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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Program in Islamic and Near Eastern Studies

**The Spiritual Reformist Thought of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī
in the Eyes of his Western Interpreters: A Critical Historiographical Review**

by

Daanish Faruqi

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
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despite being giants in their respective scholarly fields, both have managed to preserve a sense of humility, grace, and compassion in every aspect of their personal conduct—an ethic that I find sorely lacking in some of the more egotistical cesspools of the scholarly community, and one that I truly hope forms the foundation of my own academic career. Accordingly, it is not altogether surprising that I have come to view them both as if they were family. Thank you both, for all you've done for me, from the bottom of my heart.

All errors are entirely my own.

To Khulood Kandil

To Parveen and Sikander Sultan

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Preface

In the general history of pre-Modern civilizations, a single century is a very brief period. In the fifty some generations of Muslim history, three or four generations hardly suffice to indicate any long-term trend. Yet the depression of Islamicate social and cultural life in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries does stand out in retrospect. This is so chiefly in the light of what followed. With the nineteenth century came the utter collapse of the strong Muslim posture in the world: that nothing was done in the eighteenth century to forestall this smacks of inexplicable weakness or folly. But the sense that there was a depression also reflects the actualities of the Muslim lands in the eighteenth century itself... Though the eighteenth century was not without its interesting and creative figures, it was probably the least notable of all in achievement of high-cultural excellence; the relative barrenness was practically universal in Muslim lands. The strongest Muslim governments all found themselves subject to internal political disintegration... Such phenomena, which suggest some degree of decline in social or cultural power, can be called 'decadence if one is careful not to assume any long-term trend without further evidence. They represented more than coincidence among diverse lines of development; in part, at least, they doubtless answered to potent common circumstances in the lands of Islam.

--Marshall Hodgson¹

In perhaps the most celebrated history of Islamic civilization in English, Marshall Hodgson laments the desiccation and decline of the Islamic world by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the early modern period progressed, the undeniable political weakness of the great Muslim empires—the Ottomans, Mughals, and Safavids—had become increasingly apparent. This decline was long in the making—the beginnings of Ottoman weakness, for instance, could be traced at least back to the late seventeenth

¹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 3: 134.

century, in its second unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683²—and came into a climax by the nineteenth century: by then, it was clear that the political viability of the Islamic Middle East and South Asia had become existentially compromised. The majestic dynasties of yesteryear had now become either defunct or near-defunct, and their territory had largely fallen into the hands of European colonialists. Hodgson may be embellishing to an extent with his frustrations over Muslim social and cultural under-achievement during this period, but one thing is certain: by the nineteenth century, Muslims had been *politically* eclipsed by the forces of Western Europe.

Disillusioned with their loss of power, and with their newfound position of subservience vis-à-vis their European counterparts, a critical mass of Muslim scholars and intellectuals tried to make intelligent sense of what led to the *umma*'s dethronement. In so doing, many posited radical reforms meant to revive the Muslim community, and restore it to its previous position of prominence. The character of these reformist efforts naturally varied considerably from region to region, depending on the particular nuances of each Muslim land's experience with European colonialism. As Fazlur Rahman succinctly describes, the particular character of reformist efforts was accounted for largely by four factors:

- (1) whether a particular cultural region retained its sovereignty vis-à-vis the European political expansion and whether it was dominated and governed de jure or de facto by a European colonial power; (2) the character of the organization of the ulema, or religious leadership, and the character of their relationship with the governing institutions before the colonial encroachment; (3) the state of the development of Islamic education and its accompanying culture immediately before the colonial encroachment; and (4) the character of the overall colonial

² Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 28.

policy of the particular colonizing power—British, French, or Dutch.³

Accordingly, Islamic reform movements in the early modern period were markedly different in, for instance, India under British colonial rule than in Indonesia under the rule of the Dutch. But their nuances aside, reform initiatives were all united in their putative desire to revive and uplift of global Islamdom—spiritually, religiously, and often politically.

Sufi intellectuals and Sufi movements were deeply active these reformist efforts. Often perceiving the Muslim community's loss in material and political stature as evidence of deep moral transgressions, Sufi-inspired reform efforts frequently manifested themselves as acts of spiritual purification, aimed at regaining their lost stature in the eyes of Allah:

Yet there must be much in the wider common experience as well as in the particular circumstances of individual regions and districts and their traditions to help account for the new features. Loss of political power and economic collapse may be perceived as consequences of a loss of God's favour through failure to live as true Muslims and thus breed a heightened awareness of the need for the community as a whole to regain this lost favour through a programme of moral reform. The achievement of this would frequently be seen to necessitate efficient mass organization, implementation of Shari'ah and the pursuit of the ideal Islamic state.⁴

For instance, following the Sepoy Revolt of 1857, in which the British quite literally nearly destroyed the vestiges of Indian Islam in the celebrated Mughal cities of Delhi and Lucknow, the Sufi-inspired Deobandi and Barelwi movements emerged to protect

³ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 43.

⁴ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 12.

Islamic civilization in India from further encroachment by the British, through inward spiritual repair.⁵ Both movements, despite being seen as visceral rivals, were ultimately united by their desire to institutionalize their efforts at spiritual reform through education: through the great madrasa of Deoband, and the series of Barelwi educational institutes throughout North India (most famously the Madrasa Manzar al-Islam), the Deobandi and Barelwi leadership sought to train a new generation of Muslims properly grounded in Islamic thought and spirituality, which would in turn produce Indian Muslim leaders fully capable of preserving the legacy of Indo-Muslim society against the advances of the British.

Neither the Deobandi and Barelwi movements, in contradistinction to the point made above by Sirriyeh, were willing to organize politically against the British; realizing that the British were too strong to be dealt with militarily, both movements decided that their reform efforts would be best led as politically quietist movements. Still, other Sufi reformists were not necessarily quietist in their political outlook. Many Sufi orders, as Sirriyeh suggests, were actively engaged in mass political organization, with the putative goal being the implementation of Sharī‘ah, and the establishment of an Islamic state. In this context, it is not altogether unsurprising that Sufi leaders and orders were often at the front lines of direct resistance to European colonial forces. In the Northern Caucasus, Naqshbandī and Qādirī orders were instrumental in resisting Russian advances, and in Libya the Sanūsī order was equally active in fighting Italian colonialist efforts. But politically quietist or otherwise, Sufi reformers were ultimately united by an *inward*

⁵ For more on the Deobandi movement, see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007). For more on the reform movement led by Ahmed Reza Khan Barelwi, see Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and his Movement, 1870 – 1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

desire to *spiritually* repair the *umma*, which may or may not have outwardly manifested itself in political activity.

Other Muslim reformers during this period, on the other hand, were less interested in inward purification than in *outward*—and by this I specifically here mean *material*—reform of their religious tradition. Exasperated by their societies' inability to have socially and intellectually dealt with the new societal challenges brought on by the advent of modernity, these intellectual reformers sought to reconcile Islamic belief and practice with the needs of the modern world. Voraciously engaging the Qur'ān and other foundational Islamic texts, these *modernist* Muslim intellectuals argued that Islamic civilization was politically bested by the forces of Europe because of its unwillingness to sufficiently make use of reason. Reason and critical thinking, they continue, was foundational to the Islamic religious and intellectual tradition, only to have been more recently been discouraged and suppressed by dogmatic and pedantic religious scholars. By reestablishing the primacy of reason in Islamic thought, Islamic modernists argue, Muslims will be sufficiently equipped deal with the needs of the modern world. Pursuant to that goal, modernists openly embraced the use of the natural sciences and philosophy as prerequisites to material progress. As Qasim Zaman eloquently details, Islamic modernism often appeared to establish a concordance between Islamic religious belief and the tenets of liberal rationalism.

Modernist Muslim intellectuals have sought, since the nineteenth century, to find ways of making Islam compatible with what they have taken to be the challenges of the modern age. And their proposed reforms have encompassed virtually the entire spectrum of life in Muslim societies. The intellectual vigor with which these reforms were proposed, and the success with which they have been carried through—often in alliance with the postcolonial

state—has varied from one Muslim society to another, as have the precise ways in which different thinkers among these modernists have viewed the Islamic intellectual and religious tradition and defined themselves in relation to it. More often than not, however, the effort has been to retrieve the teachings of “true” Islam from the vast and oppressive edifice that centuries of “sterile” scholasticism, “blind” imitation of earlier authorities, and the “intransigence” of the religious specialists had built. In general, the modernist project is guided by the assurance that once retrieved through a fresh but “authentic” reading of the foundational texts, and especially of the Qur’an, the teachings of Islam would appear manifestly in concord with the positions recommended by liberal rationalism.⁶

Indeed, many of these modernist figures have expressed serious frustrations with the purported excesses of Sufism. The major figures of this movement have often inveighed against the irrational tendencies of more popular Sufi practices, which are allegedly at odds with the rationalist aims of the modernist project to begin with. For instance, the great Egyptian modernist intellectual Muḥammad ‘Abduh, despite his appreciation for Islamic mysticism more broadly, saw its purportedly corrupt excesses in nineteenth century Egypt as exacerbating irrationality and social malaise, and as introducing unacceptable innovations (*bid‘ah*).⁷ Likewise, both ‘Abduh’s mentor, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, and his protégée, Rashīd Riḍā, expressed similar condemnations against the irrationality of certain aspects of Sufi doctrine.⁸

Still, this is not to suggest that Islamic Modernism was antithetical to Sufism tout court. In fact, there exists a nineteenth-century Muslim thinker who, like ‘Abduh,

⁶ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7-8.

⁷ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 92.

⁸ I should disclose here that all three figures I mention in this example are part of the broader *Salafī* reformist movement of the nineteenth century, and while they all indeed qualify as Islamic modernists, I am in no way trying to conflate Islamic modernism with Salafism specifically. In other words, Salafism is but one trend within the broader movement of Islamic modernism.

Afghānī, and Riḍā, was wholly convinced that reason and rationality are fundamental to Islamic doctrine and incumbent on all Muslims, and who equally viewed the embrace of the natural sciences as fully compatible with Islamic beliefs and key to Muslim material advancement and progress—and who articulated these positions under specifically Sufi auspices. Yet this figure—or, to be more specific, the reformist aspect of his career—is woefully neglected in the scholarly literature, in contradistinction to the voluminous studies done on ‘Abduh, Afghānī, Muḥammad Iqbāl of India, and other Muslim reformists in this vein. This figure is the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir al-Jazā’irī, the famed Algerian anti-colonial resistance leader, known primarily for his lengthy military resistance campaign against French colonial forces in Algeria. His career in Algeria aside, the Amīr is also acclaimed for his having protected and saved some ten thousand local Christians and European consuls from certain massacre in 1860, during his exile in Ottoman Damascus—a feat that won him the approbation of none other than American President Abraham Lincoln.

It is less well-known, however, that the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir spent his post-military career—that is, after his eventual surrender to the French in 1847—in formulating articulating, and ultimately teaching a deeply intricate vision of Islamic reform, one urging the embrace of reason, intellect, and the natural sciences as part and parcel of the Islamic tradition—indeed, some of the very same ingredients of reform proposed by Islamic modernists. Moreover, he grounded the insights of his spiritual reform methodology on, of all sources, the theosophical mysticism of the great medieval mystic, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master), Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī. Yet despite these deep contributions ‘Abd al Qādir made to Islamic religious and spiritual reform

more generally, and to Islamic modernism more specifically, his case is woefully underrepresented in the scholarly literature. Thus, in this thesis I hope to help correct the deficiency and neglect in the study of this fascinating nineteenth-century modernist reformist, by properly investigating his doctrinal and spiritual *Weltanschauung*

That said, reviewing the relevant literature revealed that a comprehensive analysis of the Amīr's writings on Islamic reform would indeed be voluminous, and simply too burdensome to complete in the one-year period allotted for this Master's thesis. Nonetheless, it turns out that the limited academic writings available on the reformist aspect of 'Abd al Qādir's career themselves make an excellent subject of study. For students of the Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir as a figure of Islamic reformism, what can the existing historiographies on his person tell us about his reform methodology?

This thesis, then, can best be understood as a critical historiographical review of the spiritual reformist thought of the Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, as presented in the existing scholarly literature on his person. From this review, coupled with my own primary analysis of relevant sections of the Amīr's spiritual writings, I hope to make better sense of his reformist impulses, and the spiritual worldview that came to inform them. Chapters will be structured accordingly. In Chapter one I will provide a comprehensive biographical narrative of 'Abd al-Qādir, from his upbringing, to his career as a military resistance leader against the colonial French, to his eventual surrender and subsequent exile in Damascus for the remainder of his life. Without this background, it would be exceedingly difficult to make meaningful sense of his writings, which I will address in the subsequent chapter. In chapter two I discuss the Amīr's three published books on Islamic reform, with a particular emphasis on his final and most substantive

volume, the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* (Book of Stops), composed during his exile period in Ottoman Syria. Here I will evaluate the depiction of ‘Abd al-Qādir in the eyes of his interpreters, as presented in the secondary scholarly literature. In particular, I am interested here in the assertions they make about the influences for his reformist thought; as I discuss in detail in this chapter, existing literature seems to suggest that the Amīr’s reformist predilections are ultimately modeled on Western rationalism. Accordingly, I attempt to evaluate the claims made in this regard, first from the arguments proposed in the historiographies themselves.

From here, I move on to scrutinize the religious thought of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir in his own words. Chapter three is thus a primary-text analysis—and translation when appropriate—of relevant sections of the *Mawāqif*, namely those consulted and analyzed by the historiographical literature. In this (admittedly selective) primary source analysis, I hope to more fully test the veracity of the claims made about the Amīr’s spiritual reformist thought in the secondary literature, and in so doing open new vistas into his reformist methodology. From here I will conclude in a fourth and final chapter, which summarizes the discoveries and insights made in the course of the study, and provides cogent theoretical implications for further study of the Amīr as an Islamic modernist reformer.

Chapter 1: Biography

Despite the fact that this thesis concerns itself primarily with the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī’s career following his exile from Algeria, insofar as he only began articulating his thoughts on Islamic reform after the end of his military career, it would be impossible to make sense of that stage of his life—or of the religious treatises he authored during that period—without a foundational understanding of his background and role as an anti-colonial resistance leader in Algeria. Accordingly, in this chapter I hope to provide a comprehensive biographical review of the Amīr’s life, starting with his career in Algeria—that is, until his surrender to the French in 1847. For this synopsis I will be drawing mostly from Raphael Danziger’s excellent volume, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerians: Resistance to the French and Internal Consolidation*. After providing this perfunctory review, I will briefly evaluate the role religious sentiment ostensibly played in his military campaign against the French—a question that, needless to say, is also of deeply salient when evaluating his theories of religious reform. Finally, I will conclude with a survey of the remainder of his life in exile in Ottoman Syria, at which point his career as an Islamic modernist reformer fully came to fruition.

Upbringing, and Temporary Exile

‘Abd al-Qādir was born on September 26, 1807, in the village of Guetna, a small village in Western Algeria less than fifteen miles of Mascara. Founded by his grandfather Muṣṭafa b. Muḥammad in 1771, Guetna emerged as an important center for the propagation of the Qādirī Šūfī order, which Mustafa joined in Baghdad en route to a pilgrimage to Mecca. Following his return to Algeria, Mustafa successfully revived this

spiritual creed that had been all but extinct in Western Algeria, winning over a prominent and eminent constituency. Guetna further developed and expanded at the hand of Mustafa's son Muḥyī al-Dīn, who upon inheriting the order's leadership augmented both its religious services, as well as its social and economic services.⁹ By the time 'Abd al-Qādir was born, Guetna had become a diverse hub for students, traveling scholars, travelers, and Qādirī adherents seeking to pay their respects.

