept of mortifying the soul a hindrance for individualism (*in Kiyān*, 6, (34): 52).

40 These differences figured in an interesting conflict of interpretation. A Tehraní acquaintance said: “I feel at a distance from myself these days.” I nodded and responded: “Like in this poem.” He took a copy of Hafez’s *Divān*, found the poem he thought I referred to and said: “It is about this very rotten state which causes its subjects psychological problems.” Then his Zo’r-Reyāsiteyn friend corrected his reading with tortured features: “No! The Master interprets ‘loss of self’ in connection to the *zekr*” (indicating its opposite, non-political and positive meaning) (*conversation*, 01/17/96).

41 *Interview*, 12/29/96. Inversely, “most of the later Ni’matollāhī sources deride the Dhahabīs [which] reflects the sectarian *intra-farīqa* rivalry which, unfortunately, still mars the relations between these two great orders” (Lewison, 1999: 47). Nur-Bakhsh, who made no effort to treat Solṭān’alishāhīs and Ṣafī’alishāhīs as Ne’matollāhī equals, wrote: “sufi orders are but branches of a single tree of loving-
most selseles, we do not know if they are legitimate, but obviously several have gone astray. One has to treat other selseles respectfully, for people go around in them who claim activity on the holy path. As the Prophet said: ‘of the gheyba I have no knowledge’, so perhaps there are legitimate others. But for as long as this is not clear, one ought not to join hands/intimacy (moṣāfahā) with them.”

In the Islamic Republic, however, intra-Sufism antagonism has been staged in a triangular set of relations, whereby spiritual authority was to a significant extent ‘vertically’ derived from regime definitions of legitimate religiosity. Thus, compliance to state religiosity entered the formerly horizontal competition as a criterion for spiritual authority. In this way, the requirements of survival deepened the antagonism, enhanced Sufism’s social fragmentation, and held it aloof from civil society.

MOHAMMADI rightly suggested Sufi orders to be mutual interest clubs whose interests did not, contrary to civil associations, transcend the confines of the lodge. When they did come in the open, they did so to retain the intimacy of the private ‘retraite’ (khalvat). Hajjí’s confession of opportunism and disappointment indicated he had been after salvation in the khalvat, not socioreligious representation outside:

I went to the khānaqāh to find methods for success in business, and to acquire a high social position. But after years in the lodge, I still haven’t felt a thing. And most people don’t. Perhaps it works for the sheikh and his friends. I hoped for miraculous blessing (karāmut) but I haven’t seen any of it. I asked the sheikh to teach me something, to give me a good thought, for success, but all the sheikh keeps on saying is: ‘Patience!’ (howsele), and ‘concentration!’ (tamarkoz).

kindness. If one order denies or repudiates another, it only repudiates itself” (1980, preface).

Interview, 04/19/97.

MIR-HOSSEINI (1994, (2): 221) described a mind-blowing case where in 1989 conflicts related to spiritual authority among the Ahl-e Haqq resulted in one group sending a letter “to the office of the President of the Islamic Republic and to the leaders of Friday Prayers in all major towns of the country.” In earlier clashes in 1980, the government reportedly intervened not by a backlash against Sufism, but by taking sides in the conflicts (op. cit., pp. 215-6). After new clashes in 1989 in Saheh, arrests were made on both sides. A local M.P. finally helped resolve the dispute (op. cit., p. 223).

MOHAMMADI, 1375/1996: 36.

Conversation, 03/13/97. This is not to suggest opportunism is the only motive to join a Sufi order. However, the quest for personal salvation in an intimate, face-to-face relation, is a constant.
SUFISM, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE

2.

Hājī’s complaint bore witness to Sufism’s insularity, but it also pointed to a field of resemblances connecting Sufism to the world outside the lodge. Claims to powerful and exclusive spiritual authority have characterised both Sufi orders and the state, and this analogous ideational structure has been mirrored in social organisation.

Conceptions of spiritual authority in Iran have historically divided it into religious and royal components. The religious component built largely on the ethical or spiritual brokerage of the Prophetic and Imamic messages, while kingship’s ‘divine splendour’, more than God-ordained, mainly derived from thisworldly values of force and might. As ideal types, religious authority derived from representation, while royal authority equalled the self-contained value of power. Idealtypically, the revolution has brought religious charisma to the place formerly occupied by royal authority, to the fusion of both. While for the clergy this

46 Literary representations of the state and of Sufi orders in, respectively, the Islamic Republic’s Constitution and in Sufi rulebooks, are misleading with respect to spiritual authority structures. Constitution Article 1.6.c. that stipulates “negation of all forms of oppression” (ARJOMAND, 1988: 375) is superseded by the institutional primacy (and charisma) of faqīh power; the (horizontal) divisions between the world of the lodge and the outside world, the realm of the jurists and the realm of the mystics, tariqat and shari’at, etc., are mostly subordinated to (vertical) hierarchies which assign primacy to valiyat or sheikhal authority. Thus, except for similar authority structures, there is a comparison between Sufi orders and the state in their representation, too.

47 Cf., for instance, ARJOMAND, 1988: 6-7 (on Safavid caesaropapism and Qajar dualism); BEHNAM, 1986: 17-36, 117-54 (on monarchical and clerical authority); MCDANIEL, 1991: 14-47 (on the historical legacy of authoritarian rule in Iran); FRYE, 1957: 186-7, 1964: 36-54 (on the mystique of Iranian Kingship). The significance of royal authority was contested by ABRAHAMIAN, 1978: 29, who saw in it a Western projection in the Oriental Despotism tradition. For a useful summary of discussions on Shi’ite clerical authority, see BAKHASH (1991). “[In Shiite orders such as the Ni’matullahiyya and Dhababiyya, the head of the tariqa is always considered the supreme qutb, the sole and unique Pole of the Muslim saintly hierarchy, so that his cosmological role is physically and politically temporalized. One socio-political consequence of this doctrine has been that the Persian Sufi murshid is considered not only an absolute monarch over his disciples - quite in accordance with ordinary pir-murîdî tenets and teachings found in other areas of the Islamic Sufi world - but also the only genuine râler in the invisible and visible worlds of being” (LEWISOHN, 1999: 51).

48 This is not to say the Islamic Republic’s leadership embellishes some form of Monarchy. But one does notice an inspiration - in formulations of leadership, and in the way people address it - which stems from farr-e izadi, the ancient royal attribute. In this sense, the Islamic Republic institutionally reproduced royal charisma, although in a different jargon. When a diplomatic row broke out between Germany and Iran in November 1996, newspapers wrote of the “offence to the sanctities of the Islamic Repub-
has been a recent development, in Sufi orders there has for long been a natural fusion of royal and clerical spiritual authority.

Sufis’ claims – or enemies’ attributions of such claims – to clerical spiritual authority have been evident in the functional doubling of the mojtahed and the qoṭb (as representatives of the hidden Imam),⁴⁹ the foqahā and the ‘orafā, the mollah and the sheikh (as spiritual guides), and in many related structural oppositions (whether or not these find subordination to a modus vivendi socially, or a higher synthesis conceptually), such as the mosque and the khānaqāh, shari‘at and tariqat, ahl-e ḵāher and ahl-e bāṭen, or, when relations turned irreparably sour, the faithful and the heretics (see above).⁵⁰

Possibly the strongest indication of functional doubling, however, concerned guide-flock relations. There has been no provision in the ‘emulation’ (taqlid) by the ‘imitating believer’ (moqalled) of his mojtahed for a complementary or alternative, independent spiritual realm. Such a sovereign realm has been institutionally sealed in the ‘oath of allegiance/initiation’ (be’yæt) of Sufi to sheikh.

Sufism’s royal spiritual authority has been evident in the absolute obedience requested of affiliates, as an ideal and to some extent as a practice, which transcended representational values. One Soljan’alishai affiliate’s humble task consisted of watching the gate and welcoming visitors. I asked him, after Mahbub’alishai died, if he had personally known the master. He turned to me in amazement of such ignorance and said: “Me? No! I am the dog of dogs.”⁵¹ Allegiance, the martial arts specialist in Zahir od-Dowle’s lodge explained, he owed to God alone, but only through his master. “Nothing transcends the Sharī’i, but if the qoṭb orders me to drink wine, I will do so without hesitation.” Most masters in the Ne’matollāh orders have carried ‘shah’ in their cognomen, which has historically meant disembodied ‘spiritual kingship’, but could also reflect literal claims to worldly power. In the Qajar era, Sufism’s acceptance through royal patronage was preceded by competition

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⁴⁹ “Hence the hatred of the mujtahids for Sufis” (TRIMINGHAM, 1971: 164).
⁵⁰ “The functions of the [...] Imam, in Shi‘i beliefs, include the authoritative explanation of [...] the Qur‘ān, the authoritative interpretation and even extension of Islamic law, the guidance of the individual in his spiritual life in a fashion akin to the marshid [...] in Sufism” (ALGAR, 1983: 10).
⁵¹ Interview, 01/31/97. Another Sufi reported his quest to be ‘to become not’ (interview, 11/27/96).
for worldly power between Sufis and the monarch. 52 In the late Pahlavi era, the Sufis’ sharing in royal charisma through ideological and institutional royal patronage was matched by their mystical variations on Plato’s concept of a philosopher-king, 53 in whose power Moḥammad ʿAnqā left little doubt he wished to share. In a general observation of Islamic, ‘saintly’ authority, it was remarked that “in folklore the pir maintains respect much as a sultan might: through the use of brute force.” 54 In the examples from this study, the last part of the observation may be taken metaphorically: as unmediated power.