The ambience of Guetna proved instrumental for the future Amīr, not only for its cosmopolitan atmosphere, but because the income it produced provided 'Abd al-Qādir with an independent financial source. Moreover, the Qādirī Sufī order wound up providing him with an important constituency. Merely being the son of the Qādirī chief of the whole of Algeria—a man whose renown as a spiritual leader and marabout came to transcend the borders of the Algerian frontier—meant a ready base of followers, and a solid basis for future legitimacy as a leader. For, after all, “[h]e belonged to one of the most venerated families in the province of Oran.”¹⁰

It was in this unique ambience that the young 'Abd al-Qādir was initially raised. Making full use of his privileged upbringing, he from an early age reaped the benefits of some of the finest educational opportunities available. First tutored by his father in Guetna, he then continued his education under the qāḍī of the port town of Arzew, Ahmad b. Tahir, himself considered “one of the best-educated men in Algeria.”¹¹ In addition to classical Islamic sciences, the qāḍī had acquired training in the natural

⁹ Raphael Danziger, *Abd Al-Qadir and the Algerians: Resistance to the French and Internal Consolidation* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1977), 53.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

sciences from European seamen who had stopped at the port, particularly those relevant to navigation. Accordingly, in addition to providing his pupil a classical Islamic education, he simultaneously trained the young ‘Abd al-Qādir in astronomy, mathematics, and geography.¹² This early introduction to the scientific method and rational inquiry, upon which the aforementioned disciplines are founded, may have played a formative role in the Amīr’s later predilection for this mode of inquiry, as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

From his studies with the qāḍī, ‘Abd al-Qādir was sent to Oran in 1821 to complete his studies, at an elite school composed of the most prominent families in the Oran province. Here he had his first experience with what was to become one of his key adversaries throughout the course of his career: the Ottoman regency. The Ottoman administrators governing Algeria were functionally detached from Algerian society, refusing to mingle or integrate into it, while contributing little to development in the country, or to the well-being of the Algerian people more broadly. Instead, the Ottoman establishment’s relationship with the Algerians was primarily one of demanding excessive taxes, and of swiftly and forcefully punishing those who refused to comply.¹³ The young ‘Abd al-Qādir’s first experience with the Ottomans, during his stay in Oran, seem to have developed a deep resentment for them, which was to influence him for years to come.¹⁴

His resentment for his Ottoman stewards intensified, moreover, after his father Muḥyī al-Dīn and several other prominent marabouts attempted to intervene with the

¹² Ibid., 54-55.

¹³ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁴ Ibid., 55.

Turkish authorities on behalf of financially overburdened tribes, seeking a reduction in their tax liabilities in light of an onerous famine and plague in Oran in the early 1820s. In response, Hasan, the bey of Oran, had several of them executed.¹⁵ Fearing the worst, Muḥyī al-Dīn attempted to temporarily leave Algeria by taking a hajj pilgrimage, taking his son along. But this did not go over well with Hasan bey, who, fearing a rebellion disguised as a pilgrimage caravan, had Muḥyī al-Dīn and his son apprehended, and placed under house arrest in Oran for two years; following their release, they were ordered to leave the country immediately. No doubt, this likely deepened ‘Abd al-Qādir’s animosity toward the Ottomans and their regime.¹⁶ But in leaving his homeland, and in spending two years abroad—largely under the auspices of the hajj pilgrimage—‘Abd al-Qādir will have returned to Algeria having undergone a series of transformative experiences. Informed by these new sensibilities from his travels, he both gained the necessary insight to lead an effective resistance campaign against the French, and a prominent status among the people of the Oran province that were critical in bolstering his credibility as a military and political leader, as we shall see shortly.

Hajj Sojourn

Following their release from house arrest by the Turkish administration, in 1826 ‘Abd al-Qādir and his father left Algeria on a hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, allegedly financed in part by the bey himself.¹⁷ Arriving first in Tunis, this was the future Amīr’s first encounter with a Muslim tradition that was more highly developed than what he had

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., 56.

known in Algeria; after all, [t]here was nothing in his country that approached the Zaytuna mosque as a center for Islamic studies.”¹⁸ This journey, then, broadened his cosmopolitan sensibilities beyond the confines of Algeria, which despite the relatively pluralistic outlook of his upbringing in Guetna, as outlined earlier, nonetheless could not offer the diversity—or the company—he was to experience while abroad.

From there they visited Alexandria and Cairo, and after a month’s stay in Mecca for completion of the hajj rites, they spent some months in Damascus and then Baghdad. Following three months in Baghdad, they performed another *hajj* pilgrimage, before finally returning to Algeria by way of Egypt and Tunis.¹⁹ At each stage of the journey, as I outline in more detail below, ‘Abd al-Qādir continued and augmented his religious education and training, working with the preeminent scholars and institutions each country had to offer. Additionally, he met some distinguished personalities throughout this expedition, many of whom left an indelible mark on his thought process that was to last well into his revolutionary career as leader of the Algerian resistance against the French, and even beyond.

In Egypt, as elsewhere in his journey, ‘Abd al-Qādir took full advantage of the opportunities availed to him by that country to deepen his knowledge base, both of Islamic religious doctrine, and of statecraft. With respect to the former, he enrolled in the renowned Egyptian Islamic university al-Azhar during his second visit to Egypt, studying under the distinguished ‘*ulamā*’ affiliated with that seminary.²⁰ But his experience in Egypt was especially illuminating with respect to the latter, for here he had his first

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 56-58.

²⁰ Ibid., 58.

experience with the administrative, economic, and political restructuring of society undertaken by famed Egyptian reformer Muḥammad ‘Alī. As he later enthusiastically mentioned to French officers, the young Amīr was immediately taken by ‘Alī’s administrative methods, policies, and reforms, and came to see them as a model for effective governance. Indeed, ‘Abd al-Qādir and his father were said to have had a private audience with the Egyptian reformer, whose example had a formative impact on the way he structured his own quasi-state in Algeria.²¹

Upon reaching Mecca to perform the *hajj* pilgrimage, ‘Abd al-Qādir crossed paths with another famed reformer in his own right, this one a fellow Algerian: Muḥammad ibn ‘Ali al-Sanūsī, founder of the Sanūsī Sufi order that presently predominates in Libya and parts of Sudan. I will not provide here an exhaustive background of al-Sanūsī or his order, but for now will briefly mention that the Sanūsī movement is known in particular for its role in resisting the incursions of European colonialism, and in decrying the more doctrinaire placations to tradition (*taqlīd*) it felt were characteristic of the Muslim ‘*ulamā*’ at the time.²² From his meeting with al-Sanūsī, it seems that these dual tendencies may have left a lasting impact on ‘Abd al-Qādir, both as a resistance leader and as a religious intellectual.

According to one account, ‘Abd al-Qādir and his father were invited to al-Sanūsī’s *zāwiya* in Abū Qubays, where they were served a meal of couscous—a reprieve from the temporary exile from their native Algeria, being offered a traditional dish from the Maghreb while in a faraway land. Here, after the young Amīr ate fourteen mouthfuls

²¹ Ibid., 56.

²² For a more detailed account of al-Sanūsī and his order, see Knut S Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge: Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Al-Sanūsī and His Brotherhood* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

of the semolina pearls, refusing to eat more despite his host's encouragement that doing so will strengthen him, al-Sanūsī remarked to 'Abd al-Qādir's father that the youngster was prescribed by God to fulfill a profound role in his life, both for his homeland and for the Muslim *umma* more broadly. More specifically, he remarks:

The religion of Islam requires every Muslim to defend it, as far as he is able to, and forbids the Muslim to surrender to the enemy. I say to you that I have the best wishes for our son 'Abd al-Qādir, indeed he is of those who are going to make the sacred lands of Islam expand and raise the banner of jihad.²³

This meeting was, the account suggests, the reason 'Abd al-Qādir and his father conceived the idea of revolt against the French imperialists in Algeria three years later.²⁴

That said, as Vikør astutely points out, there is some uncertainty as to whether the source in question is wholly accurate; though he does not dispute that the meeting between 'Abd al-Qādir and al-Sanūsī likely took place, Vikør argues that the specifics of the story outlined above may have been exaggerated.²⁵ As such, veering on the side of caution, I am refraining from positing that al-Sanūsī's ideas, towards anti-colonial resistance or towards Islamic reform, unquestionably came to inform the future Amīr's thought process. But from what studies like Vikør's suggest, there is enough evidence to consider the possibility, and to explore the matter further—though the latter is beyond the scope of this study.

Then, upon arrival in Syria, 'Abd al-Qādir further continued his religious training, attending lectures on the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* collection of Prophetic *aḥādīth* at the

²³ Knut S Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge: Muḥammad b. 'Alī Al-Sanūsī and His Brotherhood* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 126.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 126-127.

Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. But more importantly, he and his father had the opportunity to meet and study with the Sufi leader Shaykh Khālid of the Naqshbandīyya-Mujaddīyya order.²⁶ Extremely active in spreading his reformist spiritual thought throughout the Ottoman Empire, Shaykh Khālid was deeply involved in generating a religious awakening in Damascus at the time of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s arrival. During their stay, Khālid welcomed ‘Abd al-Qādir and his father into the Naqshbandīyya way, deferring their stewardship to one of his deputies, Muḥammad al-Khānī. The two Algerian wayfarers then spent the next four months in the Naqshbandī-run Murādiyya mosque, where it is possible that they took hand (*bay‘ah*) with the Naqshbandīyya—though this was likely more a gesture of goodwill and blessing than of exclusive allegiance to that order.²⁷ Nonetheless, irrespective of whether or not he formally joined the Naqshbandīyya, this meeting with Shaykh Khālid, and the exposure to his religious revivalism, came to play a formative role in the Amīr’s career as a religious reformer himself during his exile in Damascus. I will elaborate on this influence further toward the end of this chapter.

Finally, before returning to Algeria, ‘Abd al-Qādir and his father visited Baghdad, where they paid their respects at the tomb of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, one of the foremost Sūfī saints in Islam, and, as the founder and patriarch of the Qādirī ṣūfī order, the progenitor of the two men’s spiritual legacy. During their three-month stay, father and son renewed their ties to the Qādirī order, and in turn received formal *ijāzah* from the

²⁶ For an excellent overview of Shaykh Khālid’s spiritual doctrine, and its spread throughout the Ottoman lands in the 19th century, see Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 22, no. 1 (1982): 1-36.

²⁷ Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafīyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 149.

order's then-chief, Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Qādirī.²⁸ More importantly, this numinous meeting with the esteemed *walī* provided precisely the atmosphere necessary for the promulgation of legendary tales depicting ‘Abd al-Qādir as an anointed leader, sanctioned by none other than Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī himself. These foundational myths predicting the ascendancy of ‘Abd al-Qādir as leader of the Algerians—spread in large part by his father—proved instrumental in establishing his legitimacy among the people of Algeria.²⁹ Indeed, upon returning to Algeria in 1828, Muḥyī al-Dīn and his son were greeted as heroes, and had acquired a prominent following throughout the Oran province and beyond.³⁰

Fearing that this newly found popularity would lead to more harassment by the loathed Turkish authorities, Muḥyī al-Dīn and his son spent the next two years abstaining from public life, devoting themselves to study and to solitary spiritual meditation. As they intended, this temporary isolation appeased the Ottomans, but also elevated their standing in Algerian society by increasing their reputation for spiritual devotion.³¹ Following this spiritual sojourn, the two men resurfaced to witness the commencement of a military occupation that would come to engulf their country for the next 132 years.

French Occupation of Algiers, and the Emergence of an *Amīr*

On July 5, 1830, the French entered the city of Algiers victoriously, securing the surrender of the city from the Turkish authorities, thereby ending over 300 years of

²⁸ Raphael Danziger, *Abd Al-Qadir and the Algerians*, 56-57.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Ottoman rule. Initially, French presence was met with little resistance from Algerian tribes in the interior, no doubt in part due to their animosity for the Turkish administration the French quickly overthrew, and in part due to the French presence being limited to the countryside. But with the collapse of the Turkish regime came the halting of all taxation. And with the sudden disappearance of centuries-old tax obligations, and of whatever law and order offered by the Turkish administration, Algeria quickly descended into anarchy, which quickly spread to the Oran province: overtaxed tribes sought out revenge against the collaborationist *makhzan* tribes, old tribal blood feuds resurfaced, rampant pillaging and extortion became the norm, and public safety all but disappeared. Unsurprisingly, economic activity in Oran came to a standstill.³²

Growing weary of the anarchy engulfing the province, the tribes of Oran sought reprieve in an unlikely ally: ‘Abd al-Rahman, the sultan of neighboring Morocco. Despite his original reticence, the sultan ‘Abd al-Rahman eventually complied, and in October 1830 facilitated the transfer of some 500 Moroccan soldiers on the Algerian frontier. The sultan was no doubt motivated in part by his long-standing desire to expand Moroccan presence into western Algeria. But more importantly, ‘Abd al-Rahman agreed to intervene in large part to curtail the threat posed by a Western European power in his immediate vicinity; collapse of Ottoman rule in Oran, he astutely realized, would possibly lead to a power vacuum that would be filled by the French.³³ It seems, then, that ‘Abd al-Rahman was motivated in large part by a desire to contain the French, lest they make additional gains in Algeria, or even worse, extend their colonial reach to the Moroccan borders.

³² Ibid., 40-41.

³³ Ibid., 42-43.

From the outset, the Moroccan intervention campaign in Algeria was categorically anti-French in character, and sought to inculcate in the Algerian tribesmen a visceral desire to resist the French army's imperialist incursions. This was not a straightforward task, though, as French military presence on the Algerian coastline was by itself not sufficient to instill the desired sense of enmity toward the invading army. For 'Abd al-Rahman to spearhead a successful resistance movement, as Danziger points out, he had to rally the disparate tribes behind a common cause: "What Mulay 'Ali found when he entered Oran province were numerous tribes fighting each other, quite oblivious to the French on their shores. Abd al-Rahman intended to channel this wasted energy into a movement rallied behind Morocco in a unified struggle against France."³⁴

Ultimately, the Moroccan sultan decided to anchor his movement in the language of religion. Evoking religious propaganda portraying the French not simply as colonial invaders, but as members of an infidel army seeking to do harm to the believers, 'Abd al-Rahman called on the inhabitants of the Algerian interior to subdue the infidel advances through a noble and virtuous *jihād*. While we cannot say with certainty why the sultan selected Islam and military *jihād* as the unifying banner of his movement, it is nonetheless clear that his decision proved quite judicious. Exhorting Muslim unity against French infidels, it turned out, appealed to a wider audience, and helped overcome the partisan disputes between competing Algerian tribes. Moreover, it successfully planted a sentiment of resistance to the French that would endure long after Moroccan forces left the Algerian shores.

³⁴ Ibid., 43.

Indeed, Muḥyī al-Dīn himself, whose attitude toward the French invading the Algerian coast initially came across as ambivalent,³⁵ seems to have been ultimately won over by the anti-French revolutionary convictions espoused by the Moroccans. Initially resisting pleas made by tribesmen that he militarily restore stability on his own, Muḥyī al-Dīn instead urged the Algerian notables to appeal to the Sultan of Morocco for assistance, ultimately granting his assent to the Moroccan occupation of Oran. And after Moroccan intervention commenced, Muḥyī al-Dīn grew increasingly convinced of the need to actively resist French advances.³⁶ The revolutionary spirit espoused by the Moroccans came to define his attitude toward the French moving forward, such that when the Moroccan forces withdrew from Oran—in 1831, and again in 1832—ushering in a return to anarchy, Muḥyī al-Dīn now willingly accepted the role of leader of a *jihād* campaign against the French. In this role he led several military campaigns against the French, exhorting his troops to fulfill their duty of *jihād* by attacking French infidel forces. Demonstrating to his constituency that his campaigns constituted a legitimate *jihād*, he went so far as inviting the infidel Frenchmen to Islam prior to attacking them.³⁷ And though these *jihād* campaigns did little damage to French forces, while incurring heavy Algerian casualties, they were nonetheless essential in solidifying and perpetuating the spirit of anti-colonial resistance. As Danzinger points out, Muḥyī al-Dīn's *jihād* “established a strong link between the fight against France and the consolidation of the internal factions. Jihad enabled the two warring factions to resolve their differences and

³⁵ Ibid., 59. During the initial invasion, with the French still confined to the Algerian coastline, there are no reports of Muḥyī al-Dīn making any anti-French overtures. Muḥyī al-Dīn was primarily interested in subduing the Ottomans, and arguably saw the French invasion as conducive to that end goal.

³⁶ Ibid., 59-60.

³⁷ Ibid., 61-62.

unite in a common cause, while the attack on the French, with its inevitable losses, perpetuated itself through the spirit of vendetta.”³⁸

Equally important, Muḥyī al-Dīn’s *jihād* campaigns were instrumental in legitimizing his son as his successor. With Muḥyī al-Dīn being too enfeebled due to old age to personally participate in active combat, he instead deferred to the young ‘Abd al-Qādir to lead the attacks against the French. This experience afforded the young man the opportunity to demonstrate extraordinary courage on the battlefield, and to exhibit his outstanding skills as a military leader and fighter. As ‘Abd al-Qādir already had a reputation for piety, wisdom, and spiritual knowledge, acquiring the reputation of being a brave soldier was the last necessary step in legitimizing his rightful place as leader of the Algerian resistance.³⁹

And so, on November 22, 1832, a large assembly of notables representing three powerful Oran tribes gathered on the plain of Eghris, near Mascara, to pay homage to their new leader. ‘Abd al-Qādir, then twenty-five years of age, was seated under a large elm tree, upon which his father approached the tree, and loudly pledged allegiance and submission to his son. The other notables of the congregation then followed suit, each pledging loyalty to the young man while he remained seated under the all-encompassing elm—a gesture clearly designed to mimic the pledge of allegiance to the prophet Muḥammad taken by his followers at Hudaibiya in 627/8 A.D.⁴⁰ Once the ceremony had concluded, ‘Abd al-Qādir was finally proclaimed *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*, Commander of the Faithful. And thus began his fifteen-year career as anti-colonial resistance leader.

³⁸ Ibid., 61.

³⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 51.

The Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir: Algerian Revolutionary

Upon his accession to leadership, ‘Abd al-Qādir immediately sought to expand the scope of resistance to the French. Like his father, he recognized the inextricable link between the fight against France and internal consolidation of Algerian tribesmen. But unlike his father, he gave up on direct frontal *jihād* campaigns against French troops at the outset, and instead made his first priority extending his rule within the Algerian interior. His support from a mere three seminomadic tribes, after all, while promising, would be insufficient to fully take on a European imperial power. An aspiring new leader seeking acceptance among a disparate and disjointed constituency, he would need to placate the cultural, social, and religious context of Algerian tribal society to fully establish his legitimacy.

As we have seen several times in the Amīr’s rise to power, the message of Islam had proven quite useful in garnering local support. In the Algerian context, it is worth recalling that the religious milieu is deeply colored by mystical tendencies, with an active cult of saint worship having been firmly established in the region for several centuries.⁴¹ Prior to assuming power, ‘Abd al-Qādir cemented his legitimacy as the future *Amīr* under precisely these auspices, deferring to the language of mysticism to appeal to his country’s Sufi predilections. As mentioned previously, his visit to Baghdad while in exile was monumental because the spiritual climate of paying respects to ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilāni proved fertile for establishing foundational myths of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s anointed status as *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*. These legends, imbued with spiritual significance, suggested that ‘Abd al-Qādir Jilāni himself had selected the young man as a divinely sanctioned leader. Thus, with the profundity of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s spiritual presence and *baraka* so readily

⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

apparent, the tribal chiefs and marabouts of Oran were ultimately convinced that he was the man Allah selected to lead them.⁴²

But following his ascendancy to power, he consolidated his legitimacy largely through appealing to Islamic exoteric ritual practice.⁴³ Within days of assuming leadership, he seized control of the centrally-located town of Mascara; upon establishing his base and setting up an administrative government there, he sent circulars to the chiefs of all the tribes in the Oran province, demanding their submission to his authority as leader of the *jihād* against the French. Purporting to follow in the footsteps of the Islamic caliphs, the Amīr stressed his role as unifier of the Muslim *umma* by commanding the noble *jihād* against the infidel invaders. Still, though a critical mass of tribal leaders did indeed head to Mascara and pledge allegiance to ‘Abd al-Qādir shortly after receiving his initial appeal, the major tribal leaders in the Oran province flatly rejected his leadership.⁴⁴

To overcome these obstacles, he continued to underscore his Islamic credentials to the Algerian interior, reiterating his commitment to uniting the Muslim *umma* and properly implementing the *sharī‘ah*, under the banner of *jihād*. And insofar as his opposition was largely provincial and self-serving in its outlook, this clarion call earned him a significant constituency:

For it was this [his role as jihad leader] which gave him the greatest advantage over his rivals, all of whom appeared to be merely attempting to advance their own ambitions. Abd al-Qadir, therefore, did not miss a chance to preach the strict observance of the Shari‘a. On every occasion he quoted passages from the Qur‘ān, calling for jihad. In his

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Danziger and others here refer to Islamic “orthodoxy,” but I have done my best to refrain from doing so, given the plethora of normative implications embedded in that term. It seems to me that the baggage it carries makes “orthodoxy” a less-than-useful descriptive term.

⁴⁴ Raphael Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerians*, 74-76.

letters to the tribal chiefs and other leaders, he stressed his role as the unifier of the Muslims of all races and as the leader of *jihad*.⁴⁵

Of course simply paying lip service to his caliphal role was insufficient to grant him full legitimacy. To prove his sincerity as a *mujāhid*, he decided to launch an attack against the infidels of Oran, albeit not through a direct military offensive. Recalling his father's repeated failures on that front, he instead laid siege to Oran. First prohibiting the sale of horses, a precious military commodity to French forces, he went on to issue a proclamation forbidding the supply of any foodstuffs to the French, on penalty of hanging. Furthermore, he continued to strengthen his position through his association with the Qādirī Sufi order. To overcome the objections of the several disparate (and often mutually hostile) orders operating in Oran, 'Abd al-Qādir astutely expanded the reach of his own order—establishing Qādirī centers in towns, villages, and tribes throughout the province—with each center propagating the need to follow 'Abd al-Qādir as anointed leader of the *jihād*.⁴⁶

In time these measures won him the support he clamored for, with tribe after tribe offering their allegiance to him. By 1833, nearly every tribe in the Oran province had submitted to 'Abd al-Qādir's authority. With an established and unified base of supporters, and a viable administrative system in place—the details of which I will provide shortly—the Amīr was now in a position to commence offensive *jihād* against the infidel Frenchmen. Through 1832 and 1833 the Amīr launched several successful attacks against the French, prompting them in 1834 to negotiate a truce in the Desmichels treaty, which recognized 'Abd al-Qādir as the sovereign leader of the majority of Oran

⁴⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 79-80.

province, and granted him significant economic and trade concessions in the province. The Amīr took full advantage of these concessions, declaring to the tribes of the province that they constituted French fealty and submission to his authority, which emboldened him to further consolidate and expand his rule of the Algerian interior.⁴⁷

By 1837, hostilities resumed between the French and ‘Abd al-Qādir’s Algerian quasi-state, prompting the negotiation of a second truce, in the Tafna treaty. Here, in exchange for several trade concessions, and for recognizing French sovereignty explicitly, he was granted the supply of French arms and ammunitions and, more importantly, French recognition of his rule over nearly two thirds of Algeria.⁴⁸ As he did with the Desmichels treaty, the Amīr successfully downplayed the concessions he had made to the French, and presented the Tafna treaty to his constituency as another testament to his exalted status over the subdued French infidels.⁴⁹ Moreover, shortly after concluding the Tafna treaty, ‘Abd al-Qādir gained even more leadership currency, again conferred through the veneer of Islamic authenticity. More specifically, he received a fatwa from the esteemed ‘*ulamā*’ of Fes, which he had requested prior to the start of peace negotiations. This document provided him with legitimacy from a religious body unanimously accepted in Algeria as binding, and endowed him with all-expansive (and Islamically sanctioned) powers:

It authorized the imam (meaning Abd al-Qadir) to fight those engaged in an insurrection against his authority; it ordered him to punish spies, impostors, violators of the Shari‘a, and other criminals, as well as those aiding and abetting them; it prohibited the sale of strategic materials

⁴⁷ Ibid., 89-94.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 140-141.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 146-147.

such as arms and copper to the Christians except during a truce; it authorized the imam to punish those refusing to obey the call for jihad; it ordered him to fight those refusing to pay the zakat; it authorized him to make peace with the infidels if this was required for the survival of the Muslims and their country.⁵⁰

Now the Amīr was in a better position than ever to unify the disparate tribes of Algeria under his leadership, and buttress the reach of his authority. And indeed he did: by 1839, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s sphere of control had extended to central Algeria, and his control of the country had reached its zenith.

Unfortunately for the Amīr, though, the tides were about to turn. Toward the end of 1839, hostilities between ‘Abd al-Qādir and the French began to resume; shortly thereafter, in December of 1840, Governor General Valee was recalled to France, and replaced with General Thomas Robert Bugeaud—the same general who signed the Tafna treaty. No longer interested in merely containing ‘Abd al-Qādir, Bugeaud adopted a “scorched earth,” policy, with the goal of the Amīr’s complete and total defeat. Following a long struggle over the next several years, in which ‘Abd al-Qādir temporarily sought refuge in Morocco—which in turn help spearhead the Franco-Moroccan war of 1844—the French finally got their wish: on December 21, 1847, after spending over a decade transforming a local movement of inconspicuous auspices into a semi-autonomous state encompassing over two thirds of Algeria, the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī declared his formal surrender.⁵¹

From this section, it is clear that ‘Abd al-Qādir’s understanding of statecraft was one deeply couched in an Islamic framework. Placating the religious sensibilities of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁵¹ Ibid., 223-237

Algerian tribesmen played a pivotal role in his ascendancy to leadership, and upon taking up the mantle of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, underscoring his commitment to waging a religiously-sanctioned *jihad* against infidel French imperialists was central to his ability to consolidate and expand his rule. To unify a deeply divided tribal society, the Amīr astutely recognized the need to rally them behind a common cause. In this context, Islam proved quite effective as a clarion call to overcome Algerian factionalism.

Indeed, even on an administrative level, one can argue that the Amīr governed his indigenous quasi-state under distinctly Islamic auspices, for he went through great lengths to implement and enforce a particularly strict interpretation of *sharī'ah* legislation. As noted above, he implemented laws punishing those refusing to obey the call for *jihād*, and by extension those refusing to pay *zakat*, without which the *jihād* campaign would have been financially compromised. As for conducting the *jihād* itself, he did not limit himself to direct military offensives, but also resorted to laying siege to the infidel army, forbidding his constituency to sell Christians strategic supplies, or, as we've seen in the early stages of his leadership, foodstuffs, under penalty of hanging.

Even on private legal matters, he administered justice based on a narrow interpretation of Islamic law, such that purported vices like wine, gambling, and smoking were outlawed, prayer was made mandatory, and detractors were subject to corporal punishment:

Whoever was caught at his shop during prayer-time was liable to flogging, and special wardens were appointed to watch over the application of this rule. Women were not permitted to enter mosques, and the doorkeepers were enjoined to mark with ochre any woman contravening this

regulation. Women of doubtful morals were forced to marry.⁵²

The question then becomes, was the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir a theocrat, or motivated primarily by the establishment of theocratic Islamic rule in Algeria? Several commentators, like Israeli scholar Pessah Shinar, advocate this position, suggesting “[t]he state he set about to organize, though currently referred to as a sultanate, was conceived by him as a theocracy, patterned after the Medinese umma of Muḥammad and his immediate successors.”⁵³ ‘Abd al-Qādir, Shinar continues, should not be considered an Algerian nationalist, but a proponent of an Islamic state—a state which, Shinar continues, is staunchly unaccommodating of non-Muslims.

How, then, does one accurately interpret this stage of the Amīr’s career? Would it be more accurate to consider him the founder of the modern Algerian nation-state, or would it be more appropriate to consider him a figure motivated entirely by his religious convictions? In short, was ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī a nationalist (or a proto-nationalist), or a theocrat? Certainly, this question becomes increasingly salient in the context of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s role as a religious reformist later in his life, so it is worth treating in some detail before proceeding to the rest of the Amīr’s biography.

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī: Nationalist, or Theocrat?

Opponents of the claim that ‘Abd al-Qādir’s movement was a nationalist one in its auspices are quick to point out that the Amīr does not make specific reference to Algerian statehood or peoplehood. Indeed, in his recorded addresses and

⁵² Pessah Shinar, “‘Abd Al-Qādir and ‘Abd Al-Krīm: Religious Influences on their Thought and Action,” *Asian and African Studies* 1 (1965): 150.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 145.

correspondences, he typically refers to the inhabitants of his quasi-state as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Arabs,’ but never as ‘Algerians,’ in the territorial sense of the term. Nor does he refer to the territory under his jurisdiction as ‘Algeria,’ despite the term having been used by Europeans long before its official adoption in 1839.⁵⁴ Furthermore, despite his own distinctly Arab heritage, the Amīr shows no palpable concern with Arab identity as such; in his bid for leadership, he sought allies just as often among Oran’s Berber tribes as among its Arab ones, often placing them in key leadership positions in his administration.⁵⁵ With the idea of an Algerian Arab nation-state ostensibly absent from his conception of statecraft, this argument continues, ‘Abd al-Qādir cannot legitimately be considered a nationalist, in the modern sense of the term. Rather, proponents of this position contend, his goal was “to weld both Arabs and Berbers of the former Beylik into a strictly orthodox Islamic commonwealth through the agency of jihad.”⁵⁶

As preface, it is worth pointing out that the idea of the modern Arab nation-state had not been fully cemented in the Arab world until the twentieth century. Accordingly, it might be somewhat anachronistic to expect a mid-nineteenth-century Arab anti-colonial leader to specifically ground his message of resistance in the language of territorial statehood.⁵⁷ It would be a more fruitful exercise, in my view, to analyze the inner

⁵⁴ Ibid., 154.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁷ Fully delineating the development of Arab nationalism is beyond the scope of this paper. But briefly I will point out that, although scholars accept that Arab nationalism was partly inspired by sentiments developed in the nineteenth century—largely nineteenth-century German Romantic nationalism—the prevailing opinion nonetheless suggests that Arab nationalism more broadly, and nationalism tied to nation-states more specifically, did not fully establish itself until the twentieth century. See Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State* (New York:

workings and organization of the Amīr's nascent state. Did his internal policies reflect a commitment to an Islamic caliphate, to a proto-Algerian republic, or to some other political entity altogether?

I will begin by analyzing the makeup of the state administration. As Shinar points out, 'Abd al-Qādir claimed to have expunged his administration of prior loyalists to the Ottoman regime, and to have replaced them with marabouts and sharifs. Lower officials, similarly, were selected primarily based on their religious devotion, and were sworn into office on the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* book of hadith. Several of his religious appointees proved inexperienced and inefficient civil servants, but nonetheless, Shinar argues, "what seems to have affected him even more deeply was that some people he appointed to responsible posts for political reasons 'trod with both feet upon religion.'"⁵⁸

But as Danziger points out, a closer analysis of the list of 'Abd al-Qādir's aides suggests his claims to have selected his administration by their religiosity to have been overblown. In fact, the Amīr proved perfectly willing to employ civil servants who previously served under the Turks, provided that they were competent and experienced. Following the Desmichels Treaty, he established a new and critically important position in his administration, that of consul; in his selection of consuls, he demonstrates his loyalties lay not with the appointee's religious status, but with the value the appointee stood to provide to his nascent state. His first appointee, in fact, was a French-educated Algerian Jew, Juda Ben Dran, whose status as the scion of a family of rabbis that had been prominent in the Algerian Jewish community for centuries made him a valued asset. Subsequent appointees to his consul position, moreover, were similarly appointed based

Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

⁵⁸ Pessah Shinar, "'Abd Al-Qādir and 'Abd Al-Krīm," 149.

on how well their family ties and personal character stood to serve the needs of the administration. It seems, then, that “Abd al-Qadir continued to select his top personnel more on the basis of merit than of marabout status.”⁵⁹

We see a similar phenomenon in ‘Abd al-Qadir’s application of Islamic legal codes. True, the Amīr did often make reference in his statements to running his state as an Islamic republic governed by the sharī‘ah, and indeed implemented personal status laws based on Qur‘ānic principles, by criminalizing the consumption of alcohol, smoking, and abstention from prayer. But were such measures based entirely on doctrinaire religious convictions, part of a broader campaign “aimed at the moral regeneration of his people by bringing it back to the simple and healthy ways of the early Muslims, *salaf*, and the spirit of the Qur‘ān, in a fashion reminiscent of Wahhābism”?⁶⁰ In point of fact, these harsh Qur‘ānic punishments were not wholly pervasive and all-inclusive, as religious judges (*quḍāh*, sing. *qāḍī*) were granted jurisdiction only over private offenses. Matters pertaining to the state and public affairs, on the other hand, were under the jurisdiction of state administrators, who did not rule according to the *sharī‘ah*, but according to a secular legal code (*qawānīn*) based on custom and current legal practice. “Even in affairs normally considered to be under the jurisdiction of the qadi, state officials were able to assume judgment from them.”⁶¹ It seems, then, that the Amīr’s commitment to sharī‘ah in his nascent state wasn’t without its caveats.

This selective reading of the Amīr’s administration and rule can perhaps be best seen in his attitude towards his Christian adversaries. As Shinar points out, the Amīr’s

⁵⁹ Raphael Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerians*, 100.

⁶⁰ Pessah Shinar, “‘Abd Al-Qādir and ‘Abd Al-Krīm,” 150.

⁶¹ Raphael Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerians*, 193.

rhetoric was often quite adversarial towards Christians, viewing them as infidels and sworn enemies of Allah and his religion, and of the establishment of an Islamic state. To use a somewhat sensational example, in the presence of a Christian ‘Abd al-Qādir once allegedly lowered his gaze and contracted his features, so as to avoid defilement.⁶² But as Danziger points out, these stories were likely exaggerated, and belie the more established track record of the Amīr’s personal experiences with Christians. In dealing with Christian prisoners in his captivity, the Amīr proved relaxed and amiable, often tending to their material needs quite jovially.⁶³ It seems, then, that the Amīr’s public attitude towards the Christian infidels, as articulated in his animosity-laden public statements, was not wholly congruent with his personal attitude towards Christians in point of fact, which seemed more tame by comparison.