In the Islamic Republic, the clerical component has remained unimpaired in definitions of spiritual authority: both clerics and Sufis claimed representation of Imamic authority, or the leading of their flocks in its name. The refined Soṭlān‘alishāhī doctrine that designated a worldly realm in which obedience to the foqahā was a religious duty, and signs of its clerical acceptance, were important for the containment of incongruous competition. In Saft‘alishāhī congregations, the containment of tension was managed by masters who downplayed the significance of authority claims to the outside, but on the inside upkept allegiance to the spiritual genealogy - which generally found its legitimisation in the twelve Imams, most notably ʿAlī.

The royal component in spiritual authority claims has lessened for Sufi orders - from outward and manifest it has become inward and latent - and increased (inversely) for the clerics. This has respectively meant increased and decreased political assertion on the part of the clerics and the Sufis. However, the Sufi orders and the state now both embodied royal and clerical elements, which brought them face to face, in direct competition for by and large exclusive, spiritual authority. Competition resulted not from differences - civil associations demanding a social space of their own from an overbearing, monolithical state - but

52 A citation from chapter 2.: “The power of the Quṭb is obviously greater than that of any ruler [...] Salvation in this world and the next depends on obedience to the Quṭb of the time, ‘who, in our era, is Sayyid Maʿṣūm ‘Ali Shāh.’ If a ruler attacks the Quṭb, he must come to ruin, not only because the cosmic balance has been threatened, but because the dervishes themselves will his ruin” (Pourjavadi and Wilson, 1978: 117, citing ʿNūr‘alishāhī’s Letter of Guidance (Hedāyat-nāme)).

53 “In Persian Sufism, the ‘pole’ [...] was meant as an interior quality, the realization of the so-called [...] I of the I-ness’. This is the ‘pillar of light,’ [...] that connects Heaven and Earth through the Perfect Man personified by the ruling king” (Filippani-Ronconi, 1977: 62).

similarities - the Sufi orders and the state both embodying claims to royal and to clerical authority. In one of the defamatory pamphlets that was allowed to come into the open in the Islamic Republic - for Sufism to be tarnished - a contemporary enemy restated traditional, historical reproaches, the venom of which now had a new political significance:

If the existence of the Sufi lodge in front of the mosque [now largely embodying state religiosity], the taking of the face of the sheikh into one’s mind [constituting, besides blasphemy, competition for state appointed prayer leaders] and the assumption of the honorary title of ‘king’ [ultimately denying any pretender ruler’s and particularly jurists’ worldly claims to spiritual authority], if all of this is not against the Islamic foundations, then what is? [my insertions].

The analogous structures of clerical and Sufi spiritual authority have been expressed not only in ideational similarities. One also observes various fundamental resemblances in terms of their organisation.

From its invocations of Iranian society, one can deduce that the clerical state has largely conceived of it as an amorphous mass of adepts in need of charismatic, religious leadership. Khomeyni said: “The guardianship of the Islamic jurist [...] is the same as the appointment of a tutor for minors. The tutelage of the nation regarding responsibility and authority does not differ at all from the tutelage of the under-aged.”

Some sectors of it were subject to special care: there was subsidised schooling and pilgrimages for martyrs’ families, and there were educational and literacy campaigns for tribal areas. However, the revolutionary care for the ‘disinherited’ was gradually transformed into permanent and general appeals to the Iranian nation’s Islamic solidarity. Beyond the privilege of any group, the clerical state’s charismatic elite set out to achieve a permanent mass-mobilisation, for which it made use of popular symbols - the infallible Imams, their gnostic wisdom, martyrdom’s exemplary values, the expectation of the Mahdi - ingrained in Shi’ite-Iranian culture. Whenever there were state-organised political rallies in Tehran, one would read in the newspapers the next day that ‘people from all walks of life’ had participated. Thus, the Islamic Republic has been aptly analysed in terms of its ‘populism’ (whether or not...
this offers a viable alternative to ‘fundamentalism’).\textsuperscript{57} Populism was institutionalised: the televised Friday sermon (kho\textit{th}be) has stood out as a major genre and institution at the state’s disposal, in constructing, through the Iranians’ mass-mobilisation, an amorphous clientele.\textsuperscript{58}

A similar hierarchy has operated in the Ne\textsuperscript{matoll\textit{ah}} mystic regimes, in which various genres and institutions constructed an amorphous following of affiliates. The salvation of these affiliates invariably depended on their following of the masters.\textsuperscript{59} The Sa\textsuperscript{f}\textit{alish\textit{ah}} order had many sheikhs, but not any of them under the command of the Board of Trustees. Rather, each sheikh recreated his microcosm of what had once been the orders’ central authority. There were levels of closeness to Monavvar\textsuperscript{alish\textit{ah}}, but none of the participants in his gatherings could claim superior religious status. Monavvar\textsuperscript{alish\textit{ah}} too, although critical of innovations under the Board of Trustees, was moderate in his claims to spiritual authority. In the end, all divine spiritual legitimacy was mediated, passed through by Sa\textsuperscript{f}\textit{alish\textit{ah}} - and through him, referred back to the Imams and the Prophet - to whom Monavvar\textsuperscript{alish\textit{ah}} and the participants in his gathering, in turn, theoretically constituted an amorphous following as well.

In order to retain an amorphous following and contain dissent, Ne\textsuperscript{matoll\textit{ah}} leaders had to testify to their (‘royal’) might from time to

\textsuperscript{57} Halliday pointed out the weakness in juxtaposing populism and fundamentalism in Iran (1995: 256-7). Abrahamian (1993: 17) cites as populism’s features: “A movement of the propertied middle-class that mobilizes the lower classes, especially the urban poor, with radical rhetoric directed against imperialism, foreign capitalism and the political establishment. In mobilizing the ‘common people’, populist movements use charismatic figures and symbols, imagery, and language that have potent value in the mass culture. Populist movements promise to drastically raise the standard of living and make the country fully independent of outside powers. Even more important, in attacking the status quo with radical rhetoric, they intentionally stop short of threatening the petty bourgeoisie and the whole principle of private property. Populist movements, thus, inevitably emphasize the importance, not of economic-social revolution, but of cultural, national, and political reconstruction.” I have been deliberately selective in my citation as the middle-class element is not relevant to the present discussion, and class in Iran in general and particularly in the 1970s has, in my opinion, been less relevant than “the specific religious project [...] in the Iranian revolution” (that Abrahamian rather neglects, cf. Halliday, 1995: 257), to which charismatic authority and leadership have been central.

\textsuperscript{58} The Islamic Republic “elevated the Friday prayers [...] into a key state institution for [...] indoctrination, and mass mobilisation” (Kazemi, 1996: 140, cf. Eickelman, 1992: 646).

time - their possession of blessing, which was witnessed through the performance or the narration of miraculous deeds. But they also had to appeal to the affiliates by invoking a popular, Sufi construction of Shi‘ite history through which they testified to representational (‘clerical’) legitimacy. Superseding the power of any contemporary master, the charisma of Sháh Ne‘matolláh Valí, the founder of the order, radiated through to the present in all Ne‘matolláhí gatherings (majáles), and the spiritual chain that traced back his legitimacy to the first Imam, also pointed forwards to the contemporary masters.

The size of the Solján‘alísháhí order, the variety in its real estate property, the number of its affiliates, and their wide geographical spread, corresponded to hierarchies more complex than the Šafi‘alísháhí ones. The qoṭb disposed of three varieties of sheikhs: one ‘sheikh of sheikhs’ (sheykh ol-masháyék) who shared in many of the master’s attributes and had the right to install lesser sheikhs; the ‘restricted’ (mahdíd) variety, who were installed at specific places at specific times; and the ‘independent’ (motalq) ones, who could be detached to any place, at any time.60 These layers of sheikhs in between the master and his affiliates did not, however, attain authority in themselves. The sheikhs had a representative identity, bestowing the master’s grace on the affiliates, and reproducing their dualism. Sufis in both Ne‘matolláhí orders repeatedly stressed - in a formulation which was politically convenient but simultaneously ‘authentic’ to the Sufi orders’ collective conceptions of the self - that the affiliates had no particular identity and included ‘people from all walks of life.’

In a pre-revolutionary definition of Islamic prayer, Ṭabátábá’í divided it into the ‘canonical’ type (ṣalá), ‘supplication’ (dó‘r), ‘litany’ (verd) and ‘invocation’ (zékri).61 He did not, then, define these in any hierarchy, and he could not have foreseen canonical prayer as a state institution in the Islamic Republic. On banners and wall-paintings in the streets one read: “prayer is the sun of hearts” (namáz khvorshíd-e delhá ast), and “enjoining the good is obligatory like prayer is” (amr be ma‘rif mešl-e namáz vájeb ast). In the lodge of Šafi‘alísháhí, one obstinate Sufi who thought prayer was unnecessary and felt that all one needed to do was ‘thinking of Ḥusayn’, was sharply corrected: “When was ‘Ali succesful?”’, he was asked, and then given the answer: “It was

60 Interview Ṣajjí Malísháh, 05/07/97.
61 In Ṭabátábá’í, 1982: 91.
when he prayed." Post-revolutionary Ne'matollahi would certainly not equate zikr with namaz. Namaz preceded the Sufi meditations in both of the Ne'matollahi orders, circumscribing their encompassing realm of legitimate religiosity. If there was any fundamental unity in these varieties of Islamic prayer, beyond being complementary, it was to be found in their communicative structures.