Why the gap between the Amīr’s public and private personas, then? Why the apparent inconsistencies between the Amīr’s public proclamations, espousing Islam as the basis of his statecraft and inner thought process, on the one hand, and his personal conduct in point of actual fact on the other hand? As Danziger points out, this was a critical strategy on the Amīr’s part, to invoke Islam as part of a larger campaign to advance the needs of the state. This is not to suggest that the Amīr was not pious or religious on a personal level; we have every reason to believe that he was a devout believer. But his invocation of Islam as a statesman was driven less by inflexible religious convictions than by the astute realization that doing so would be crucial to providing his campaign legitimacy. “In other words,” as Danziger points out (emphases mine), “the amir's pious concern for his Muslim brethren subjected to Christian

⁶² Pessah Shinar, “‘Abd Al-Qādir and ‘Abd Al-Krīm,” 157.

⁶³ Raphael Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir and the Algerians*, 182.

occupation was expressed only as long as it was *politically expedient*. It always took second place to pragmatic considerations of state. Indeed, it is in *pragmatism*, rather than the inflexible observance of Islam, that the key to Abd al-Qadir's political conduct lies.”⁶⁴

What does this all mean, though, for the question being posed? Was the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī a theocrat, or a nationalist? As we have seen, the Amīr’s use of Islam in the public sphere was limited in its scope, and was driven more by pragmatism than by dogmatism. Given as much, I don’t think it accurate to characterize him as a “theocrat,” in the strictest sense of the term. But on the other hand, irrespective of whatever pragmatic concerns he had in mind, the fact remains that he did in fact make use of Islam as part of the state apparatus. As such, despite the caveats we discussed, it would not be inaccurate to conclude that the Amīr was *partly* influenced by theocratic concerns. As for nationalism, as we have discussed previously, he made no specific public overtures towards leading a nationalist cause, territorial or otherwise. But nonetheless, his efforts were clearly directed at solidifying the rule of the entirety of the Algerian terrain against French invaders, two thirds of which he came to command in his heyday. His primary concern, it seems, was sovereignty of his homeland, now under the threat of invasion by foreign infidels. As such, despite the absence of public statements espousing nationalist ambitions on behalf of “Algeria” specifically, his clamoring for the sovereignty of his nascent state certainly reflects a nationalist sentiment.

In short, it is oversimplified to clearly rubber-stamp the Amīr with either of these two labels, as they are not mutually exclusive. In my view, it would be more accurate to describe him as: an anti-colonial resistance leader motivated by nationalist concerns,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 183.

who, in the name of pragmatism and political expediency, largely grounded his movement in the language of religion.

With that said, it seems that there is a tendency for historical accounts of this figure to conceive him in unequivocal terms, despite the multiplicity of his persona that we have seen throughout this analysis. This tendency, it turns out, is not new, but has been evident in accounts of the Amīr since the 1830s. As we shall see in the next section, these narratives often contorted the person of the Amīr as part of a jockeying for influence among competing imperial powers.

‘Abd al-Qādir as a Symbol

Lui, l'homme fauve du désert,

Lui, le sultan né sous les palmes,
Le compagnon des lions roux,
Le hadji farouche aux yeux calmes,
L'émir pensif, féroce et doux ;

Lui, sombre et fatal personnage
Qui, spectre pâle au blanc burnous,
Bondissait, ivre de carnage,
Puis tombait dans l'ombre à genoux;

Qui, de sa tente ouvrant les toiles,
Et priant au bord du chemin,
Tranquille, montrait aux étoiles
Ses mains teintes de sang humain;

Qui donnait à boire aux épées,
Et qui, rêveur mystérieux,
Assis sur des têtes coupées,
Contemplait la beauté des cieux

--Victor Hugo⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Victor Hugo, *Châtiments* (Paris: Librairie du Victor Hugo illustré, 1862), 68.

Since his resistance to the French began, the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir was made the subject of a series of cultural, symbolic, and literary narratives throughout Europe. Indeed, in the British imagination in particular, he acquired an exalted status: Robert Browning and W.M. Thackeray transformed him into the epic hero of their verses. We see the same phenomenon, moreover, in literature, painting, and music, with the Amīr being elevated into a mythic hero.

For the French, on the other hand, the cultural narrative of the Amīr evolved tremendously throughout the course of their altercations with him. During active combat with the Amīr, he was not outright villainized, but was often portrayed as an incorrigible thorn in the side of noble French imperial aims.⁶⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, the famed French theorist of democracy, had an apparent blind spot for French imperialism, and in his apologetics for the French colonial project in Algeria expresses his frustrations with the Amīr. Though he does not outright vilify his adversary, “he also makes subtle allusions to the emir's fanaticism or tyranny, thus suggesting that the French army's violence was warranted because its opponent was as bad or worse.”⁶⁷ After his capture, the narrative of the Amīr was transformed into that of a majestic and dignified spirit, properly tamed by the nobility of French imperial wisdom. Here his religiosity is emphasized, with his likeness typically presented with prayer beads and a white robe.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Here I am referring to the predominant cultural narrative of the Amīr in France, as discussed in Nora Achrati's article. Anti-colonial French voices like Victor Hugo, whom I cited in the beginning of this section, were seemingly in the minority.

⁶⁷ Cheryl B. Welch, "Colonial Violence and the Rhetoric of Evasion: Tocqueville on Algeria," *Political Theory* 31, no. 2 (April 2003): 252.

⁶⁸ Nora Achrati, "Following the Leader: A History and Evolution of the Amir ‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Jazā’irī as Symbol," *The Journal of North African Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2007): 146.

In both cases, the narrative presented of the Amīr served to bolster a central national myth. For the British, ‘Abd al-Qādir “represented a foil to French imperial immorality,” which so far as the British were concerned was inherently immoral in contradistinction to the rival project of British imperialism. Thus, “the act of portraying ‘Abd al-Qadir as an epic hero was in fact a means toward the larger end of villainising France.”⁶⁹ For the French, he served the opposite role: his irreverent fanaticism at first bolstered the need for the noble French to continue to fight this powerful foe, and his subsequent magnanimity and grace was proof of the success of the French civilizing mission.

I propose that the “symbol” analogy developed by Nora Achrafi might prove useful in deconstructing contemporary historiography of the Amīr. As Achrafi and others have demonstrated, there is significant historical precedent in contorting or exaggerating the persona of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir for specific political and nationalist aims. It might, then, be useful to keep this in mind upon encountering blind spots in present-day historiography of the figure. We see here the ready applicability and salience of Achrafi’s paradigm when dealing with the Amīr’s career in Algeria; it might, then, also prove useful in evaluating his subsequent career as an exile in Damascus, and more importantly, as a proponent of religious reform. It is to this final stage in his life that we shall now turn.

Surrender, Exile, and the Renewal of the Akbarīyya Legacy

As part of the terms of his surrender to the French, the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī was promised the opportunity to live the rest of his life in exile in the Muslim

⁶⁹ Ibid., 144.

Mashriq—as previous parties of Algerians who had surrendered to the French had been allowed to do so. But the Amīr was unlikely to have been able to anticipate the French Revolution of 1848, which brought down the monarchy of Louis-Philippe of Orleans that had underwritten the favorable terms of their Algerian adversary’s surrender. The monarch’s republican successors were equally apprehensive about ‘Abd al-Qādir as a putative threat to French interests, yet felt insufficiently compelled to honor agreements made by their predecessors. And so, they “found a simple, if apparently dishonourable, solution to the problem--they made Abd el-Kader a prisoner of the state.”⁷⁰

First held in what John King refers to as “ignominious captivity” in the port of Toulon, ‘Abd al-Qādir was then imprisoned in France for five years – first at the Château of Pau, and then at the Château d’Amboise. During this period, we can only speculate the full extent of his feelings of humiliation and betrayal while in French captivity—although we do see instances of his expressing frustration at his involuntary confinement, his repeatedly being relocated, and at the idea that the French were so unfaithful to their promises in the first place.⁷¹ Still, he did draw solace from the presence of his immediate family and confidantes while in incarceration, and was granted the autonomy to receive guests and maintain a private living quarters. Nonetheless, during his time in France, the Amīr kept himself busy mostly through private religious study.⁷² He remained in French captivity until 1853, when Louis Napoleon granted him clemency and allowed him to

⁷⁰ John King, “Abd El-Kader and Arab Nationalism,” in *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective: Essays in Honour of Albert Hourani*, ed. John P. Spagnolo (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992), 143.

⁷¹ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, *Tuḥfat al-za’ir fi Tārīkh al-Jazā’ir* (Beirut: Dar al-Yaqza al-‘Arabīyyah, 1964), 514-530.

⁷² John King, “Abd El-Kader and Arab Nationalism,” 144; Nora Achrafi, “Following the Leader: A History and Evolution of the Amir ‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Jazā’irī as Symbol,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2007): 141.

resettle, first in Bursa, Turkey, and, following a devastating earthquake there, ultimately in Damascus in 1855, where he spent the rest of his life.

It is at this stage of his life and career that the Amīr fully turned his attention to matters of spiritual and religious reform. More specifically, it was during this period that he began the spiritual journey that ultimately led him to the thought of *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the Greatest Master), Ibn ‘Arabī. On the brink of an acute spiritual crisis, the Amīr came to see Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophical mysticism as the necessary salve to the predicament facing the Muslims of his day. Such that, upon his arrival in Damascus, he dedicated himself fully to the teaching of Akbariyya thought, gathering a following with what came to be a highly influential circle of disciples, until his death in 1883.

Before concluding this chapter, it would be useful to briefly discuss the religious and spiritual context of Damascus at the time, to fully understand how Akbariyya doctrine in general, and the Akbariyya-inspired reformism of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī in particular, was likely to have been received. As I intimated previously, the Sufi order of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddiyya, under the leadership of Shaykh Khālid, had made significant inroads throughout the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. The Amīr’s reception in Syria, then, makes much more sense when viewed through the prism of the spiritual milieu generated by Shaykh Khālid in nineteenth-century Damascus.

‘Abd al-Qādir’s spiritual mission in Naqshbandiyya-Khālidīyya Damascus

By the time ‘Abd al-Qādir arrived in Damascus in 1855, Shaykh Khālid’s religious revival movement, under the auspices of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddiyya Sufi

ṭarīqa, had deeply penetrated the Ottoman Empire, and had established a firm footing in Syria in particular. As I will demonstrate in this section, the peculiarities of the Naqshbandīyya-Khālīdīyya proved quite hospitable for the Amīr to quickly establish himself in Shaykh Khālīd’s home turf, so to speak. I will not spend much time here addressing the details of Khālīd’s spiritual doctrine.⁷³ But to the extent that it is germane to the subject at hand, it is worth mentioning that Shaykh Khālīd’s movement, in accordance with the Naqshbandī tradition more broadly, refrained from exalting their spiritual masters as necessarily superior to those outside the order. Though the movement was quite insistent on the *sharī‘ah* being inextricably linked to the spiritual path, Khālīdī authors had no qualms about citing Sufi masters outside the Naqshbandī framework whom they felt maintained that commitment to the spiritual Law.⁷⁴ Thus, given the *ṭarīqa*’s openness to the spiritual knowledge of outside Sufi masters, it is more likely that its adherents would be receptive to the thought propagated by a Qādirī leader like the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir, so long as he sufficiently satisfied their concerns with *sharī‘ah* compliance.

Furthermore, the *ṭarīqa*’s openness in this regard lent itself to remain hospitable to the controversial mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabī. Indeed, the early Naqshbandī tradition evinces a strong positive interest in al-Shaykh al-Akbar’s teachings.⁷⁵ We see a notable exception to this tendency, though, in the thought of Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624). The

⁷³ As I mentioned previously, Butrus Abu-Manneh offers an excellent study of Shaykh Khālīd’s spiritual doctrine in his article “The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 22, no. 1 (1982): 1-36.

⁷⁴ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 32.

⁷⁵ Hamid Algar, “Reflections of Ibn ‘Arabī in Early Naqshbandī Tradition,” *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 10 (1991): 45-66.

founder of the Mujaddīyya branch of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa*, and often described as the reviver of the second millennium in Islam (*mujaddid al-alf ath-thānī*), Sirhindī had very strong reservations about the theosophy of *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, particularly his doctrine on the “unity of being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Alarmed by its seeming endorsement of pantheism, Sirhindī replaced it with his own doctrine of “oneness of appearance” (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*), which suggests that any experience of unity between God and man is purely subjective, occurring only in the mind of the believer.

Nonetheless, despite his misgivings, Sirhindī critiqued the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī “with a certain trepidation and took pains to stress his overall respect for the great master.”⁷⁶ His successors in the Mujaddīyya line, moreover, maintained a similar positive regard for Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings, often citing him alongside classical authorities of Sufism like Junayd and Ghazālī.⁷⁷ Indeed, Shaykh Khālīd maintained Ibn ‘Arabī’s works in his library, and his major deputies—particularly Muḥammad al-Khānī—quoted him often in elucidating the Khālīdi spiritual path. Despite eschewing the immanent interpretation of the Akbariyya doctrine—which opened the door to pantheism—the Khālīdī branch of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa* was indeed amenable to the more transcendental interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings, which tended to identify the mystical path with the duty to adhere to the *sharī‘ah* and the *sunna* of the Prophet.⁷⁸ As we shall see, the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī’s reform methodology was largely based on this transcendental approach to the Akbariyya doctrine; as such, his teachings had a natural

⁷⁶ Hamid Algar, “Reflections of Ibn ‘Arabī in Early Naqshbandī Tradition,” *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 10 (1991).

⁷⁷ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 32.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 147-148.

valence with the Khālidiyya disciples and leadership that greeted him upon his arrival in Damascus.

Finally, the doctrinal congruence between ‘Abd al-Qādir’s reformism and the Khālidiyya aside, the Amīr had a ready audience in Damascus based on his previous associations with the Khālidiyya as a young man. As mentioned earlier, in his early twenties ‘Abd al-Qādir visited Damascus en route back to Algeria following a Hajj pilgrimage alongside his father. During that sojourn, he met Shaykh Khālid, who allowed him into the Naqshbandiyya path by assigning him to his key deputy, Muḥammad al-Khānī. Upon his return to Damascus, ‘Abd al-Qādir quickly rekindled his established ties with the Khālidiyya, first reviving his friendship with Muḥammad al-Khānī, who by that time had become a key figure in the Khālidiyya leadership. Shortly thereafter, the Amīr established relationships with Khānī’s key disciples, among them Muḥammad al-Tanṭāwī, and Khānī’s son, Muḥammad al-Khānī the younger. These men then became staunch devotees of the study of Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine under ‘Abd al-Qādir’s guidance, and the notes they took while under his tutelage formed the nucleus of the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*.⁷⁹

Indeed, even beyond his relationship with Khānī the elder, the Amīr managed to secure a critical mass of followers and disciples from precisely the families that a generation ago subscribed to the reformism spearheaded by Shaykh Khālid under the auspices of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa*:

The correspondence between the Damascene ‘ulama who joined the religion reform led by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī under the inspiration of the Akbari teaching after 1855, and the group that belonged to the renewal movement headed by Shaykh Khālid within the framework of the Naqshbandī

⁷⁹ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 204.

order in 1823-1827, is indeed striking. It can be seen both in the family affiliations of the 'ulama of the two generations and in the nature of their relationship to the heads of these two consecutive reform trends. Thus, Muḥammad al-Khānī and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Biṭār, who figured prominently in 'Abd al-Qādir's circle, were the sons of Khālid's most faithful adherents in the order in Damascus, his local deputy and his representative in the Maydān.⁸⁰

Weismann offers several explanations for this seeming continuum between the Khālidīyya and 'Abd al-Qādir's movement between the first and third quarters of nineteenth-century Damascus. Among them, the most interesting in my view is that the reformist project spearheaded by Shaykh Khālid seemed compromised by the new political and economic circumstances emerging in Syria at the time. Under the aegis of the Tanzimat reforms and European economic penetration into the Ottoman Empire, Weismann argues, Khālidīyya reformism lost its allure among a critical mass of its adherents. The Akbarīyya revivalism propagated by 'Abd al-Qādir, then, seemed more hospitable to accomplishing their reformist goals. Accordingly, given these new realities, "to a large extent, the Akbarī theosophy replaced the Naqshbandī path as the most adequate articulation of these families' distresses and desires in the new circumstances emerging in Syria as a result of the two processes of the Tanzimat reforms and European economic penetration."⁸¹

With this background, I can now more comfortably proceed to investigating 'Abd al-Qādir's thought on religious reform, as articulated in his writings.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 213.

⁸¹ Ibid., 214.

Chapter 2: ‘Abd al-Qādir’s writings on Islamic Reform

Beginning with *al-Miqrāḍ al-Hādd: Li-Qaṭ‘ Lisān Muntaqiṣ dīn Al-Islām bi-al-Bāṭil wa-al-Ilhād*, (*Sharp Scissors to Cut the Tongue of the Slanderer of the Religion of Islam*) composed while in French captivity, and followed by *Dhikrā al-‘Āqil wa-Tanbīh al-Ghāfil* (*Reminding the Rational Man and Alerting the Neglectful Man*), which he wrote while in his original exilic location of Bursa, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī opens new vistas into the depths of his theological thought process. In the *Miqrāḍ*, composed as a rebuttal to the accusations by a Catholic priest of the immorality of Islam, he sought to establish both the existence of God and the reality of prophethood, specifically through the use of reason (‘*aql*). Viewing reason as “the trait which distinguished man from other creatures,”⁸² the Amīr goes on to extol reason as wholly superior to the physical senses, and an indispensable faculty for coming to understand God. To be clear, though, he does not acquiesce that reason alone is sufficient to understand God: as reason is not a source of moral values, and possesses no knowledge about the Divine, man needs prophets to guide him through the intricacies of the Unseen. That said, while reason is itself incapable of replacing the message of the prophets, it is the only faculty available to man capable of grasping the logic of the prophetic guidance.⁸³

In the *Dhikrā*, composed four years later at the behest of a French scientific committee that had enrolled him in their register of scholars, the Amīr reiterates the centrality of the rational sciences, now in contradistinction to the dangers of imitation

⁸² David Dean Commins, “‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Jazā’irī and Islamic Reform,” *Muslim World* 78 (1988): 122.

⁸³ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 159.

(*taqlīd*).⁸⁴ “The intelligent person,” he insisted, “must consider the statement rather than the person who is stating it,”⁸⁵ as blind emulation uninformed by the intellect can lead to disastrous consequences for the Muslim community. Here again he affirms that the sciences of the prophets are superior to intellectual knowledge, considering the use of unbridled reason to the exclusion of prophetic guidance no less problematic than uninformed imitation: “Those who call on people to adopt pure imitative knowledge and avoid rationality are ignorant, while those who are satisfied with rationality at the expense of the revealed sciences are deluded.”⁸⁶ He instead advocates combining both approaches, whereby the rational sciences and the revealed sciences complement and nurture one another interdependently:

The rational sciences are like nourishment and the revealed sciences are like medication. The sick may be harmed by food if they neglect their medicine. Similarly, the minds of all creatures are sick, and there is no treatment for them but the medications prepared by the prophets, namely the duties of worship. Those who are satisfied with rational knowledge will be harmed by it like the sick person who is harmed by food; as happens to some.⁸⁷

Another key theme in the *Dhikrā* is the fundamental harmony between Islam and the other revealed religions. Much as his admirers in the 19th century applauded him for compassion towards non-Muslims, here the Amīr eschews rigid bifurcations between the

⁸⁴ It is worth noting that in the modernist context, *taqlīd* is not simply a deferment to past judgments and adherence to established precedent—which is, after all, the traditionally understood juristic meaning of the term. Islamic modernists recast *taqlīd* as *blind* and uninformed imitation, and thus a cause of social stagnation. For more on the modernist recasting of *taqlīd* in this manner, see Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2010).

⁸⁵ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, "Reminding the Intelligent, Notifying the Unmindful," trans. Itzchak Weismann, in *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 133.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

faiths.⁸⁸ Instead, he stresses that the truth possessed by the monotheistic religions is essentially one. Adopting inclusive language making constant reference to “the prophets” (*al-anbiyā`*)⁸⁹, he goes so far as to explicitly suggest that Muslims and Christians, despite their doctrinal differences, are essentially brothers:⁹⁰

For all prophets have proclaimed that the true religion is one, even if they disagree in some of their particular laws. They are like men of one father and different mothers: to deny all of them, or to deny some and affirm the truth of others, is deficient. If the Muslims and Christians listened to me [on this matter], the differences between them would disappear, and they would become brothers—outwardly and inwardly alike.⁹¹

Finally, as a corollary to his support for the use of *‘aql*, in this volume the Amīr issues a clarion call for believers and followers of the prophets to embrace rather than eschew the benefits of modern science. No doubt directing his critique at conservative religious scholars who rely excessively on *taqlīd*, here he reminds his reader that inveighing against the purported immorality or inadmissibility of modern science is outside the domain of the prophetic path. The science of the prophets concerns itself primarily with what is beneficial to mankind, both in this life and in the hereafter.

Accordingly, then:

The prophets did not come into being in order to refute the philosophers, or to repudiate the sciences of medicine,

⁸⁸ Though at face value this theme in the *Dhikrā* seems in line with the reputation the Amīr acquired in the West for magnanimity, his handling and treatment of non-Muslims—particularly during his revolutionary career in Algeria—is of course an issue that cannot be fully understood from this text alone. I will address this more thoroughly elsewhere in this chapter.

⁸⁹ as opposed to the singular term *nabī*, thereby implying an affinity for all the prophets in the Abrahamic legacy rather than exclusively for Muḥammad.

⁹⁰ All translations of Arabic language texts, unless noted otherwise, are my own.

⁹¹ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, *Dhikrā al-‘Āqil wa-Tanbīh al-Ghāfil* (Beirut: Dār al-Yaqza al-‘Arabīyah, 1966), 107.

astronomy, or geometry—which they considered in tune with the doctrine of God’s transcendental oneness—but rather to ascribe all the world’s phenomena to the Lord’s power and will.⁹²

Not only, the Amīr continues, does modern science not pose any discernible threat to the religion as such, but to inveigh against science as inimical to religion is actually to commit a grave sin. Even grander of a sin, he goes so far to say, than outright rejecting the prophets altogether (emphasis mine):

They did not come to refute that bodies are composed of a combination of the four elements, or that the earth is round, or that the moon’s eclipse is caused by the earth standing exactly between it and the sun, for none of these assertions contradict the message of the Prophets. The only issue the Prophets are interested in is whether the universe is created or pre-eternal. Once the createdness of the universe is established, it does not matter whether the earth is round or flat, or how many levels the heavens comprise. All that matters is that this is the work of God. *And whosoever tries to refute these things for the sake of God’s religion has committed a crime against it, and in fact causes more harm to the sharī‘ah than its self-avowed detractors.*⁹³

From these two works, we see that the religious thought of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī transcends the peculiarities of his role as a resistance leader in French-occupied Algeria. Indeed, in decrying the arbitrary constrictions placed on the community of believers by *taqlīd*, in emphasizing the fundamental compatibility between revelation and reason, in embracing the material benefits of the scientific method, and in extolling the brotherhood between Muslims and Christians, the Amīr’s message speaks to religious reformism more broadly. In line with the thought of other major nineteenth-century Muslim intellectual figures, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s religious worldview seems to

⁹² Ibid., 107-108.

⁹³ Ibid., 108.

articulate a renewed critical engagement with the Islamic tradition in the aftermath of modernity, particularly under the yoke of European colonial rule. His engagement with religious *tajdīd*, moreover, comes to full fruition in the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*.

The Amīr’s deepest spiritual insights during this final chapter in his life are addressed most succinctly in his third and final book, the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fi al-Wa’z wal-Irshād* (The Book of Stops for Preaching and Guidance). Composed as a series of numbered aphorisms, offering commentary and interpretation on Qur’ānic verses and Ḥadīth reports, each *mawqif* (stop)—a reference to the stops between the stations on the Sufī path—was unmistakably infused with Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophical mysticism, both in content and in its highly associative linguistic style. These interpretations, moreover, were experienced by ‘Abd al-Qādir directly as mystical revelations from the Divine. The *Mawāqif*, then, offer a unique glimpse into the Amīr’s spiritual maturation during the final stage in his life.⁹⁴

Accordingly, I will be spending the bulk of this chapter focusing on the *Mawāqif*, with a particular emphasis on the spiritual reform methodology it articulates, and on the interpretation of that methodology in Western historiography. As full disclosure, I will not here be offering a meticulous primary analysis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophy more broadly, but will be relying on secondary sources and commentaries of Akbarī doctrine when necessary. My primary concern here, after all, is not Akbarī doctrine as such, but the Amīr’s use of that doctrine as the basis of a religious reform movement. As for the text of the *Mawāqif* itself, while I will be making direct reference to it here, I will also be relying on secondary sources as appropriate. My goal in this section is to offer a general

⁹⁴ Itzhak Weismann, “God and the Perfect Man in the Experience of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī,” *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 30 (Autumn 2001): 59.

overview of the *Mawāqif*'s reform methodology, rather than a detailed commentary of the text. That said, I will indeed offer a more rigorous analysis and commentary of the primary sources, with translation when appropriate, in the next chapter.

The *Kitāb al Mawāqif* and Islamic Revivalism

At its outset, the Amīr's spiritual project as articulated in the *Kitāb al Mawāqif* was one motivated by a strong sense of purpose, to rescue the Muslim *umma* by guiding it back to the true religion. He perhaps most succinctly articulates this sense of mission, and the centrality of Ibn 'Arabī and his teachings to accomplishing its objectives, by way of a dream. In it 'Abd al-Qādir relates seeing his spiritual master in the form of a lion, holding a large chain in its hand. The beast then commanded the Amīr to put his hand in its mouth and, despite his fear, he complied. Upon doing so, the lion reverted to Ibn 'Arabī's human form, with which 'Abd al-Qādir was intimately familiar, based on his many previous dreams featuring *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*. In fact, elsewhere in the *Mawāqif*, the Amīr reveals that it was in the liminal space of the dream world that he studied Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* directly with its author.⁹⁵ Though in this introductory vision, the great master was incoherent and confused (*majdhūb*), repeatedly uttering that he was going to die, before finally falling to the floor.⁹⁶

At this point the Amīr awakens, and proceeds to offer his interpretation of the vision. Ibn 'Arabī's appearance as a lion signifies his exalted status among the Sufi saints (*awliyā' Allah t'ālā*), while the chain in his hand represents the Islamic *sharī'ah*.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 164.

⁹⁶ 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, "Mawqif 346," in *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī al-Wa'z wa-al-Irshād* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Shabāb, 1911), 3: 68-9.

Putting his hand in the beast's mouth signifies 'Abd al-Qādir's dedication and reliance to the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, for he regarded all of his spiritual insights as having derived from the great master. As for *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*'s status as a *majdhūb*, 'Abd al-Qādir sees his master's confused state as indicative of the troubles of the time, with moderation—and, ostensibly, commitment to the *sharī'ah*—being lost amidst great changes. Amidst such a tumultuous period, the Amīr continues, Ibn 'Arabī, in repeatedly proclaiming he was going to die, was lamenting that the Muslims had come to disobey the commandments of Allah and His prophet, and of shunning their religion.⁹⁷

Seeing a crisis facing his religious community amidst the rapid transformation of Muslim society—brought on in no small part by the material realities of European colonialism—the Amīr took it upon himself to rescue the *ummah* and guide it back to the true faith. In his very first *mawqif*, he articulates the foundations for his Akbarī-inspired system of religious renewal. While maintaining that the Sufis do not bring anything new to the religion, he argues that they do have a new understanding of it. Their mystical insights neither violate nor reject the literal meaning of scripture, but they do find in them additional inner meanings which were hitherto unknown. Careful to anchor his position in the prophetic traditions, which testify to the many faces of the Qur'ān—unveiled by the Sufi path, and by reason—'Abd al-Qādir posits that mystical revelation may unveil an entirely new understanding of a verse or tradition that did not even cross the minds of previous generations of scholarly and Sufi commentators. “In 'Abd al-Qādir's eyes, the Qur'ān thus constitutes a source of perpetual renewal in Islam, facilitating ever new interpretations that do not contradict the tradition, but rather add to it new layers of

⁹⁷ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 163.

meaning, according to the revelations of the Sufi saints in every generation.”⁹⁸ The *Mawāqif*, moreover, constitute in large part such a renewed interpretation of scripture and tradition, as revealed to the Amīr by the spiritual unveiling along the Sufi path.

It is precisely because of his insistence that each generation of Sufi saints commands the capacity for renewing the Islamic tradition that the Amīr is so antagonistic towards the ‘*ulamā*’ of his day, whose blind acceptance of ancient scriptural commentaries (*taqlīd*) unnecessarily restricted the tradition’s regenerative potentialities. Still, despite his staunch opposition to the *taqlīd* of the traditional scholars of his day, whom he derisively refers to as “‘*ulamā*’ *al-rasm*, a term which may be rendered as “the formal scholars,” or as he himself defines them, “those who are content with the mere name of knowledge,”⁹⁹ ‘Abd al-Qādir instructs his disciples to avoid any outright confrontation with them. Instead, they should feel pity for their lot, even if they express indignation and actively conflict.¹⁰⁰

The Amīr is less forgiving, though, when he addresses the rationalist theologians (*mutakallimūn*), for whom he reserves his most scathing criticisms. In particular, he excoriates the *mutakallimūn* for attempting to know God through their intellects rather than through His divine providence. This is not to suggest that the Amīr discourages the use of reason; as his previous two volumes make clear, he sees the use of reason (‘*aql*’) as a religious requirement for believing Muslims. But with that said, he does caution his readers about the limits of reason. More specifically, “he repeatedly reiterates in the *Mawāqif* that reason can lead only to the point of acknowledging God's existence and

⁹⁸ Itzhak Weismann, “God and the Perfect Man,” 60.

⁹⁹ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 176.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

unity, beyond which divine guidance, as handed down by the prophets, becomes necessary."¹⁰¹ Reason, then, is sufficient for worldly matters, but is not a substitute for obeying revelation. ‘Abd al-Qādir finds the *mutakallimūn*’s reliance on unbridled reason particularly problematic, moreover, because the limits of their own logical principles put their approach at odds with his ever-renewing approach to scriptural exegesis. As Weismann explains, “‘Abd al-Qādir argues that what the rationalists regard as their God is something bounded and limited by their own logical principles. The God of the prophets and their followers, by contrast, is unbounded, unlimited, and capable of doing whatever He wishes, even that which the rationalists claim to be impossible.”¹⁰² Perpetually renewing the Islamic tradition to match the needs of each generation, the Amīr argues, is ill accomplished through the inherent restrictions of the intellect. Rather, it can only be fully realized through the boundless possibilities offered by the mystical unveiling of Divine knowledge. Put another way, the discursive approach of the theologians is inherently limited; the experiential approach of the Sufi path is not.

Having established scriptural renewal as the foundation of his methodology, ‘Abd al-Qādir moves on to posit Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the “Unity of Being”) as the center of the Akbarīyya doctrine.¹⁰³ ‘Abd al-Qādir views this idea of the Unity of Being as the mystical station of separation (*furqān*), in which God’s earthly creatures are perceived as subsisting in Him. In this station, “the divine attributes and the relative diversity are simultaneously present, and it is obligatory to fulfill the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰² Ibid., 179.

¹⁰³ I here lack the bandwidth to fully deal with the metaphysics underlying the concept—that would itself require a monograph-length study—but will do my best to approach the principle as succinctly as possible.

commandments and be concerned with worldly affairs, as required by the Shari‘a.”¹⁰⁴

Implying a mutuality between God and His creatures, Ibn ‘Arabī maintained that the two were as if mutually dependent: just as God’s creatures (in potential) require Him to be realized, God in turn requires His creatures to make manifest His manifestations. Based on this mutuality, ‘Abd al-Qādir, believed, the experiential knowledge of God as revealed through the Sufi path (*ma‘rifa*) is disclosed from a combination of these two perspectives, the divine and the earthly.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, those on the Sufi path are not exempt from their material responsibilities to engage worldly affairs.

Yet the Amīr is very clear to point out that this mutuality is not an endorsement of pantheism, as it is vested *entirely* in God, the only One who really exists. “Whatever is found on earth,” then, “is in a state of non-existence, and the perception of existence is merely an illusion of the senses or of the intellect.”¹⁰⁶ That said, ‘Abd al-Qādir, like Ibn ‘Arabī, makes a distinction between two different degrees of non-existence, one relative (*fanā’* or *thubūt*) and the other absolute (*‘adam maḥḍ*). In proclaiming that the entire world is imaginary, he clarifies, he is referring to a *relative* non-existence: the world is neither the essential truth (*‘ayn al-haqq*), nor is it wholly untrue (*ghayr al-haqq*), but within the truth one part is depicted as created, and the other as God. Beyond this, there is the absolutely existence of God within Himself, “which cannot be grasped and against which stands nothingness.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, “in the true reality (*al-wujūd al-haqīqī*) there is

¹⁰⁴ Itzchak Weismann, “God and the Perfect Man,” 61.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 62.

nothing but His exalted essence, while all the world is in the imaginary reality (*al-wujūd al-khayālī*).”