Sufi ceremonies compared to the Friday sessions in that they, too, were hermeneutic exercises in which the right of interpretation was monologically sealed. They featured similar, esoteric interpretations of reality, in a collective endeavour to uncover meaning hidden deeply under the surface of manifest phenomena. They read the world for signatures that related it to the holy book, and attributed common purpose to instances - such as imperialism and spiritual crisis - at first sight isolated. Collective interpretive efforts had spiritual progress and becoming better Muslims among their primary aims; religious purposes that many Shi'ite Iranians would consider largely interchangeable.

More important for the present discussion, amorphous audiences were constructed and rallied through the congregations' hierarchical features. Both the Friday sermon and the Sufi ceremonies were hierarchically authoritarian in that they created two largely undifferentiated strata - the faithful and the affiliates versus the prayer leader and the master - the one defined in its attribute of 'following' to the other. In Tehrani Friday sermons, hierarchy is physically stressed in the speaker's speaking from a pulpit and his audience being seated on the ground. The Ne'matollahi orders' physical arrangement has both parties seated on the floor, but all affiliates facing their master in the centre. The Soltan'alishahi's visibly marked the master's place, while the Board of Trustees was only informally in the centre of attention (see figure 14).

One might question the social significance of these spatial orders - they do not necessarily rule out more egalitarian settings - but here, they manifested one aspect of a larger communicative structure. Spatial hierarchies were paralleled in the generic dominance of monologue, which defined the first party through passivity and repetition / listening and silence, and the other by its activity and initiation / speaking and voice.

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62 Conversation, 12/01/96.
63 I am here using a definition by Foucault (1994: 29): "Let us call the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to make the signs speak and to discover their meaning, hermeneutics."
Neither Sufi spiritual gatherings nor state Friday sermons enhanced a ‘civic culture’ - defined by self-conscious, plural and assertive social identities. Through their hierarchical communicative features, they instead (re)produced the ‘mass culture’ of an amorphous following.

In terms of these crucial similarities to the Islamic Republic’s spiritual authority structure, the Sufi orders have compared to the state regime rather than to civil associations. Functionally, the orders differed from the state mainly in the absence of taxation and a monopoly of violence; the two differences that in general prevail between religious regimes and modern states. In many other respects, however, the orders and the state engaged in competition for exclusive spiritual authority, not because of fundamental differences but, instead, numerous resemblances, in their evocations of collective states of bliss.

BAX, 1987: 3. Although even here, there is a comparison. The orders collect religious revenues on some scale; the state has a central office for khomms collection (sandīq-e akhmas). The difference is the voluntary and informal nature of the first, and the compulsory and fixed nature of the second.
Figure 14. Spatial hierarchy in four Sufi lodges

LEGEND. Large circle: affiliates; bold large circle: masters; bold small circle: notables. Centred rectangles represent empty space. Side-flanks in the Solṭān’alishāhī lodge represent balconies, and the three affiliates on top of the drawing are seated in an ante-chamber. Drawings do not represent absolute or relative numbers but relative distances.
PARADOXES OF CIVILITY AND SUFISM

Or la perpétuation et la transmission de ce message spirituel des Imâms sont indépendantes de la question de savoir si telle ou telle société islamique rejetera ou acceptera, pour ‘s’adapter au monde moderne’, l’introduction du code civil.\(^7\)

The mystic regimes do not easily fit the model of associational life and civility, circumscribed in the classical definition of civil society. Recently, however, several anthropologists cast doubt on the definition’s descriptive and conceptual value, holding it inapt to grasp cultural variability. They objected to the classical idea that it is “too narrowly circumscribed by modern western models of liberal-individualism”, and that “the recent use of the concept to differentiate states according to their potential for democracy and civilisation [...] carries on [...] using rationality and individualism [...] to measure the distance between the civilised individual and the collectivist barbarian.”\(^6\) They considered it, in short, a Western artefact to be ideologically deconstructed. If it was to offer any meaningful perspective, “the exploration of civil society requires [...] careful attention be paid to [...] informal [...] practices overlooked by other disciplines.”\(^6\)

The first series of critiques takes the descriptive, classical model of civil society for a prescriptive one. The critiques moreover strike one as political, more so than conceptual, and they do not, therefore, significantly problematise Western origins in the classical concept of civil society. The second appeal, however, points to a real conceptual problem. The image traditionally evoked of associational life, applies to well-established groups, mutually well-connected and socially powerful, in which interactions and transactions take a formal, registered and regulated, orderly course. The informal processes through

\(^7\) CORBIN, 1971, (1): 90. The 1804 *code civil* has been one of the historical markers of the Western civil society: “Mit den großen Kodifikationen des bürgerlichen Rechts wird ein Normensystem entwickelt, das eine im strengen Sinne private Sphäre, nämlich den von ständischen wie von staatlichen Auflagen tendenziell befreiten Verkehr der Privatleute miteinander sichert” (HABERMAS, 1993: 144). Before the Islamic revolution, Daryush Shayegan conceived of the relations between civil society and religion, beyond Corbin’s view that they were simply unrelated, as mutually exclusive: “the West has been losing its spiritual trustworthiness since the sixteenth century when it substituted civil society for religious order” (in BOROUJERDI, 1996: 150).


\(^6\) HANN, 1996: 3; 6.
which such groups evolved, fall outside the scope of civil society’s
classical definition, which is, essentially, synchronic. In a process-
oriented, diachronical search, however, one would be able to explore
civil society’s history of emergence and subsequent development.
Conceiving of the Iranian civil society as a process, one could make
comparative sense of its (re-) ‘emergent’ character, which has been
often observed but also left theoretically unexplored.

The following explores two instances in which Shi‘ite Sufism
meaningfully, though in paradoxical, implicit, passive and informal
ways, relates to the Iranian civil society. First, Western public
spheres originated from literary and artistic circles and debating
clubs, not - immediately - from politically assertive mutual interest
groups. An important new strain in Iranian, religious intellectual
discourse provides a parallel. Sufism figures passively in it, as a
recurrent reference, representing a beacon of legitimate religiosity.

Secondly, Western public space, in advance of any full-fledged
civil public sphere, was first established in societies which were not
only mute and inward looking, but also secretive and closed, and
confined to selective memberships. The Ne‘matollāhī Sufi orders
have similarly maintained a secluded and shielded religiosity of their
own. By implication, this means non-state religiosity, no matter to
what extent the orders outwardly accommodated to the public tran-
script of state Islam. Through non-state religiosity they confronted, if
largely willy-nilly, the state’s ‘colonisation of the lifeworld’. 70

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70 Paraphrasing, ‘colonisation of the lifeworld’ refers to the extension of ‘syste-
mic’ economic and bureaucratic criteria to private realms (Lebenswelt refers to “der
transzendentale Ort, an dem sich Sprecher und Hörer begegnen; wo sie reziprok den
Anspruch erheben können, daß ihre Außerungen mit der Welt (der objektiven, der
sozialen oder der subjektiven Welt) zusammenpassen; und wo sie diese Geltungsan-
sprüche kritisieren und bestätigen, ihren Dissens austragen und Einverständnis er-
ziehen können” (HABERMAS, 1988, (2)), undermining freedom and consensus-
forward, communicative rationality (op. cit., p. 293, in an argument that begins at p.
273), enforcing systemic assimilation (op. cit., p. 522). The analogy consists in the
Islamic Republic having extended its reach over Iranian society and individuals,
physically as well as ideologically, further than previous twentieth-century regimes,
and in it having conceived of and imposed its regulations exclusively. It is not im-
plied, by this historical comparison, that the Iranian, Islamic world as a whole would
now be in the developmental stage that Europe was in in the eighteenth century.
In his historical study of Western public space, Habermas (1990 [1962]) identified its embryonic forms in advance of any institutionalised, state guaranteed public freedom. Confined, public space was first established in salons, clubs and coffee-houses, partly co-opted by the court, from which developed the associations of citizens that gave shape to the classical, Western civil society. It was public debate, beyond the reach of court society, which marked the transition from a ‘representative’ public space - the public representation of rule and rulers - into a ‘civil’ public space - the civilians’ proper realm that won over the public stage. The process is described in the transformation of predominantly inward, literary (eighteenth century), into outward, political (nineteenth century) public space. Intellectuals’ discourse in which Sufism figures as a recurrent reference, represents a similarly inward public space in the process of expansion.

The philosopher ‘Abdolkarim Sorush is one of Iran’s most prominent contemporary intellectuals.71 He was educated in Iran and abroad and initially he was a fervent supporter of the revolution and the Islamic Republic. Gradually, however, he came to realise a contradiction between his Islamic values and the state that purported to execute these. The Iranian philosophical discourse that Sorush embodied, has been pervaded by European categories of thought - through the translation into Persian of Kant and Hegel as much as Heidegger and Foucault - the most important of which for Sorush has been the concept of relativism. He argued that the revelation was sacred, as its meaning remained unchanged in time. But readers were not, hence the need for interpretation.72 Interpretation was a secular matter, for the legitimisation of which no meta-secular arguments were valid (an idea which Sufis too, in various formulations, stressed

71 Another intellectual writing within the jurist community and similarly influenced by mysticism, was Mojtabah-Shabestarî. “Shabestarî differentiates between faith and the religious law, associating faith and the essence of religiosity with religious experience rather than with the religious law (faqih). In this, he relies on the mystics who have said: ‘the human problem is the problem of correct interpretation of religious experience and not the experience itself’” (Aliejad, 1998: 37).