Furthermore, Ibn ‘Arabī’s system offers two stages by which God is manifested in this “imaginary reality.” First is His revelation to Himself in the world of the unseen (*‘ālam al-ghayb*) in the form of immutable essences yearning to be realized (*al-a‘yān al-thābita*). Only after this first stage does He reveal Himself in the *visible* world (*‘ālam al-shahāda*) through these immutable essences, in the form of actual appearances. The form of each appearance, though, is not determined by God in his capacity as Creator, but by the inherent capability (*isti‘dād*) of its immutable essence to reflect God. By extension, then, it is not God as Creator, in the second stage of His revelation (that is, His revelation in the visible world), that determines the character of man, but instead it is man’s predisposition of his own immutable essence, as already established beforehand in God’s revelation to Himself.¹⁰⁸

On the basis of this principle of *isti‘dād*, ‘Abd al-Qādir saw the potential to fully realize his yearning to adapt the Islamic tradition to the needs of his generation—while of course remaining faithful to the letter of the scripture, as discussed previously. For, if the Creator is revealed in the immutable essences according to their inherent predispositions, it follows that God conducts the visible world through the laws of nature. From this, ‘Abd al-Qādir argues that God cannot change man’s predestined inclination, as it emanates from his inner nature rather than from his conscious will. Accordingly, he concludes, in the “imaginary reality” in which man lives, he must acquiesce to his nature which demands him to rely on himself, rather than ask God for what does not suit him. By extension, this principle may be formulated thus that, since man must accept reality as

¹⁰⁸ Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 170-171.

it is, it is incumbent upon him to work within it rather than ask refuge from it in God.”¹⁰⁹

And since it is man’s potential disposition to know the world through his reason (‘*aql*), self-reliance based on his *isti’dād* necessarily implies acquiring the worldly sciences by his intellect.¹¹⁰

Based on this rationalist-oriented understanding of *isti’dād*, the Amīr posited a reform methodology that included three principal positions. One was an emphasis on the importance of science and reason for human well-being, and the need of the Muslims to fully utilize it to progress materially. This outlook is congruent not only with the discussion of *isti’dād* I outlined above, but also with the content of his two previous books, which similarly urged the need for Muslims to make use of their rational faculties. The second principal position in the Amīr’s scheme was a sense of kindness towards Christians. To be clear, he does not deny the duty of waging *jihād* against the opponent of Islam, until they pay the poll tax and are subdued, but he describes this as the most difficult requirement for the Sufis to oblige, and nonetheless stresses the need to have special compassion for the People of the Book.¹¹¹ It is this ethic, moreover, that undergirded the Amīr’s celebrated efforts to protect thousands of local Christians and European consuls from massacre in 1860. As a caveat, I should point out that the secondary literature does not adequately explain how this position fully relates to the Amīr’s adaptation of the Akbarīyya legacy; I will attempt to explore this question further in my own analysis of the primary sources, in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 182.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 190.

Third, he argues for an outright abstention from political affairs. Referring to the famous prophetic saying, enjoining Muslims to remove evil, be it by the hand, tongue, or heart, ‘Abd al-Qādir suggests that the Sufis, inasmuch as they realize man’s status as mere receptacles for reflecting God’s manifestation (according to his *isti’dād*), are absolved of this requirement to remove evil altogether.¹¹² The Amīr’s call to shun politics, moreover, was allegedly designed to prevent religious objection to the modernizing thrust of the Ottoman government’s Tanzimat reforms.¹¹³ And finally, it is worth mentioning that dissatisfaction with this quietist approach ultimately paved the way for the politically activist model of Ibn Taymiyya coming to dominate the religious and political scene in Damascus after ‘Abd al-Qādir’s death.¹¹⁴

Having outlined the basic tenets of the Amīr’s reform methodology, I will now move on to the reception and interpretation of that methodology in Western scholarship. Here I will be relying on the work of David Dean Commins, and of Itzhak Weismann, two Western scholars who have written in some detail about this period of the Amīr’s life. As we will see, despite both scholars coming to significantly different conclusions in their interpretations of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī’s role as a Muslim reformer, they nonetheless ground their positions on largely the same premises.

¹¹² Ibid., 191.

¹¹³ That is, according to Itzhak Weismann. I will address the veracity of the allegation in the next section.

¹¹⁴ Itzhak Weismann, “God and the Perfect Man,” 71.

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī through the eyes of his interpreters

David Dean Commins discusses ‘Abd al-Qādir’s life in Syria in the context of a study of Islamic reformist tendencies more broadly in late Ottoman Syria.¹¹⁵ Though his treatment of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s career and role as an Islamic reformer in this volume is quite brief, Commins does succinctly summarize the Amīr’s career in Algeria, and offers a compelling narrative of his career in exile, of his renewed emphasis on reason as articulated in the *Dhikrā*, and the impact on this rationalist trend in religious thought on the Salafi movement that later gained footing in Damascus.

Moreover, Commins further elaborates on the Amīr’s role as an Islamic reformer in a journal article dedicated exclusively to this issue.¹¹⁶ Here he more thoroughly discusses the religious thought of ‘Abd al-Qādir, as articulated in the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*, specifically in contradistinction to his earlier works. Arguing against the idea that the *Mawāqif* is a completion of the Amīr’s earlier works, Commins sees it as a shift in focus from a rationalist character to that of scripturalist Sufism. So convinced is Commins that the content of the *Mawāqif* marks a break in ‘Abd al-Qādir’s religious thought process that he goes through considerable effort to explain why the Amīr so dramatically shifted his outlook in this regard. He posits that the young ‘Abd al-Qādir’s early interactions with Shaykh Khālīd may have been responsible for his sharī‘ia-minded predilections, but, realizing that the Amīr did not spread Khālīd’s doctrine upon returning to Algeria, makes sure to qualify his speculation with the caveat “[w]hether or not al-Shaykh Khālīd profoundly influenced young ‘Abd al-Qādir we may never know unless documents

¹¹⁵ David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 26-30.

¹¹⁶ *Idem*, “‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Jazā’irī and Islamic Reform,” *Muslim World* 78 (1988): 121-131.

surface that shed more light on this episode.”¹¹⁷ “It is also possible,” Commins continues, “that when ‘Abd al-Qādir was in the Ḥijāz he came into contact with ulama sympathetic to the call of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, but we have no evidence of that.”¹¹⁸

Commins’ argument here strikes me as incoherent, for two reasons. First, it seems odd for him to be so flippantly speculative: if, as he admits, there is presently no evidence for the positions he advances, then why speculate about them in the first place? And second, despite all his efforts to draw a binary distinction between the emphasis on reason in the Amīr’s earlier books and the “*sharī‘ah*-minded Sufism” of the *Mawāqif*, he goes on to argue that the *Mawāqif* do not contradict the principles manifest in ‘Abd al-Qādir’s earlier work: “These strictures on the limits of reason do not represent an abandonment of Jazā’irī’s earlier essays, for they too drew a boundary between knowledge attainable by reason and knowledge accessible only through prophecy.”¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, despite the inconsistency of his argument and the tenuousness of his conjectures, it is quite clear that Commins unabashedly does not consider ‘Abd al-Qādir a Muslim reform figure in the truest sense of the expression: instead, he argues, “[w]hile al-Jazā’irī laid the foundation for Islamic reform in Damascus, he cannot be counted among its advocates or its early formulators. Rather he appears to represent a *sharī‘ah*-minded Sufi who elevated the place of reason in Islam.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 128.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ *Idem, Islamic Reform*, 30.

¹²⁰ *Idem*, “‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Jazā’irī and Islamic Reform,” 126.

This assessment is entirely at odds with the thesis brought forth by Itzhak Weismann, who not only sees the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī as a bona fide Islamic reformer, but who sees his Sufi treatise as the culmination—rather than an abandonment—of the reformist thought articulated in his first two books. Despite the different character of the Sufi-oriented *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* from his earlier works, Weismann insists, they were actually two different manifestations of the same teaching:

‘Abd al-Qādir evidently regarded his two first books as an explanation suitable for the level of understanding of the common people...These writings constitute, therefore, the external aspect of his teaching. ‘Abd al-Qādir’s collection of mystical passages, on the other hand...constitute the inner aspect of his teaching. As a sufi of the Akbarī school, ‘Abd al-Qādir viewed these two aspects as the two opposite standpoints from which the truth may be beheld: the divine standpoint, which is attained by means of mystical experience, and the human standpoint, which is acquired through logical judgment based on perception.¹²¹

Like Commins, Weismann acknowledges that the *Mawāqif* inveighs against the unrestricted reliance on reason. But unlike Commins, Weismann does not seem to think this contradicts the overall continuity of the Amīr’s reform project. As we have seen previously in the discussion of the Akbarī doctrine, man’s *isti’dād* enjoins on him the requirement to deal with reality according to his own natural disposition to know the material world through his intellect. Reason and mystical unveiling, Weismann would suggest, complement rather than oppose one another.

Moreover, Weismann sees the system of religious thought propagated in the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* as constituting a bona fide reform methodology. Like Commins, Weismann deals with the person of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī in the context of Islamic reform in late Ottoman Damascus more broadly. But unlike Commins, Weismann is

¹²¹ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 156-157.

deliberate in his engagement with the spiritual methodology articulated in the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*, going so far as to attempt to traverse the unfathomable depths of the Akbariyya doctrine which lay at the foundations of the Amīr’s final tome.¹²² In his monograph, Weismann discusses the Amīr’s use and interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine in the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*, and discusses the place of Akbariyya doctrine in the triumvirate of Islamic religious reformist trends in late Ottoman Damascus—first the Naqshbandīyya-Khālīdīyya, then the Akbarīyya, then finally the Salafīyya.

But Weismann does not stop there. Particularly in an article published in the *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society*, Weismann attempts to fully explicate the Amīr’s interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophical mysticism as a system for Islamic religious reform. Referring to a passage from the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* in which the Amīr sees Ibn ‘Arabī in a dream, Weismann argues that ‘Abd al-Qādir took on the Akbarīyya mantle specifically as a response to the troubles befalling the Muslims under the yoke of modernity; ‘Abd al-Qādir’s system of spiritual refinement, then, as articulated in his final tome, was to bring Islam in line with the needs of the modern world.¹²³ Weismann then elaborates on the Amīr’s specific use of tenets of the Akbarīyya doctrine to articulate: a renewed interest in reason and the scientific method; compassion towards religious minorities; and a commitment to humanism more broadly.¹²⁴

That said, despite the fundamentally different conclusions Weismann and Commins reach in their analysis of the Amīr as a reform figure, they both largely

¹²² Interestingly enough, Commins makes no reference whatsoever to Ibn ‘Arabī in either of his two publications on ‘Abd al-Qādir.

¹²³ Itzhak Weismann, “God and the Perfect Man,” 60.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 66.

coalesce on one major point, which will be my primary preoccupation in this section. That is, they both suggest that ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī’s interest in material progress and rationalism is ultimately contrived, or less than fully derived from Islamic principles per se. In Commins’ case, some of his comments on this issue are somewhat tame, and leave room for interpretation. But as a whole, they do seem to suggest this tendency, as I will demonstrate below.

For instance, he ends his journal article by pondering some of his uncertainties in comprehending ‘Abd al-Qādir’s thought process over the course of his career. In that discussion, he posits “[t]he stress on reason may have stemmed from the need for pragmatism in relations with the French, or alternatively during his sojourn in France, where he encountered Christian propaganda against Islam of the kind that inspired his 1848 essay.”¹²⁵ Then, he concludes this point, and the essay, by acknowledging that his argument is ultimately speculative: “[t]hese suggestions are of a hypothetical nature, and a more complete explanation of ‘Abd al-Qadir’s reformist tendencies can only emerge from a reevaluation of his life that integrates the various facets and stages of his career.”¹²⁶ I have already addressed the questionable nature of this sort of speculation, and thus won’t discuss that again here. But more importantly for our purposes, this appraisal by Commins, at face value, seems to suggest that the Amīr’s interest in reason was inorganic, so to speak. That is, it suggests that the Amīr’s stress and emphasis on reason in his religious thought process was either one based on expediency and opportunism, or somehow thrust upon him based on his interactions with the French, to defend Islam from its defamers. Again, this passage is not particularly detailed, and

¹²⁵ David Dean Commins, “‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Jazā’irī and Islamic Reform,” 131.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

leaves the possibility for several readings, of which the one I offer above may not be entirely accurate; Commins' brevity allows for ambiguity in its interpretation.

But in other passages, he is not as reserved or ambiguous on this issue. After outlining 'Abd al-Qādir's attitudes towards reason and revelation, as first articulated in his second book, *Dhikrā al- 'Āqil wa-Tanbīh al-Ghāfil*, Commins goes on to argue that the Amīr's position is an anomaly in the Islamic tradition:

The ideas Jazā'irī expressed on reason and revelation represented a minority position in the history of Islamic thought, one held by rationalist philosophers and which was gaining strength as the nineteenth century progressed. That tradition's elevation of reason was apposite to Muslims' search for indigenous sources to affirm the principles of science that seemed to lie at the basis of progress.¹²⁷

At this point Commins had established little more than that the Amīr advocated the use of reason and intellect instead of blindly placating authorities (that is, to rely solely on *taqlīd*), and that he saw rational knowledge as complementary to the understanding of revealed knowledge, which itself is irreplaceable. Despite Commins' claims to the contrary, such an outlook is not a particularly radical or contentious one in the trajectory of Islamic intellectual history. The tradition of Islamic dialectical theology, or *'ilm al-kalām*, for instance, operates on such a paradigm, as we have seen previously. Indeed, the Amīr excoriated the practitioners of *kalām*, the *mutakallimūn*, for relying *excessively* on their intellect to know God, to the detriment of the mystical unveiling characteristic of the spiritual path. The *kalām* tradition, moreover, enjoyed a perfectly healthy status in

¹²⁷ *Idem, Islamic Reform*, 27.

the history of Islamic thought, having been practiced by some of the most revered figures in what is typically considered Islamic orthodoxy, namely Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.¹²⁸

It is rather grandiose, then, for Commins to claim that such an uncontroversial position “represented a minority position in the history of Islamic thought.” Commins is correct to the extent that rationalist philosophy (that is, the tradition of *falsafa*) could reasonably be considered a minority position, but his argument here is highly reductionist, for as we have seen in the case of *kalām*, the *falsafa* tradition claimed no monopoly over the formula advocated here by the Amīr (that is, the acceptability of reason as a mode of inquiry, and its compatibility with revelation.) In reducing rationality to the *falsafa* tradition, and in ultimately suggesting that deference to blind *taqlīd* while shunning the exercise of reason was intellectually normative throughout the Islamic tradition, Commins’ analysis here seems grossly oversimplified.

In contradistinction to Commins’ analysis, Itzhak Weismann is even less reserved on this issue. Repeatedly in his work on the Amīr, he unequivocally suggests that ‘Abd al-Qādir’s reform methodology was motivated by a desire to appropriate Western rationalism—the implication, of course, being that the Amīr acknowledged rationalism as Western as such. This impulse, Weismann argues, was first cultivated during his confinement in France:

The decisive period in the spiritual development of Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī was deferred, however, until after his surrender to the French in 1847. Contrary to the stipulations of the treaty signed with him, ‘Abd al-Qādir was taken under guard to France. Here he initially enjoyed a certain amount of freedom, thanks to which he became one of those few Muslim reformers, such as the Young Ottomans and the Egyptian Rifā‘a al-Taḥṭāwī, who were

¹²⁸ For more on the *kalām* tradition, and its acceptance in the Islamic mainstream, see Tim Winter (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

able to realize at first hand the material progress attained by Europe through its new rationalist--scientific approach. In the wake of the 1848 revolution 'Abd al-Qādir's situation deteriorated, as his large entourage was separated from him and he was allowed almost no contact with the outside world. In this period of disillusionment and despair he went through an acute spiritual crisis, which led him to the teaching of Ibn 'Arabī.¹²⁹

Immediately following this passage, Weismann footnotes two texts: a section from a historical biography composed by 'Abd al-Qādir's son Muḥammad,¹³⁰ and a section from a book by Jawād Murābiṭ, dealing specifically with 'Abd al-Qādir's relationship to Sufism.¹³¹ But surprisingly, neither of these two selections seems to support or justify the assertions Weismann is making. The selection from Murābiṭ's book discusses how the the Amīr did indeed undergo a spiritual crisis while being imprisoned by the French—during which he eventually sees the Prophet Muḥammad in a dream—and ends with a conversion to the thought of al-Shaykh Muḥyī al-dīn Ibn 'Arabī. Yet nowhere in the passage does Murābiṭ invoke any discussion of European material progress, its rationalist worldview, or the Amīr's having been impressed by it.

The passage from the *Tuḥfat al-za'ir*, moreover, similarly lacks any such reference. The nearly twenty-page selection certainly does refer to the Amīr's stay in French captivity, his negotiations with the French in this respect, and his being repeatedly transferred to different locations, but there is no mention whatsoever of the Amīr's purported admiration of European rationalism during this period. In fact, not only does the selection make no reference to 'Abd al-Qādir's being impressed by Europe's new

¹²⁹ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 150.

¹³⁰ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, *Tuḥfat al-za'ir fī Tārīkh al-Jazā'ir wa-al-Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir* (Beirut: Dar al-Yaqza al-'Arabīyyah, 1964), 514-530.