72 Cf. Rouleau, June 1995. It could be argued that interpretation of the sacred sources is what most of the Shi’ite clerics do anyway. The radically new aspect of the philosopher’s approach - although seemingly much in line with the eighteenth century theological position of the Akhbâris - is, however, his extension of the right of interpretation to the religious lay population at large.
over and again). Sorūsh concluded there was no justification for any
group to monopolise interpretation, and, consequently, state power.

Thus, the philosopher attacked exclusivity in the idea of velāyat-e
faqīh: “Soroush regards religion and mysticism along with science
and philosophy as four legitimate modes of attaining knowledge [...].
He charged that just as the fatvā [...] of a rural jurist differs from that
of an urbanite, [...] so the Islam of a philosopher contrasts that of a
mystic.”73 Because of his unabatedly religious perspective, Sorūsh
became a feared critic of the Islamic Republic,74 and in this respect
compared to Kant. Just as the latter’s Enlightenment-declaration
(‘dare to think!’) found its expression in an ambivalent allegiance to
Frederick the Second, so the former subverted through criticism, but
is not known to have ever explicitly declared unambiguously ille-
gitimate, until Khatami’s ascent, Khomeyni’s doctrine of jurist rule.75

Sorūsh developed these ideas in his position as a university lec-
turer, and spread his ‘thinly disguised call for pluralism’ through
articles in Kiyān magazine.76 These activities attracted the inter-
ternational media’s attention, and he embarked on a series of international
lectures. Directly and indirectly, the government took various mea-
sures to put a stop to his message. Lectures were cancelled and he
was beaten up by îezboll¿h’s. Despite being nearly untouchable
through his increasingly global renown, he was largely silenced.77

75 FOUCAULT (1984: 37) concluded of Was ist Aufklärung: “And Kant, in con-
clusion, proposes to Frederick II, in scarcely veiled terms, a sort of contract - what
might be called the contract of rational despotism with free reason: the public and
free use of autonomous reason will be the best guarantee of obedience, on condition,
however, that the political principle that must be obeyed itself be in conformity with
universal reason.” Cf. HABERMAS’ more positive evaluation of Kant’s significance
76 KAZEMI, 1996: 151.
77 After the 1997 presidential elections, Sorūsh commented on the results on
CNN, which he was fiercely reproached for by the hard-line newspaper Keyhān.
“Abdolkarim Sorūsh who is according to the commentator (!) of the television
station CNN an Islamic philosopher against the regime (!) said in an interview with
journalists of this news channel, among statements concerning the above issues, that
the election result is a way to find peace and quiet towards a better future. While the
journalists of the Western and Zionist media assessed the crisp and clear statements
of [...] Khatami as a sign of a confession of disappointment and despondency vis-à-
vis the Western encampment, and knew the issues forwarded by Mr. Khatami to be
based on his fundamentalism, Sorūsh’s happy divulging [...] appears ridiculous.
These statements of Mr. Sorūsh, in the margin of issues that he addressed at confer-
While Sorûsh’s thought has become the object of international exegesis, the extent to which his oppositional discourse derived from the Islamic, mystical tradition - this has been a recurrent motive in Iranian intellectual discourse - has not often been analysed in any detail. Mystical philosophy was rather associated with Sorûsh’s intellectual and political enemies, particularly Rezâ Dâvari, who had carried Corbin’s Heideggerian mysticism to its absolutist extremes. As Sufism accommodated itself to regime religiosity through blending its mysticism with a Khomeynist variety of ‘erfân, however, Sorûsh delved into Islamic mysticism - in as far as its legitimacy was beyond doubt - to argue authentic, decisively non-statist religiosity.

In a recent interview that has been published on the internet, Sorûsh explained that “My first attempts at interpretation concerned the Koran and an important Sufi text, Mathnavi [....] My continuing contemplation of Rumi made me gradually better acquainted with ences and speeches abroad and that have become termed ‘Islamic Lutheranism’, assume a very particular meaning” (Khordâd 8, 1376/May 29, 1997). It was reported that “In a July letter published in a newspaper, publisher and writer Abdolkarim Soroush confirmed that he had been banned from leaving the country and that his passport had been confiscated. In November Ansar-e Hezbollah thugs attempted to break up at least one of Soroush’s lectures” (U.S. Department of State, Iran Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997, p. 8).

See, for instance, Cole’s (1996) discussion of intellectuals’ nationalist discourse in the Qajar period. He addressed Etemâd os-Salîna’s ‘Dreambook’ that used dervish imagery to argue against the reformists of his time and in favour of absolute monarchy (op. cit., pp. 51, 53). Inversely - Sufis arguing reform - “Voltaire, [...] whose works had not been translated into Persian [in the nineteenth century], was held in high esteem by some Sufis, who had heard of his anti-clericalism” (Bayat, 1982: 62). Alinejad (1998: 3) emphasised the “meaningful function of the new interpretations of Iranian-Islamic philosophial and mystical traditions in building new political imaginaries.” In these traditions, he felt (as did Sorûsh), lay the roots of current trends towards democracy and pluralism (op. cit., p. 5). Similarly, “from a political perspective, these new interpretations may be considered in opposition to the official interpretations of the sacred texts held by the conservative Shi‘i jurists in power” (op. cit., p. 15).


Mysticism had been an important theme from his earliest book, ‘The Restless Structure of the Universe’ (Nahûd-e nô-drâm-e jahân), in which “the author aligns himself with the mystical Shi‘i school of illumination (eshrâq), and particularly with its great seventeenth-century exponent [...] Molla Sadra [...] Sorush’s strong mystical tendency can be shown in the conceptual structure of his various arguments, as well as by the simple fact that the most frequently and approvingly cited reference in his writings and lectures is the great mystic poet Jalal al-Din Rumi” (Matin-Asgari, 1997: 100-1, 102, cf. various references in this chapter).
Sufism. In another passage, he mentioned “a memorable trip [to] the desert town of Gonabad. There I met the Ghotb or the master of the mystic Sufi order of Khaksari that is also known as Gonabadi. Upon my return, I wrote a fictionalized travelogue [about this memorable trip to the Sufis of Gonabad] entitled "Journey to the Center."

“Religiosity”, Sorush held, “is the station of being in love” (dindari maqam-e ‘asheqi ast), and he chose to explore it in the language of the mystics, as in "the words of Mowlana". Rumi, the Sufi, has not been absent from official religious discourse, if only because his poetry has such authority in Iranian culture that banning it would be inconceivable. But he predominantly has been represented as an ‘aref, not as a Sufi. Eftelat, for instance, prescribed that he had not been ‘a Sufi or a recluse ascetic’ (ṣift va zāhed-e khalvat-neshin) and not even ‘a Sufi-like mystic’ (‘aref-e šifti-vash).

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81 The equation of Khākṣār and Gonābād is obviously a mistake. The interview was held on May 3, 1999. I found “Intellectual Autobiography: An Interview” on http://www.seraj.org/ (10/31/99), a website dedicated to Sorush. The interviewer was "Sadri", but other details are unknown.

82 Tahliil-e maqām-e hokāmat-e dini, 1375/1996: 7. Although Sorush was ambivalent or sometimes negative towards Sufism, overall his tone was positive (especially in Şerīthā-ye mostaṣāmeh: sokhani dar plurālism; mosbat va manfī, 1376/1997). In his treatment of Muhammad al-Ghazzali, Rumi and Hafez he stressed their enmity towards Sufism (Qeṣṣe-ye arbāb-e mutrefat, 1375/1996: 6, 7, 26, 59-61, 257). However, in the same publication he told, in an inverse appreciation, that the important lesson of Sufism is abstention from power and wealth, to refrain from sin (1375/1996: 268). In ‘Confused Consciousness, Confused Identity’ (Zehniyat-e moshavvash, hoviyat-e moshavvash, in Kiyān, 1996, 6, (30): 4-9), he “conceded that by its very nature [...] tasavvof leads to fatalistic thinking [...] and perplexity [...] traits that breed irrationality and confusion in Iranian culture” (MATIN - ASGARI, 1997: 103). In Akhlāq, zibā-shenāsī va ‘erfān (1375/1997: 17), however, Sorush associated beauty with proximity to God, and proximity to God with Sufis.

83 Tahliil-e maqām-e hokāmat-e dini, 1375/1996: 2. SHAYEGAN writes (1997), in what must be a reference to Sorush, of distortions in the Westernised Islamic episteme, that it “is quite capable of mixing eschatology with, for example, positivism. The product of such combinations is always a hybrid which can only be made to fit together by grafting” (op. cit., p. 27). Ironically, similar grafting was employed by “all kinds of converts: German fundamentalists, British Sufis, meticulously conscientious Swiss Muslims, French dabblers in ‘a nice class of Islam, rich in cultural appeal” (op. cit., p. 74). Although one may agree with Shayegan that “to match two notions which belong to different constellations of ideas, kept apart by the great historical caesuras on which modernity is founded, is to attempt a chain of identification and misread the genealogy of the concepts” (op. cit., p. 27), the attempts live a life of their own, and thus constitute an object for social science.

84 There were fewer inhibitions in lesser figures. A new edition of ‘Ali Torke’s Sharḥ-e golshan-e rāz was judged ‘among the best books to have appeared until now
Sorūsh repeatedly evoked challenging images of a more legitimate, Islamic spiritual authority. As the Islamic Republic politicised mysticism, Sorūsh gave Mowlānā an inverse political reading: “Our [...] mystics [...] have [...] taught us that one can attain freedom in the shadow of religion”, he stated, and “Mowlāvī comprehends the aim of ‘prophecy’ precisely in this founding of freedom for believers and supporters of religion.”

The teachings of Sufi mystics, Sorūsh felt, had been a reaction not only to monarchist ethics but also, more generally, to despotic ethics, predominant in Iranian, Islamic history.

Under Sorūsh’s hermeneutic reasoning that strove to define the basis for textual authority and religiosity, lay a fundamental, ontological discussion that dealt with the essence of man: “Our mystics have spoken about nothing but man. Sufism and ‘erfān are, fundamentally, anthropology. The mystics have said that man is the embodiment of the overarching name of God.”

From this inclusive conception of mankind, it followed that “mystics such as Mowlāvī [...] knew the ‘fight between the believer, the unbeliever and the Jew’ to occur [only] as a consequence of conflicting perspectives”, and that they had “in an insightful and wise manner laid the firm foundation for an honest and just pluralism.” One of the ways in which


In the same passage, Sorūsh criticised ‘Sufi ethics’ (MATIN-ASGARI, 1997: 107).

“The Islamic state can only be justified if it is democratic and humanistic” must not be mistaken for secularism, but be seen as a strictly religious view. The year in which Sorūsh published Dīn va azdād (1996), there was also a round table on ‘religion and freedom’ at Tehran University (ADELKHAH, 1997: 17).

In winter 1997, Nāme-ye farhang (24) published a ‘forum on pluralism and culture’ that was presided over by Reżā Dāvari. Hojjat Ol-Eslām Rashād recognised mysticism, just as Sorūsh did, as an Islamic basis for pluralism (op. cit., p. 5, English introduction). Dāvari’s evaluation, contrary to that of Sorūsh, was decisively negative: “because of the confusion of the language and ambiguity of the concepts and interpretations, some of the pious believers have defended pluralism [...] Pluralism is not a religious or theological issue, and in theological and ‘erfān introductions to its explication, it is in reality a kind of political exploitation” (op. cit., p. 3, English; p. 13, Persian text). The views of Dāvari are in line with those of the Western relativists in the civil society debate, who positively reckon that “Some societies may reject modern western notions of what is intrinsically good, as when a Brahmin rejects equality and upholds the hierarchy of
pluralism became manifest, was in the diversity of religious explication and experience, which Sor’sh considered ‘our Sufis’ to represent in words and action.\textsuperscript{89} Mysticism, then, embodied Islamic pluralism.

As many Iranian critics of the Islamic Republic did, Sor’sh maintained that he took no political positions at all, and stated emphatically that “mystical theories must not be established as the basis for political thought, because this unusual practice is dangerous.”\textsuperscript{90} Habermas observed of Western equivalents: “Der kritische Prozeß, den die öffentlich räsonierenden Privatleute gegen die absolutistische Herrschaft anstrengen, versteht sich selbst als unpolitisch.”\textsuperscript{91} Sor’sh’s mystical demand for a ‘society of law’ (jame’e-ye hoqûqî), an allegedly unpolitical plea, was an important political event as it transcended Henry Corbin’s traditionally narrow conception of ‘erfân beyond and isolated from any ‘Code Civil’\textsuperscript{92} In this way, through its denial and claims to the opposite, Sufism discursively transformed into Sor’sh’s oppositional defence of (religious) civility.

2.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, Western proto-civilians faced a ‘representative public space’, which was filled with the emblems, gestures and rhetoric of rule and rulers. As long as this rhetoric and these emblems and gestures remained the sole occupant of the public space, there could be no full-fledged civil society.

caste, or a Mollah defends the sacred truths of Islam against secular pluralism” (HANN, 1996: 18). However, interestingly, it is the enemies who cite from the Western tradition as well. Transcending the East-West divide, Sorh cited Weber and Davari found solace in Heidegger.

\textsuperscript{89} Sor’sh’s discourse and practice, but also in the fact that he reproaches Sufism for zohd while it is with the voice of this very, traditionalist and quietist ‘erfân that Sor’sh speaks in the above citation. In the above lecture Sor’sh played a dangerous game by associating velâyat as a mystical concept with Sufism, suggesting an alternative conception for the faqîh and donyâvi varieties of velâyat-e faqîh.

\textsuperscript{90} HANN, 1996: 18.

\textsuperscript{91} ALINEJAD (1998: 13) rightly remarked that thinkers such as Sor’sh engaged in “constant flirtations with politics.”
Nevertheless, civil public space was established within the confines of closed societies. Habermas mentioned Freemasonry and illuminationist societies - secretive as much as Iranian, Islamic Sufism - as examples. He illustrated their dialectical relation to the representative public space as follows: “Die Beschränkung der Öffentlichkeit, meint Kant mit dem Blick auf die damals heißumstrittenen Freimaurerlogen, sei »die veranlassende Ursache aller geheimen Gesellschaften<”. Thus, the common European phenomenon of Freemasonry was “as old as civil society itself, if civil society as a whole was not just an outgrowth of Freemasonry.”

This points to a paradox in civility, which describes open, non-primordial interaction, resembling what Habermas in a different context outlined as the ‘ideal speech situation’ - free of distorting system constraints - but which has nevertheless, in Western European countries, been constituted through one of its opposites: secrecy.

In Habermas’s argument, the question of public space was closely related to a widening scope for rationality. It was rational communication that needed the protection of secrecy, as rational communication threatened self-explanatory sovereignty. Thus, “Solange die Publizität ihren Sitz in der fürstlichen Geheimkanzlei hat, kann sich Vernunft nicht unvermittelt offenbaren. Ihre Öffentlichkeit ist noch auf Geheimhaltung angewiesen, ihr Publikum bleibt [...] intern.”

However, one suspects the more crucial element in civil society to have been not rational communication, but the threat that its independence posed. The crucial element in eighteenth-century contes-
tations of public space, was the ‘bürgerliche Dialektik von Innerlichkeit und Öffentlichkeit.’ Facing a representative public space, it had to emerge and be constituted as a secret public space.” This paradox of civility has also operated in the mystic regimes, in their relations to the Islamic Republic’s waning, representative public space.

The Ne’matollahi orders were not all fora for rational, civilian dialogue. One Sufi said: “When a thief enters a house, the first thing he does is turn out the light. Love (‘eshq) is such as thief, with respect to reason (‘aql). What we do here is wage a ‘war of love’ (jang-e ‘eshq) to annihilate that which cools down ‘eshq, which is to say ‘aql’.” While many other Sufis would disagree and assign a central place to ‘aql, as demands Shi’ite doctrine, no Sufi felt that it was ‘mystic reason’ that faced an over-bearing state. It has been as independent bearers of a religiosity of their own, that Iranian Sufis have countered, if largely willy-nilly, their lifeworld’s colonisation.

Countering colonisation: rules and their performance

Reflecting on current circumstances in Iran, one Sufi stated: “We are now where all started, with individuals and small groups, without formal organisation.” An ‘actual Sufism’ had now rejoined the ‘essential Sufism’. It reminded of Corbin’s invocation of the sixth imam: “L’Islam a commencé expatrié et redeviendra expatrié. Bienheureux les expatriés!” Sufism’s basic social dilemma had always reflected tension between the actual and the essential states: “Sufism is about religious experience, not about social organisation. But without social organisation, religious experience is obstructed by enemies. All organisation corrupts, but without it Sufism would be destroyed as well.” Others felt contempt for the last part of the equation, and cited the histories of Sufi martyrs “who were way beyond caring about their bodily survival.”

any other source of knowledge, then it is doubtful if rite-ridden Freemasonry ever fitted the criterion of rationality.

99 Interview, 02/21/97.
101 Another observer similarly reflected: “Sufi groups have split in tens and tens. They don’t bureaucratise. That would kill charisma” (conversation, 10/19/96).
102 It is a favourite saying among Sufis, based on a (prophetic) hadīs, that “one has to die before one dies.”
idealists, however, envisioned a cosmic drama in which an ideal
Sufism, a path without organisation, had become polluted by worldly
forms. Now it was reaching a return to its original, essential self, in
contrary circumstances, in the preordained shape of a full circle.103

“There are no preconditions to love in the khānaqāh”, Sorūsh
wrote, moulding Sufism into a pluralist political agenda.104 But lodge
life has been as regulated in the Islamic Republic as it was in the Pahlavi
dynasty, bearing temporally distinct relations to state and jurist
regimes. Historical charters of Sufi ‘order’ have been laid down in
rules, and Sufism’s “sanctity of rule [...] means in practice the pres-
ervation and perpetuation of the adab (decorum or discipline).”105

Persistent political concerns provide a context for the universality
of Sufi rules. Sufism’s repression was often followed by internal
reforms in Sufi assemblies, which increased the number, severity and
reach of rules. The killing of Ḥallāj was among the reasons for the
development of Sufi manuals that contained guidelines for the right
teachings - the outstanding historical exemplar.106
Figure 15. The *kashkul* in the Ṣafīʿalīshāhī lodge (courtesy Mohammad Yāvari)
Pand-e Šâleḥ and other Neʿmatollâhî sets of rules had jurist or state concerns for law and order as a context. Thus, both figuratively and literally, ‘rule’ and ‘order’ have been intimately related, and this relation had a rationale in concerns for survival. The twentieth-century Hâmidîya Shâdîlya order in Egypt survived through rules. Facing jurists, rulers and a modernising society, its leader charted an intricate system of ‘laws’ that in turn modernised the order. This made it hard on anyone to denounce it as traditional or heretic, its organisation sharing in the modernity of governmental institutions, its teachings being directed towards the Islamic law. On top of the occasional jurist attack, twentieth-century Khâksâr Sufis were persecuted by Reza Shah, and the order responded, similarly, by organisational reforms which enhanced the Khâksâr Sufis’ lasting survival.