¹³¹ Jawād Murābiṭ, *Al-Taṣawwuf Wa-Al-Amīr 'Abd Al-Qādir Al-Ḥasanī Al-Jazā'irī* (Dimashq: Dār al-Yaqzah al-'Arabīyyah lil-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1966), 18.

rationalist-scientific approach, but it specifically refers to the Amīr bemoaning his mistreatment at the hands of his captors. After all, he had been promised clemency in exchange for his surrender, only for the French to renege on their agreement and instead incarcerate him. Under such inauspicious circumstances, it would not be unreasonable for the Amīr to have a less-than-positive outlook toward the French. For instance, shortly after realizing that he had been double-crossed, and lamenting the fact that he and his men were duped into French incarceration, he has the following gut-wrenching exchange with the French Colonel Dumas:

As the Amir's grief became even more intense, the Colonel Dumas began to speak to him with kind words, and with amiability and good will. And the Amir replied:

If things remain in this state much longer, many of us will undoubtedly die out of sadness. And I am the only one responsible for this. Because no one thought it was a good idea to come to the French, except me. And the thing that deceived me, and delivered me into their hands, is their claim that they are a people that do not violate their covenants, and do not go back on their promise. But in fact, these people don't know how to hold a promise... Or, better yet, they do make covenants, but only covenants predicated on lies and deception.

If I knew that there were a just court or political body anywhere in this entire country, one that hears the claims of the wrong and oppressed, and delivers them justice against their opponent... Or if there were a king with enough power to do this... Then I would have raised my case. And maybe they would have helped me, and maybe they would have taken my side.

At this the colonel could not say or do anything, except express his deep regret and heartache over the situation. And it's in God's hands!!!¹³²

¹³² Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, *Tuḥfat al-za'ir*, 519.

Such an elegy, suffice it to say, is barely recognizable from the propitious account offered by Weismann. And Weismann's optimism in this respect is not limited to the passage quoted above, for nowhere in any of his writings does he offer even cursory acknowledgment 'Abd al-Qādir's feelings of mistreatment and resentment towards the French. Not only, then, do the sources Weismann footnotes here make no reference to the Amīr appreciating European rationalism, but they raise the possibility that Weismann's assertions more generally may be counterfactual or embellished. This is not to suggest that the Amīr's experience in French captivity can be reduced to the passage I translated above, but the fact that his overall feelings of betrayal are entirely absent from Weismann's report suggests a serious omission on his part.

Nonetheless, Weismann unhesitatingly presses on with this thesis, insisting on a binary relationship between the Amīr's conceptualization and newfound appreciation for Europe on the one hand, and his spiritual development on the other. Later on the same page, he proceeds to justify his position under the auspices of the Amīr's change of heart toward the French (emphasis mine):

The new attitude that 'Abd al-Qādir adopted *toward Western civilization* in consequence of his experience in France became apparent after his release by Napoleon III in 1852. He now participated in various official events and enjoyed conversing with generals and scientists... While on a visit to Paris during the Crimean War, 'Abd al-Qādir took part in a prayer of thanksgiving in the Church of Notre Dame, and expressed his admiration for the technical innovations he saw in the international exhibition then taking place in the French capital.¹³³

'Abd al-Qādir's willingness to engage French officials in cooperative conversation may indeed indicate a new attitude toward the French, but does it suggest a new attitude

¹³³ Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 150.

toward Western Civilization *tout court*? Without knowing more about the auspices of the meetings in question, this assertion seems problematic.

Weismann ends this selection by footnoting a well-known biography of ‘Abd al-Qādir composed by British officer Charles Henry Churchill, based largely on the Amīr’s own dictations. But surprisingly, rather than rely on the English-language original, he instead refers to an Arabic-language translation as his reference.¹³⁴ I can only speculate as to why Weismann made such a decision, but nevertheless, I went through the Arabic translation and found the reference in question. Rather than translate it here myself, though, I will instead rely on the relevant passage from the original, which reads:

Whilst Abdel Kader was in Paris, the news of the fall of Sebastopol arrived. He was asked to assist at the celebration of the *Te Deum* in Notre Dame; and he was told that the Emperor would be flattered by his presence on the occasion. Though prostrated by a recent severe illness, he consented to go. No small sensation was created amongst the vast throng which filled the cathedral, as Abdel Kader advanced up to the altar, leaning on the arm of a French marshal, and accompanied by other officers of rank. On leaving it he was loudly cheered. The principal aide-de-camp of the Minister of War conducted him over the International Exhibition, which on the year of this visit made Paris the rendezvous of all the civilized world. After viewing all the varied productions which it contained, he paused for a long time in perfect astonishment at the marvellous [sic] elaborations of machinery which expanded in various compartments before his eyes. Then he suddenly exclaimed, “Surely this is the temple of reason and intelligence, animated by the breath of God.”¹³⁵

This passage certainly suggests a more amiable relationship between the Amīr and French officers, and that he was undoubtedly impressed by the technical advances he

¹³⁴ Charles Henry Churchill, *Ḥayāt al-Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir*, trans. Abu al-Qāsim Sa’d Allāh (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyyah lil-Nashi, 1974), 275-276.

¹³⁵ Charles Henry Churchill, *The Life of Abdel Kader, Ex-Sultan of the Arabs of Algeria; Written from His Own Dictation, and Compiled from Other Authentic Sources* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), 303-304.

witnessed at the International Exhibition. Moreover, it clearly conveys his astute realization that these projects on display were the fruits of reason and intellect. But that said, nowhere in this passage does he assign or acquiesce ownership of the intellectual methodology undergirding these innovations to the French, or to Europe. Indeed, from this passage, we cannot intelligently discern much of anything about the Amīr’s attitude toward “Western Civilization,” particularly given that the entity in question is left so nebulous and ill-defined by Weismann. Weismann’s assertion here, then, reads as reductionist, and ultimately unsupported by the evidence he presents.

Yet despite not having adequately justified the claim, Weismann continues, throughout the corpus of his writings, to ground his analysis of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī on the presupposition that the Amīr capitulated rationalism as having originated in the West. As we have seen, the sources he has cited thus far have not adequately supported this position, and some (namely in the *Tuḥfat al-za’ir*) ostensibly contradict it. Nonetheless, moving forward Weismann does even more of a disservice to his cause, by continuing to argue this position without offering any qualifying references for it whatsoever. For instance, in explaining the Amīr’s sense of mission to rescue his coreligionists from certain crisis, Weismann asserts that ‘Abd al-Qādir, unlike his predecessor Shaykh Khālīd, perceptively “realized that this regression could not any more be explained solely by the internal weakness of the Muslim world, but rather was principally due to the undeniable superiority achieved by the European Powers.”¹³⁶ Realizing as much, he thus “sought to integrate his profound religious faith with the rationalist mode of thinking underlying the achievements of the West” as the basis of his reform methodology, urging his fellow Muslims “of the necessity to abandon the practice

¹³⁶ Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 164.

of blind imitation which so pervaded their scholarship in the latter generations and to make use of their own reason, as the Europeans did.”¹³⁷ This is not to suggest, the argument continues, a blanket adoption of Western rationalism in all its facets: “preservation of Islam in an age of Western supremacy,” required “acquir[ing] the practical sciences which provided the West with its power” while firmly excluding the Western rational method from the revealed sciences, lest it lead to skepticism and disaffection from religion as it did in Europe.¹³⁸ Or, put another way, “the Islamic response to the Western rationalist challenge must begin with reforming Muslim orthodoxy from within,”¹³⁹ by “adopt[ing] the Western rationalist approach to worldly affairs while, at the same time, barring it from the religious sciences, particularly theology.”¹⁴⁰

In each of the selections quoted above, Weismann fails to offer a single footnote or reference to ground his assertions. Nevertheless, Weismann continues throughout the entirety of his writings to inject Europe and the West as ‘Abd al-Qādir’s primary referent. Weismann’s descriptions and explications of the Amīr’s reform methodology, unsurprisingly, are repeatedly peppered with this tendency. The first scheme in this reform system, Weismann begins, is “an emphasis on the importance of science for human well-being, which reflected ‘Abd al-Qādir’s recognition of the material supremacy achieved by Europe and the Muslims’ need to appropriate it.”¹⁴¹ The second

¹³⁷ Ibid., 157.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 164-165.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 165.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 191.

¹⁴¹ Itzhak Weismann, “God and the Perfect Man,” 63.

scheme in this tripartite reform system, he continues, is compassion toward Christians, “which expressed his still basically religious perception of the West.”¹⁴² Weismann explains the third and final scheme, the call to shun politics, in the context of the Muslim commandment to remove evil whenever possible. As I mentioned earlier, ‘Abd al-Qādir deemed Sufis exempt from this requirement altogether. After establishing as much, Weismann explains the phenomenon as being “clearly a call to completely shun politics, which reflected ‘Abd al-Qādir’s readiness to overlook the Westernizing thrust of the late Tanzimat statesmen for the sake of modernization.”¹⁴³ Once again, Weismann here offers no footnotes or references at all to justify framing ‘Abd al-Qādir’s religious reform system in binary opposition to Europe or the West, or of suggesting the Amīr’s interest in the Tanzimat reforms lay in its purportedly “Westernizing thrust”; a Western referent is simply assumed *a priori*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I hoped to provide a succinct overview of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī’s spiritual ripening, and the overall tenets of the methodology of religious renewal as he articulated them in his writings—particularly in his *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*. Against this backdrop, the implications of the *Mawāqif*’s reception in Western historiography become far more evident: the Amīr’s interest in religious and spiritual renewal, the secondary literature seems to assert, is ultimately predicated on a desire to emulate a rationalist worldview that originated in the West. Yet as we have seen, particularly in the work of Itzchak Weismann, the evidence presented thus far does not

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 191.

seem to support or justify this presupposition, and in some cases seems to outright contradict it. Given as much, these historiographical accounts ultimately offer an incomplete understanding of how ‘Abd al-Qādir’s truly conceptualized his system of spiritual renewal—particularly as it relates to the West—in point of actual fact.

Given the limitations of the existing secondary literature, the only way to more fully discern the nuances of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir’s spiritual thought process is to consult the *Mawāqif* themselves. As I mentioned previously, the brevity of this thesis does not allow for a full reading of the *Mawāqif* in their entirety, so as a compromise I will do a selective reading, based on the *Mawāqif* cited in the historiographical literature—particularly in the accounts offered by Itzhak Weismann. From this primary source analysis, we can hopefully make more intelligent sense of the Amīr’s conceptualization of religious reform. In particular, we can hopefully better discern how, if at all, he conceptualizes the West in the formulation of his spiritual *weltanschauung*. That is to say, did he view the rationalist method he sought to inculcate among his co-religionists—as articulated in his understanding of *isti’dād*—as originating from Western civilization? Or did he view it as an organic part of his own Islamic tradition? Or is his attitude in this respect not altogether transparent? In other words, did the Amīr see the West, or Western civilization, as his referent when constructing and conceptualizing his reform methodology? It is to this question that we shall turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī in his own words: A study of the

Kitāb al-Mawāqif

At face value, the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* does not seem to operate on any particular organizational logic. That is to say, recurring themes and topics of spiritual inquiry do not appear to be grouped into similar sections of the volume. Instead, it proceeds with numbered aphorisms (*mawāqif*) appearing in ascending order, without any given *mawqif* necessarily bearing any connection with the *mawqif* that preceded it. This lack of thematic continuity in the text’s arrangement makes it somewhat elusive to focus on a particular area of the Amīr’s intellectual inquiry—in this case, his attitude toward reason. That said, even when limited to the relevant sections of the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* cited by Weismann, the material is rich enough to provide a critical insight into the matter at hand. To be clear, this reading is not comprehensive, but it nonetheless offers an instructive vista into the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir’s understanding of religious reform, and in particular, how the West factors into his spiritual calculus.

As I intimated in the last chapter, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s taking up of the Akbarīyya mantle was not incidental, but was part of an impassioned attempt to confront the profound social and spiritual challenges facing the Muslims of his day. Dismayed and distressed at the beleaguered state of the Muslim *umma*, the Amīr was prompted by an urgent sense to take the lead in changing the Muslim condition. In fact, as we shall see shortly, he goes so far as indicate that he considered himself specifically ordained for this arduous task. This urgent sense of mission ultimately led him to embrace the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī as the solution the existential challenges facing the *umma*.

The question then becomes, what prompted the Amīr's sense of distress? What in the Muslim condition of his day was so deficient or lacking to lead to his spiritual awakening in this respect in the first place? According to Itzhak Weismann's accounts, as we have seen in the last chapter, this deficiency 'Abd al-Qādir saw in his religious community reflected his realization of Europe's having gained supremacy over the Muslims, through its use and embrace of reason, and through the material advancements offered by the natural sciences. His spiritual mission in this respect, it follows, was motivated by a desire to overcome the stagnation befalling the Muslims due to their having insufficiently embraced European rationalism. But as we shall see shortly, a careful reading of the Amīr's own words on this matter in the *Mawāqif* suggests that his sense of mission, and his angst over the state of the Muslim *umma* at the time, was far more sophisticated than a mere desire to master any winning European formula for success.

The Roots of 'Abd al-Qādir's Spiritual Vocation

In his article published in *Die Welt des Islams*, Itzhak Weismann begins to articulate the urgent sense of calling that underlay the Amīr's spiritual thought. More specifically, he suggests that the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* was a project motivated by the realization of European rational dominance over the Muslims, and the pressing desire to protect the *umma* from being subdued entirely. More specifically, he argues:

'Abd al-Qādir's collection of spiritual experiences after settling in Damascus, which is entirely stamped in the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī, indicates his urgent sense of mission, derived from his realization of European supremacy over the Muslim world. To preserve the Muslim faith in the face of the rationalist challenge of the

West, ‘Abd al-Qādir urged his co-religionists to approach the West and master the practical sciences that lay at the base of its power. On the other hand, he warned them to completely remove rationalism from the religious sciences, lest it would lead, like it had done in Europe, to disbelief.¹⁴⁴

To bolster his argument, Weismann cites three separate sections of the *Mawāqif*. More specifically, in the first sentence, immediately after the word “mission,” he cites pages 142-3 of volume 1 of the *Mawāqif*. Then, at the end of the second and third sentences, he cites, respectively, page 86 and 236 of the same volume. But shockingly, these passages he cites offer very little justification for the position he forwards here.

Pages 142-3 of volume 1 mark the first two pages of *mawqif* 83. In this *mawqif*, surprisingly enough, ‘Abd al-Qādir makes no reference whatsoever to his sense of spiritual mission, much less of it being derived from European supremacy over the Muslim world! Rather, the passage revolves around concept of blessing (*ni‘ma*) from an Islamic framework. More specifically, the Amīr suggests that knowledge itself is a blessing—the greatest blessing, in fact. He then goes on to subdivide knowledge into two categories: the knowledge of practice, and the knowledge of speech.¹⁴⁵ There is no discussion at all in this passage of the Amīr’s coming to spiritual maturity, or of the motivations behind his taking up the mantle of reformism in the first place.

Weismann’s interpretation of page 86 of the *Mawāqif*, moreover, is equally problematic, as it as well bears no ostensible relevance to the actual content of the text being quoted. This passage refers to a discussion of causality more broadly, in which the Amīr creates a categorical distinction between the fortunes of the material world and

¹⁴⁴ Itzhak Weismann, “Between Šūfī Reformism and Modernist Rationalism: A Reappraisal of the Origins of the Salafiyya from the Damascene Angle,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 41, no. 2 (July 2001): 217.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, “Mawqif 83,” in *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī al-Wa‘z wa-al-Irshād* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Shabāb, 1911), 1: 142-143.

those of the spiritual world. In the context of this discussion, he states that the fortune that is bestowed from God encapsulates both the fortunate of the spirit and the intellect, and that this has been proven in the worldly sciences and in the spiritual sciences.¹⁴⁶ There is no discussion at all in this passage of the Amīr’s spiritual maturation, of his engagement with the West, or of his urging his co-religionists to engage the “practical sciences that lay at the base of its power.” In short, the passage Weismann quotes has no palpable relevance whatsoever to the position he puts forward.

In the final passage Weismann quotes here, fortunately, the content of the text being referenced does not seem altogether irrelevant. But even then, the source does not seem to go as far as he suggests. As Weismann intimates, in page 236 of volume 1 of the *Mawāqif* ‘Abd al-Qādir indeed does go so far as suggest that the use of reason is not without its limits. More specifically, he cautions his reader that the benefits of reason are wholly inferior to the knowledge acquired through the process of spiritual unveiling.¹⁴⁷ That said, he makes no reference to Europe or European unbelief here. He does refer to “freethinkers and naturalists” (*al-dahrīyya wa l-ṭabā’īya*) as being particularly susceptible to this excessive reliance on reason, but it is unclear whether this is intended to refer to Europeans as such. Elsewhere Weismann argues that this is the case, claiming in his book that these two terms “in ‘Abd al-Qādir’s time came to denote the Westerners and their Muslim imitators.”¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately Weismann does little to justify the assertion, so barring a more expansive literary review of Arabic terminology in

¹⁴⁶ Idem., “Mawqif 45,” in *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī al-Wa’z wa-al-Irshād* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Shabāb, 1911), 1: 86.