In the Neʿmatollâhî regimes, tacit and written rules have enhanced both secrecy and the reproduction of order (which were, in turn, related). Rules have regulated interaction in and outside the lodge into levels of formality and proximity, i.e. distributing discourse and practice along a scale of external-formal, internal-formal, external-informal and internal-informal components. These historically articulated distributions, which corresponded to differentiated Sufi ‘levels of teaching’, aided integration into the Pahlavi dynasty and accommodation vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic. The rules of Rezâʿ al-shâh were beneficial to the Solṭân al-shâh’s civil and religious integration under the Shah, while in the Islamic Republic, rules enhanced accommodation to regime religiosity in the lodge of Zâhîr od-Dowlâ. In either case, the rules protected the internal and informal spheres, the esoteric core of which has consisted of friendship

107 GILSENAH, 1973 (Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt).
108 Cf. KEDDIE, 1963: 34. Formality/informality differentiation in discourse has been theorised by IRVINE (1979), and, in relation to ḏâbîb, by GILSENAH (1973, 1982). GRAMLICH testified to the rule-led nature of Neʿmatollâhî ceremony in the Pahlavi era. There were “Regeln über Essen und Trinken, Fasten und Fastenbrechen, Gesundsein und Kranksein, Reisen und Daheimsein, Eintreffen und Abschiednehmen, Alleinsein und Beisammensein, Reden und Schweigen, Umgang mit Höhergestellten [...] und Untergebenen, dazu Normen für anständiges Sitzen, Blicken, Niesen, Husten, Naseputzen, wie man die Schuhe anzieht und auszieht, wie man sein Bündel packt und auspackt, anschlält und abschnallt, wann der Kopf bedeckt sein soll und wann nicht, wann man Grüßen soll und wann nicht und dergleichen mehr” (1981, Vorwort).
with God/guidance (valâyat).\textsuperscript{109} The claims and proofs of friendship with God were not carried outside the lodge for public display, and valâyat - belonging to the innermost realm of experience where God took over - ultimately breached any formality.

\textit{Ādāb} circumscribe three interrelated realms of cultivated inner states, moderated outer behaviour and a disciplined learning of the features of the Sufi path.\textsuperscript{110} Regarding their proper, political functionality, \textit{ādāb} do not easily compare to \textit{civilité}, in definitions laid down in the manual books of the European Middle Ages and Renaissance.\textsuperscript{111} In European court-settings, the rationale of etiquette consisted primarily of safeguarding internal cohesion and the integration of nobles. Notwithstanding royal relations, court positions and a religiosity which at times became \textit{salonfâhig}, the Ne\'matollâhîs have remained powers in their own right: as inviolable realms of sheikhal authority. In the first instance, therefore, Ne\'matollâhî \textit{ādāb} functioned as protective devices, shielding a proper religiosity.

\textit{Ṣaff}âlîshâh distinguished ‘outer etiquette’ (\textit{ādāb-e zâher}) from ‘inner sophistication/dealing with people properly’ (\textit{solâk-e bâten}). Qazvînî related the esoteric to thought (\textit{khiyâl}) and the exoteric to language (\textit{zabân}), which implied that anything a Sufi might tell about Sufism could be radically separate from Sufism itself.\textsuperscript{112} The view that held politics to be “something that operates only in the world of the \textit{zâhir}” - a conception widespread in Iranian society at large - has been more than a quietist rejection of politics.\textsuperscript{113} It was simultaneously a religious and a political economy, which allocated meaning according to levels of formality and proximity.

The component of reproduction which was external (i.e. not primarily having to do with the affiliates, their initiation, with liturgy or the lodge) and informal (i.e. not being circumscribed in or derivative from any Sufi rule, despite being very common and offering legitimisation) consisted of public relations to people in high places.

\textsuperscript{109} Protection of an esoteric core characterises most orders. ‘Listening’ (\textit{samâ}) among the Khâksâr was a carefully kept secret (\textit{serr}) only entrusted to those on higher stages of initiation into the order’s hierarchy (Gramlich, 1981: 65). Equally important to this organisational logic, the rituals concerned have often been the target of jurists’ and rulers’ denunciation - as heretical.

\textsuperscript{110} My paraphrase of Meier, 1992, (3): 55.


\textsuperscript{112} Qazvînî, 1376/1997: 430.

Sufis claimed in writing (and surely, orally as well) that they had predicted and aided Reza Shah’s ascent to power and prevented his son from being assassinated. Power in the high Society of Brotherhood was reflected in the elected leadership belonging to the co-opted Pahlavi elite, despite claims of strict and by implication classless Sufi equality. Solṭān’alishāhī sources too, mentioned politicians in the Khorasani lodge and meetings with the royal family. But they also documented relations to and authorisations by several of the Sources of Emulation. In the Islamic Republic, legitimisation for instance came through references to the Imam and to his son, Aḥmad.

Formal and external aspects of reproduction in the Ṣafʿalishāhī and Solṭān’alishāhī orders involved charitable donations during the Iran-Iraq war, announcements in newspapers of public gatherings, ‘open houses’ on Shiʿite occasions, and public services such as the Šāleḥiya clinic. They were also evident in the Sufi language of regime religiosity, which constituted sublime, traditional performances of either ‘authentic’ respectability or ‘dissimulation’ (taqīya). In either case, they matched the (formal) request in any of the written rules for (external) respect for the social order. The forceful, public statements of allegiance to the religious order in Zahir od-Dowle’s lodge carried their own subversion in the private ideology of submission to unlimited sheikhal authority. To this day, Solṭān’alishāhī leaders have maintained that Reẓā’alishah’s Khomeynist religious perspective on human rights was an authentic representation of Solṭān’alishāhī views, while many affiliates (whether they are right or not) ‘knew better’ and said, tongue in cheek, that this manifesto was what being a mojtahed had (only) outwardly required of their master.

Paradoxically, Reẓā’alishah’s rejection of universal human rights was forwarded from an Islamic anthropology, as much as Sorūš’s

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114 The doctrine of taqīya of one’s true beliefs was developed by the sixth imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, in the context of Sunnite repression of Shiʿites. It has been claimed that “Among the Sufis the execution of al-Ḥallāj led to the charge that he had been guilty of unveiling the arcane in his claim of union with the divine, and a recommendation of precautionary public silence or dissimulation. Among both Sūfis and Shiʿites, although the cautionary motive probably predominated in early taqīya, there developed the notion that there was something religiously wrong or desecrating about revealing one’s true beliefs to the non-initiate, and indeed only the initiate would be able to understand them” (Keddie, 1963: 52, cf. op. cit., p. 51). Iranian dissimulation, in pre-modern as well as modern times, has been described as an ‘essential way of surviving’ (Halliday, 1986: 667).
promotion of universal religious pluralism. People who put their trust in man, abused reason, and thereby put themselves ‘out of the ranks of mankind’. Freedom of thought, conscience and belief was allowable only to the extent that it did not clash with the Qur'ān or the Holy Law. As to equality, “Islam lays the foundations of excellence, nobility, and superiority in the degree of faith.” Thus, the unfaithful were ‘outside the pale of humanity’. All rights of man in Reşā-‘alishāh’s treatise emanated solely from God’s grace. Where the Western human rights declaration went essentially wrong, was in putting man in God’s place. Not going into Sufism or valāyat in any detail, this (formal) treatise belonged to the (external) outside world.

Formal and internal aspects of reproduction consisted of activities such as mental counselling and financial charity towards the flock. Among Ne’matollāh’s liturgy, zekr has provided the primary occasion and locus for formal and internal reproduction. When performed impeccably, zekr integrated affiliates into the orders, thereby reproduced hierarchy and respectability, and contained dissent.

In the late Pahlavi era, Ṣafī‘alishāh’s zekr provided affiliates with Sufi symbolism and preserved their allegiance, while these symbolic performances were simultaneously detached from the inner, Freemasonry concerns of the Hey‘at-e Moshāvere. Among the Solţān-‘alishāhs, concerns for order, hierarchy and religious respectability led to a ‘reform’ of the admonition (va‘ız) and zekr-sessions. Lackiness had evolved in them, and Rezā‘alishāh invoked the image of ‘monkeys climbing the pulpit’ to admonish his following. No issues

117 Rezā‘alishāh felt that “[t]he audience must pay heed to the dignity of the gathering and respect the rules for outer behaviour such as quietness and paying proper attention. It should not believe that crying is required in itself, because tears that do not stem from [...] the confession of remorse and awareness are not desirable. The auditor must be aware that the outer defeat of the guiding imams (peace be upon them) was in reality their total victory and self-sacrifice [...] The speaker must also hold these sessions in sincerity and in trying to please God, not for building a reputation or assembling a following” (MAḤBūB‘ALISHĀH, 1373/1994-5: 120-2).
118 Rezā‘alishāh “greatly suffered from the chaotic situation that was sometimes witnessed in the gatherings, given his great interest in the mourning and zekr-sessions in remembrance of the calamities of the Guiding Imams [...] and he considered it far removed from haqīqat. In his view, this situation subverted the service of the speaker [...] and the audience” (MAḤBūB‘ALISHĀH, 1373/1994-5: 120-2).
119 “With respect to sermons, he had particular thoughts: ‘unauthorised people ought not, under any condition, during the sermon [...] and the Remembrance of the
could be expounded in the religious sessions which were ‘unclear’ or might cause affront and conflict among the Muslims.\textsuperscript{120} In an ultimate gesture of Shi‘ite respectability, Reza‘ali\textsuperscript{121} finally proposed the supervision of the Sources of Emulation over Shi‘ite sermons.

In the Islamic Republic, the split Šafi‘ali\textsuperscript{121} orders had ‘impeccable’, i.e. orderly and regime-accommodated performances to the extent that they were public and formal. However, even the most impeccable performances in the main lodge were never quite the ‘more peaceful arena of Sufi ritual’.\textsuperscript{122} As Šafi‘ali\textsuperscript{121} was been without undisputed, centralised leadership since the revolution, meditations became an arena for competition rather than authority transmission.

Regularly, the informal leadership of the Hey‘at-e ‘Oman\textsuperscript{a} requested the audience to keep its volume in check, not to monopolise the singing, and reminded it was forbidden to incur physiological effects on itself through headbanging. “If we have no concentration, then our circle (halqe) is broken.” A rebellious crowd that used to assault collective discipline (rey\textsuperscript{a}zat) came, it was felt by one affiliate, Catastrophe (zekr-e mos\textsuperscript{i}bat), to go up to the pulpit (menbar), because the pulpit is a high position that is reserved for the Prophet and the Imam (peace be upon him) and their representatives. And the dream of the Honourable Prophet in which monkeys climb his pulpit - interpreted as the Ummayads - actually has no exclusive connection to the Ummayads. It includes every person who behaves contrary to the Islamic and religious commands\textsuperscript{9} (MAH\textsuperscript{B}UB\textsuperscript{AL} ALISH\textsuperscript{A}H, 1373/1994-5: 121-2).

\textsuperscript{120} “As concerns the sermon and zekr leaders, he stated they should be recommended to thoroughly internalise the historical sources of Islam, and particularly the life and deeds of the Guiding Imams (peace be upon them) so that the true traditions (akhib\textsuperscript{r}) be distinguished from the false traditions, and they would only speak that which is transmitted and trustworthy, and would refrain from invoking some of the matters which are not clear and which cause affront […] In the pulpits, persons ought not to engage in self-praise or vilification either, and they should abstain from personal affections and spite, and from the exposition of those issues which cause conflict among Muslims. They should base themselves on the thought and the deeds of the great personalities” (MAH\textsuperscript{B}UB\textsuperscript{AL} ALISH\textsuperscript{A}H, 1373/1994-5: 122).

\textsuperscript{121} “[H]e deemed necessary the supervision over the sermon […] by the Honourable Sources of Emulation and even recommended the foundation of an educational branch for the sciences of admonition (wa\textsuperscript{z}\textsuperscript{e}) and the sermon (kh\textsuperscript{a}t\textsuperscript{a}ba), so that the appropriate and educated people, who would also be taken sufficient care of in a material sense, could engage in this work, and this important task be saved from confusion. It was because of this very respect he had for the pulpit […] that if by chance [someone] turned his back to [it] because of a lack of space, he immediately ordered for him to change his sitting situation [to face the pulpit], and he reminded that the pulpit was the place of the Prophet of God (may God send greetings to him) and his legatees (ow\textsuperscript{i}t\textsuperscript{a})” (MAH\textsuperscript{B}UB\textsuperscript{AL} ALISH\textsuperscript{A}H, 1373/1994-5: 121-2).

\textsuperscript{122} GILSE\textsuperscript{E}NAN, 1982: 101.
“from other orders, in order to disrupt our sessions.” Others, however, felt they wanted to revive the pre-revolutionary Sufi grandeur. Then, *zekr* had been “much heavier, and much better. Then, everything was there; you had restaurants, discos, clubs, music. If among all these distractions a person would come to the lodge, it implied a conscious choice. Now, many people come to the lodge in a flight”\(^{123}\) When the informal leader of the Board of Trustees had once been absent, scandalous laxity had occurred in religious performance, according to one Sufi. “You saw people stretching their legs, as if they had come here to relax. They think it is O.K. to come here and have a party; to have a good scream, just like children.”\(^{124}\)

Paradoxically, impeccable performances bore witness to spiritual authority and (Sufi) order, while simultaneously negating the pluralistic civility that Sorūsh saw represented in Sufism.\(^{125}\) “God accepts any appearance” (*khodā har kolāhī bakhshad*), it was heard from individual Sufis, but not in public sessions. Instead of spiritual universalism, impeccable performances staged religious nationalism, and, to some extent, racism, as when the nationalist cause was made into an anti-Arab contest to which Sufism was the militant and indigenously Iranian response.\(^{126}\) Ṣafī’alishāhī *zekr* in the main lodge (not

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\(^{123}\) *Interview*, 12/19/96.

\(^{124}\) *Conversation*, 02/06/97.

\(^{125}\) Some famous Sufis in Islamic history have been associated with Universalist, monotheistic ecumenicalism and compassion towards their fellow humans. But exceptions aside, the value of universalism - which is a religious and a psychological concept in Sufism - is hardly ever laboured unto a practical theory of pluralism, on the social plane, and with respect to concrete others who share a common social space. Among the exceptions (at the level of discourse) are the Lebanese al-Aúb¿sh, whose vision is “a society of normalcy and stability, where social and religious pluralism is the mode for Muslims [...] and in their relations with non-Muslims [...] the Abbâsh emphasize the need for *civility* and moderation at the individual, societal, and state levels” [italics mine] (NIZAR HAMZEH et al., 1996: 224). For these reasons, the Abbâsh were mentioned in the context of ‘enlightened Islamic spiritualism’. The Iranian context has not seen any of these developments.

\(^{126}\) The encounter of the Other met with an irrevocable fear of difference in one Khâksâr sheikh. In a rage, he declared that the world was nowadays ruled by homosexual, British members of parliament (*interview*, 10/22/96). He evidenced a forceful correspondence between mystic attitudes and nationalist ideology, the sort of analogy that Thomas Mann described with frightful certainty in the hypnotist Cipolla vis-à-vis prewar fascist Italy (in *Mario und der Zauberer* (1990 [1930]). Nationalist themes were absent before the revolution, cf. GRAMLICH, 1981. In a Khâksâr lodge he noted references to (spiritual) kingship unheard of among Ne’matollahi Sufis in contemporary Iran: “Erlaubnis des Meisters und des Königs”
in any other) always commenced, where formerly the Shah or ‘King ‘Ali’ were celebrated, with an emotional appeal that sought to safeguard blessing for the Iranian nation and the religion it embodied:

*Dör kon az mā / doshmān-e ahl-e beyt /
doshmān-e ahl-e beyt dar miyān-e mā na-goźir*

Keep far from us the enemies of the People of the Household /

*ānhā’ī ke bar mellat o din-e mā khyānat mī-āvarand /
dör az mā kon*

keep far away from us /
those who bring treason upon our nation and our religion

Solțān’alishāhī meditations were always fully formal and public, and clerical attendance had legitimised them religiously. Even a critic of Sufism had to admit that “the Gonābādī Path [...] established order in the Sessions of Poverty (jalāsāt-e faqrī) and [that they are led by] well-informed and faithful persons, more so than in other Sufī branches.”¹²⁷ The Solțān’alishāhīs had a silent ‘zekr of the heart’, Rezā’alishāh had performed religious nationalism in the ĥoseynīya, and the arba’īn morning session on June 26, 1997, suitably and conventionally ended with the invocation of Āmoli’s true Sufi/Shī‘ite.

But despite impeccable performances that were able to rally and retain a large following, many affiliates ‘knew’ that inside the hardened shell of conformity, a vulnerable pearl, a cherished lifeworld lay in concealment. After all, “the foqahā’ were only scribes, while the Friends of God were the representatives of the Imam.”¹²⁸ They had ‘known’ Khomeyni as a Sufī-cāref, Rezā’alishāh to have performed dissimulation in his Islamic human rights tract, Mahbūb-‘alishāh to have died an Islamic martyr’s death, and Majžūb’alishāh to be an icon of freedom, through his ties to the Nehzat-e Āzādī. They particularly ‘knew’ the exoteric to be hierarchically subordinate to the esoteric in many respects, and the performance of dissimulation, accommodation, order and rules to be required for its protection. Through rule-led communicative differentiation, the cherishing of valāyat among these Solțān’alishāhī affiliates institutionally

¹²⁷ CHAHĀRDĀHĪ, 1361/1982-3: 223.
¹²⁸ Interview, 07/17/97.
eluded another constitution: that of the Islamic Republic, which sought to monopolistically impose the jurists’ velāyat.\textsuperscript{129}

Public space in the mystic regimes was shielded by secrecy - rules distributing interaction according to levels of proximity and formality - and their public remained internal. For these reasons and others - such as primordial structures in internal relations and unabated state affiliation externally - the orders have not been a part of the associational life of civil society as it has been classically understood. However, secrecy and inward, internal audiences also characterised Western civil societies, when these were faced with an overbearing, representative public space. Because of its proper institutional life, providing spiritual masters, liturgy and lodges, Sufism testified to a religiosity of its own, no matter how much it accommodated to regime religiosity. In its master-disciple relations, it resembled spiritual authority as embodied in the state. Public space was claimed in a monopolistic fashion by the state, and the mystic regimes needed shielding against it, for them to retain a religiosity of their own. For this set of reasons, the mystic regimes engaged in an - unsought - competition for spiritual authority with the state.\textsuperscript{130}

A Sufi held the state to be fearful of the Path because “when people go after Ultimate Reality, then its legitimacy crumbles.” A Tehran-based Hojjat ol-Eslām confirmed that “since the killing started, people have massively turned to the Sufi lodge.” The politicised mosque had become a shadow of its former self as a beacon of authority, and one only went there nowadays, a Sufi said defiantly (and in private), to urinate.\textsuperscript{131} “Religion is losing out everywhere in the

\textsuperscript{129} “Le régime [...] a fondu le discours révolutionnaire et les principes de légitimité religieuse pour occuper l’espce public” (ADELKHAH, 1997: 9). I do not suggest that valāyat is intrinsically opposed to velāyat. Only the terms’ exclusive readings make their relations problematic. Lastly, valāyat and velāyat do not exhaust Shi’ite terminology to discuss leadership: “If we consider the ruler as a valī [...] then we are speaking of obligation, but if we consider him as a vakil [...], then we are speaking of the rights of the people” (ALINEJAD, 1998: 31, citing Sorush).

\textsuperscript{130} At the high tide of civil society discussions (1993), SALAMI’S Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World appeared, in which it was effectively argued that some form of democracy had emerged in many (Islamic) Middle Eastern Countries, without there being, however, a deep and broadly shared commitment to ideas of democracy.

\textsuperscript{131} Conversation, 11/27/96. Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani spoke out against the state ownership of mosques in Resālat (Abān 12, 1375/November 2, 1996), citing Khomeyni: “He said: do not allow mosques to become state owned, because what
world, also here in Iran”, another Sufi said, and implicated it was only the Sufis, not state clerics, who could upkeep it. The state and the Sufi orders have constituted competing public spaces, as the Islamic Republic’s all-inclusive representative authority was challenged by the Sufi orders’ proper religiosity - whether or not expressed as regime-religiosity. In this respect, the Ne’matollāhī orders were not at variance with the reported representatives of the Iranian civil society, such as magazines in Khatami’s Iran, which have been described as a Gegenöffentlichkeit. The Ne’matollāhī mystic regimes were part of it, to the extent that through variously layered sets of cultural performance they retained the integrity of their lifeworlds.

* * *

When I came to meet the sheikh, I had trouble in locating his house. “He lives up the mountain, and everybody knows him over there”, a person told me along the mountain road. But nobody actually did. And when one seemed to do, he asked: “Sheikh? You mean Mollah.”

Further instructions finally brought me to the house, and the sheikh/mollah let me in. He put me stationary in the yard and went away. When he returned to escort me to his living quarters, he had put on a kafan and an inscribed, felt tāj. The sheikh confirmed that he had also been a mollah and then produced an amount of knowledge that left me permanently bent down writing in my notebook.

We talked for a long time without me noticing and then suddenly he declared the meeting over. He told me to go ahead and wait for him. Outside the gate I saw him rushing over the yard, returning without his tāj and now wearing a mollah’s ţabā over his kafan.

He winked at me and escorted me to a taxi that, it seemed, had suddenly appeared. The driver greeted, the sheikh/mollah nodded both amiably and naturally and told him to get me where I wanted. In a decisive gesture, he grasped my right hand and left a little sweet in my palm. My stupefied gaze met with the sheikh/mollah’s serene tranquillity, then our eyes met in silent, hilarious laughter, which later on stirred up violently in me every time I reflected on the scene.

the [...] clergy needs is independence.” The ayatollah’s suggestion that this matter would be negotiable, completely ignored the reality of state Islam.

\[132\] Interview, 05/01/97.

WEBER wrote that “the most irrational form of religious behaviour, the mystic experience, is in its innermost being not only alien but hostile to all form” (1977: 342). Even in its ‘innermost being’, however, time leaves its marks on Sufi experience. Distinct temporal ranges emerge from the gulf that separates Entezām’s secular and elitist view on Sufi experience in the Pahlavi dynasty and the populist Sufi celebration of mystical martyrdom in the Islamic Republic.

Even while “Kay Kaš señ says, in his description of the darvīš, [that] ‘The essence of truth (rāstī) is the negation of ambivalence ([dogānegī]),’ this essay has argued that it has been, paradoxically, an essential ambivalence, which maintains and reproduces Sufi truth. Režāalishāh was a pole as well as a jurist, and the resulting room for manoeuvre enabled his affiliates to read the defence of an authentic spiritual realm through their master’s exoteric words. Šafīalishāhī masters retained spiritual authority through abstaining from public claims to it, sharply separating inner and outer realms. It has been these performed, historical balances of religious urge and constraint, in the Islamic Republic as in the Pahlavi dynasty, which made the Šafīalishāhī and Solţān’alishāhī Sufi orders into mystic regimes.

\[134\] \textit{BATESON, ET AL., 1977: 273, citing the \textit{Qābūs-nāme}.}
APPENDIX 1.

Genealogy of Iranian, Shi'ite Sufi orders

Abû'l-Qâsim al-Junayd (d.910) — Bâyezîd Bâshâni (d.874)

Abu'n-Najîb as-Sohravardî (d.1168) — Abûl-Fazîl al-Bâghdâdî (d.1155/6)

Abû Hafs as-Sohravardî (d.1234) — 'Amâr al-Bidîlî (d.1194-1207)

Abûn-Najîb as-Sohravardî (d.1234) — Abûl-Fazîl al-Bâghdâdî (d.1155/6) — 'Eyn ol-Qoçât al-Hamâzûnî (d.1131)

Abûn-Najîb as-Sohravardî (d.1234) — Abûl-Fazîl al-Bâghdâdî (d.1155/6) — 'Abdulkhâliq al-Ghujvûnî (d.1220)

Abûn-Najîb as-Sohravardî (d.1234) — Abûl-Fazîl al-Bâghdâdî (d.1155/6) — 'Abdulkhâliq al-Ghujvûnî (d.1220) — Yûsuf b. Ayyûb al-Hamâzûnî (d.1140)

Abûn-Najîb as-Sohravardî (d.1234) — Abûl-Fazîl al-Bâghdâdî (d.1155/6) — 'Abdulkhâliq al-Ghujvûnî (d.1220) — Muhammad al-Ghazzîlî (d.1111)

Abûn-Najîb as-Sohravardî (d.1234) — Abûl-Fazîl al-Bâghdâdî (d.1155/6) — 'Abdulkhâliq al-Ghujvûnî (d.1220) — Yûsuf b. Ayyûb al-Hamâzûnî (d.1140)

Abûn-Najîb as-Sohravardî (d.1234) — Abûl-Fazîl al-Bâghdâdî (d.1155/6) — 'Abdulkhâliq al-Ghujvûnî (d.1220) — Yûsuf b. Ayyûb al-Hamâzûnî (d.1140)

LEGEND. The genealogy charts central nodes in the main Shi'ite Sufi spiritual lineages, not each and every historical succession. (SH): Shi'ite Sufi order; (1) The Kobrâviya and Bektâshiya had Shi'ite leanings/offshoots but remained mainly Sunni; (2) The Ightishâhiya (‘rebels’) were not exactly a Sufi order, but a label for Kobrâvi groups that split off after Isâq al-Khottalânî (sources: cf. Gramlich, 1965; Trimingham, 1971; Zarrinkub, 1990, (1)).
APPENDIX 2.

Geographic concentration of Shi'ite Sufi orders in Iran

**Legend.** This non-exhaustive map mainly charts current, official centres, and does not account for the fact that unofficial Sufi activity extends to the smallest villages in Iran. The distinction between Sunni and Shi'ite among Sufi orders in Iran roughly coincides with the distinction between rural/tribal and urban. Rural/tribal Sunni orders are generally known for regional rather than local concentration. The Qâderîya and Naqshbandiya orders have been included to bring these distinctions - and thereby the specificity of the Shi'ite orders - to the fore.

(S): Sunni Sufi order.

1. The Tehran list stems from personal observations, which also holds for my inclusion of the Zahabiya in Shiraz.
2. I have no conclusive evidence about the Zahabiya in Tabriz, but still decided to include them as Gramlich's (1965: 89) pre-revolutionary account is matched by post-revolutionary remarks in Momen (1985: 212) and Nasr (1991: 216).
3. The mention of Khaksar in Mashhad is based on Gramlich's (1965: 90) account, and more recent suggestions in Chahardali (1361/1982-3: 25, 31) that Mashhad is still a Khaksar centre. The Iran Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit (Hawthorn 1992: Lonely Planet Publications) mentioned Naqshbandis using a 'mausoleum' at the Gonbad-e Sabz in Mashhad (p. 174). As Chahardali (1361/1982-3: 31) mentioned the Khaksaris' Gonbad-e Sabz khanaqah, however, I hold it likely that the Survival Kit referred not to Naqshbandi but Khaksar Sufis.
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