¹⁴⁷ Idem., “Mawqif 118,” in *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī al-Wa’z wa-al-Irshād* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Shabāb, 1911), 1: 236.

¹⁴⁸ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafīyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 178.

nineteenth-century Syria, its veracity is unclear. And even assuming that these two terms did legitimately refer to “Westerners and their Muslim imitators,” as he suggests, the Amīr’s commentary here in totality nonetheless has little to do with his motivations for embarking on his campaign of religious renewal. In other words, the sections of the *Mawāqif* Weismann cites here simply do not support the position he puts forward, for they don’t give his reader *any* conclusive understanding of the Amīr’s motivations for taking up the mantle of spiritual reform.

What, then, are we to make of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s motivations for embarking on this journey? Fortunately, elsewhere Weismann makes references to passages of the *Mawāqif* that indeed deal with this critical issue, and do so profusely. In particular, in his book he makes reference to the Amīr’s dream featuring none other than Ibn ‘Arabī himself, which rather succinctly delineates some of the concerns we seek to address here. I briefly summarized this dream and its implications in the last chapter, but for the sake of extracting the full interpretative possibility of the epochal event, I will translate it here in part. In *mawqif* 346, ‘Abd al-Qādir sees Ibn ‘Arabi in the form of a lion with a large chain in its paw. Then, the beast commanded the Amīr to put his hand in its mouth, and upon doing so, the lion reverted to the great master’s human form. Though in this instance, he was utterly incoherent and confused (*majdhūb*), repeatedly uttering that he was about to die, before ultimately falling to the floor. After describing the dream, the Amīr offers his interpretation of its significance:

The chain in its left (paw) referred to the Islamic *sharī‘ah*...His appearance as a deranged man referred to the troubles of the time, and the loss of moderation amidst great changes. Finally, his proclamation of death signified a deep sense of regret over what had become of Islam, with

the Muslims defying the commandments of their Lord and their Prophet, and shunning their religion.¹⁴⁹

From this dream, we see no indication whatsoever that ‘Abd al-Qādir’s spiritual mission was derived from any recognition of European material supremacy. The Amīr indeed appears motivated by a sense of urgency and vision, but as he states, this urgency is derived from the fact that the Muslims have *lost* their commitment to their own tradition. If the Amīr’s primary lamentation is that Muslims have been insufficiently committed to their religion in the aftermath of tumultuous changes, it simply does not make sense to suggest that he would subsequently be urging his co-religionists to adopt or appropriate methods of a wholly different tradition (that is, the Western tradition Weismann speaks of) as a viable solution to the problems the *umma* now faces. ‘Abd al-Qādir’s preoccupation with reforming the Muslim condition, in fact, seems to have little to do with *any* European referent to speak of. Whatever the details of the solution he seems to advocate for Muslim reform, it seems from the text thus far that he intends to extract it organically from the Islamic heritage itself, rather than borrow from an intellectual source he regards as foreign.

With that said, though we now have a more informed understanding of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s motivations for undertaking his spiritual mission, what I have presented thus far tells us little about how he plans on rectifying the ills befalling Muslims of his day. To fully grasp this aspect of the Amīr’s thought process, we must explore the intricacies of his reform methodology as he laid it out. It is to this that I shall now turn. As I intimated in the last chapter, his unique understanding of the Qur‘ān as perpetually offering new insights to successive generations is paramount to his spiritual worldview.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, “Mawqif 346,” in *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī al-Wa‘z wa-al-Irshād* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Shabāb, 1911), 3: 69.

The Qur‘ān as Source for Perpetual Renewal

In the very first *mawqif*, ‘Abd al-Qādir reveals to his reader the methodological backbone of his system of spiritual renewal. As I briefly summarized in the last chapter, he saw in the Qur‘ān a source of perpetual religious renewal, with each generation of Sufi saints receiving additional meanings of its verses. He opens the *mawqif* by quoting verse 33:21 of the Qur‘ān, “Verily, you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent model.” Then, in explaining how he came to learn this verse, he reveals the “secret spiritual modality” that came to inform his knowledge of scripture more broadly:

I have received this precious verse through a secret spiritual modality. In fact, when Allah wishes to communicate an order or an interdiction to me, announce good news or warn me, teach me some knowledge or respond to a question that I have asked Him, it is His practice to remove me from myself—without my exterior form being affected—and then to project on me that which He wishes through a subtle allusion contained in a verse of the Koran. After that, He restores me to myself, furnished with this verse, consoled and filled. He then sends me an inspiration concerning that which He wished to tell me through this verse. The communication of this verse proceeds without sound or letter and cannot be assigned to any direction of space.¹⁵⁰

Thus, the Amīr acquires additional layers of meaning of scripture through unveiling from the Divine Himself. He goes on to explain that he had received knowledge of half of the Qur‘ān through this mystical unveiling, and had hoped to be revealed the entirety of the holy book in his lifetime in the same vein. All the verses he addresses in the *Mawāqif*, moreover, were received through this process.

Furthermore, though he admits here to having acquired new meanings of the Qur‘ān hitherto unknown by his coreligionists, he makes clear that the mystical unveiling

¹⁵⁰ Idem., “Mawqif 1,” in *The Spiritual Writings of Amir ‘Abd Al-Kader*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. James Chrestensen and Tom Manning (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995), 161.

he speaks of is not a substitute for previously revealed knowledge. Indeed, the Sufis in no way purport to compromise the timelessness of scripture in its literal sense. Instead, while respecting the literal meaning of the text, they purport to uncover additional meanings that augment rather than replace previously revealed meanings:

The People of our Way—may Allah be pleased with them!—have never claimed to bring anything new in spiritual matters, but simply to discover new meanings in the immemorial Tradition...Everything which is found on this page, and everything which is found in these *Mawāqif*, is of this nature. It is Allah who speaks the Truth, and it is He who guides on the straight path.¹⁵¹

Having established as much, he returns to the Qur'ānic verse cited in the opening of the *mawqif*, and explicates the richness of its meanings acquired through this process of mystical revealing. Deeming this edification to the Prophet of Islam as an “immense ocean, without beginning or end,” the Amīr sees in it the source for all the sciences, both the religious and the worldly sciences alike.¹⁵² For at first glance, he argues, the verse concerns itself with God's relationship and attitude toward Muḥammad. From that perspective, the verse concerns itself with knowing Allah and His infinite attributes:

From this point of view the introductory verse embraces infinite and inaccessible knowledge; comprising knowledge of Allah, His attributes, His independence with respect to His creatures and their dependence on Him; and knowledge of the Messengers, what is incumbent on them, what is permitted to them and what is prohibited to them; and knowledge of the divine Wisdom in their creation, and the procession of this world and of the other world.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 162.

¹⁵² Ibid., 163.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 164.

Accordingly, insofar as the verse from this viewpoint deals with discerning knowledge of the Divine, in this sense it forms the basis for the science of dialectical theology. Yet this is only the beginning of the verse's interpretative possibilities. From another perspective, it instead concerns itself with Muḥammad's attitude toward Allah, and by extension the process of worship and devotion embedded in that relationship between the Creator and his Messenger:

From another point of view this model concerns the comportment of the Messenger towards his Lord, the perfect Realization of what servitude means, the accomplishment of everything which Lordship demands, his total dependence upon God (*al-faqr ilayhi*) and his total abandonment to Him in all things, his submission to His power and his satisfaction in everything He decrees, his gratitude for the graces which He grants and his patience in the trials which He inflicts. This aspect of the verse relates to the limitless and innumerable sciences concerning the sacred Law and concerning acts of worship and the ordinary acts of existence, practices leading to salvation and practices leading to perdition.¹⁵⁴

The verse from this perspective, then, forms the basis for the sciences of religious law and worship.

Yet the Amīr does not stop here. Just as the supplication of the Messenger of Allah as an excellent model speaks to Muḥammad's relationship with God (and vice versa), 'Abd al-Qādir also sees in this verse an encapsulation of the Prophet's relationship with humanity more broadly. And in the nuances of this relationship, he acquires an even deeper understanding of the foundations of the sciences. In the attitude of man towards Allah's Apostle, he sees the basis of knowledge of the Prophet's merits and virtues:

From yet another point of view, this relates to the comportment of men toward the Prophet...This category of interpretation of this verse is connected to the inexhaustible

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 164.

knowledge of the virtues of the Prophet and of his teachings and the virtues and teachings of the other prophets and gnostics, and of the trials which they all had to endure from those who treated them as impostors.¹⁵⁵

This interpretation of the verse, in other words, is connected to the science of discerning Prophetic conduct and teachings, both of Muḥammad and the Prophets that preceded him. Additionally, this science deals with the history and hagiography of the great saints (*awliyā*), and of their virtues and attributes.

Finally, ‘Abd al-Qādir interprets this Qur’ānic verse, from the perspective of the Prophet’s attitude toward humanity, as offering a vista into the practical sciences of proper human conduct in the *dunyā*. More specifically:

This can also be understood as the comportment of the Prophet toward the creatures, of the love which he had for them, of the good that he wished for them...This aspect of the verse is connected to the knowledge—which pens cannot transcribe nor minds enclose—of the noble attributes and perfect virtues, and to the science of the governing of men in the affairs of religion as well as the affairs of the world with a view toward good order and the prosperity of the universe and the happiness of the elect. (165)

From this prism, then, the same Qur’ānic verse that provides us with basis of the religious sciences—of theology, Islamic law, Sufism, and the study of Prophet and saintly *aḥādīth*—also provides us with an ethical blueprint for how to conduct ourselves and govern our affairs in the ephemeral world.

In beginning the *Mawāqif* with this example, the Amīr sets the stage for a theosophical approach that remains firmly embedded in the scriptural tradition, yet simultaneously allows him the flexibility to challenge the zeitgeist of his day. Moreover, from the very inception of the *Mawāqif* we see a commitment to addressing material

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 164-165.

concerns of the *dunyā*. This is to say, ‘Abd al-Qādir was not an armchair philosopher exclusively concerned with the mystical path to salvation, but in his spiritual approach he saw it equally necessary to weigh in on the ephemeral concerns facing the Muslims of his day. In this *mawqif* he expresses a strong interest in man learning proper conduct in governing the affairs of the world. And as we saw briefly in the last chapter, he saw proper worldly conduct of man governed not by fatalism, but by man’s essential and innate predispositions, or man’s *isti’dād*.

Isti’dād, Free Will, and Reason

It is on this basis, of man acting according to his *isti’dād*, that ‘Abd al-Qādir bases his understanding of justice, and of free will. In *Mawqif* 23, he quotes verse 18:46 of the Qur’ān (Sūrat al-Kahf), which refers to the idea that thy Lord does not harm or oppress anyone (*wa lā yaḍhlimu rabbuka aḥadan*), and then goes on to qualify that the Lord will never be unjust because created things, through their own capacities (*isti’dādāt*), seek out from Him to manifest in them that which they necessitate. This capacity, moreover, is universal, is neither made nor created, and is not borne of created beings’ actions themselves.¹⁵⁶ The Lord’s being just, then, is inherent in the pre-determined decree of nature. For although in His act He has absolute choice, he can nonetheless “only act according to the measure of the essential predispositions (*isti’dādāt*) and according to the nature of the receptacles of His theophanies. This conditioning by the essences of the things imposes itself on God Himself and it is in conformity with what they are that He

¹⁵⁶ Idem., “Mawqif 23,” in *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī al-Wa‘z wa-al-Irshād* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Shabāb, 1911), 1: 59-60.

manifests Himself in them.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, it follows that (emphasis mine) “[i]n everything His act and His choice are *according to what the essence of that thing demands*.”¹⁵⁸

In arguing that the Lord acts precisely according to the nature and essence of His theophanies, ‘Abd al-Qādir is suggesting that the worldly aspect of His revelation requires man to be self-reliant, rather than seek from God that which does not suit him. In this “imaginary reality” of ‘Abd-al-Qādir’s theosophical system of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, man must work within reality rather than seek refuge from God to change it for him. For man, this implies engaging the world discursively, using his natural intellect, as that is his *isti’dād*.¹⁵⁹ It is on this basis, it seems, that ‘Abd al-Qādir has grounded his interest in the use of the worldly sciences as necessary for Muslim advancement.

It is also on this basis, Weismann, argues, that the Amīr justifies the need to borrow the fruits of European reason. As man must accept reality for what it is, rather than seek divine intervention to alter it, Muslims of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s day were thus required to accept the reality of Europe’s rationalist method having led to its having achieved superiority over the Muslim *umma*. ‘Abd al-Qādir’s interest in science for human well-being, the argument follows, “reflected ‘Abd al-Qādir’s recognition of the material supremacy achieved by Europe and the Muslims’ need to appropriate it.”¹⁶⁰ But a close reading of *mawqif* 364—which Weismann himself cites, as I will discuss shortly—casts serious doubt on this being the case. Here he is asked by some of his companions whether Muslims should, given their having been defeated by the Christians,

¹⁵⁷ Idem., “Mawqif 227,” in in *The Spiritual Writings of Amir ‘Abd Al-Kader*, 119.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 182.

¹⁶⁰ Idem., “God and the Perfect Man in the Experience of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī,” *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 30 (Autumn 2001): 63.

adopt their mannerisms and beliefs. The Amīr’s response is less than encouraging. I translate this exchange in part below:

One of my companions asked me why Muslims clamor to imitate the Christians, or to take them up as role models in their habits, their clothing, and their dietary habits. Or better yet, take up their actions and reposes, their rulings, or their laws [literally, their *sharī‘ah*]. And I responded: most people, except the select of God’s servants, think that if the disbelievers become dominant over the Muslims, that this is indicative of God’s aid of them over the Muslims. But this is false. For the Muslim, when he disobeys the commandment of his Lord, and rejects the law of his Prophet, God most High forsakes him. So, as for when the Muslim and disbeliever face off, the Divine Name takes control of the Muslim who is unfaithful, and throws fear in his heart. And the Muslim is summarily vanquished.¹⁶¹

‘Abd al-Qādir’s position in this passage is indirect, but nonetheless readily discernible with respect to the question he is posed by his disciple. That is, when asked why Muslims have been clamoring to mimic the Christians in their mannerisms and rulings, he responds by pointing out that a critical mass of Muslims have falsely come to the belief that Christian material supremacy is an indication of their having gained favor over them, hence the Muslim desire to imitate what they think are the methods behind European success. But by immediately responding that this is a false presupposition, and immediately thereafter adding that God will forsake the Muslim who rejects the commandment of his Lord, he is clearly suggesting that imitation of the Christians in this respect amounts to rejecting the commandment of the Lord, in point of fact. In other words, despite the material advantage the Christians have gained over the Muslims—a fact he concedes—‘Abd al-Qādir unequivocally does *not* advocate or endorse mimicking

¹⁶¹ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, “Mawqif 364,” in *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī al-Wa‘z wa-al-Irshād* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Shabāb, 1911), 3: 255-256.

them, either in their style and conduct or in their rulings and affairs—that is, their *sharī‘ah*. Doing so, he cautions, is to disobey the example set down by their own Prophet (*sharī‘ah nabīhi*), which will inevitably lead to Muslims being forsaken by their Lord, and ultimately defeated.

Nonetheless, in Weismann’s explication of this *mawqif*, he offers no such acknowledgment that the Amīr essentially disavowed appropriating the knowledge and ways of the Christians for material gain. Instead, as if sidestepping this declaration altogether, he proceeds with his previous argument uninterrupted, insisting that ‘Abd al-Qādir’s emphasis on acquiescing to reality led him in turn to concede the reality of European supremacy over the Muslims—and the rational method undergirding that material supremacy.

The same stress on the necessity of acquiescing to reality helps ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī to justify the growing European supremacy over the Muslim peoples. This is discernible in his reply to the question of why Muslims praise whatever comes from the Christians and imitate them in all their manners and habits. ‘Abd al-Qādir first gives the traditional answer that since the Muslims had neglected the *sharī‘a* and amirs—who came to believe that the defeats of their armies stemmed from the customs and conduct of the unbelievers, proceeded to imitate them. Because the questioner was not convinced by this external explanation, ‘Abd al-Qādir adds an inner one: The reason for the changes in the situation of the world is the changes in the manifestations of the divine names. Divinity in Itself needs these changes, be they for the good or for the bad. The divine names act upon and influence the creatures, each one of them in its own way. All the affairs of the creatures depend upon the laws of the divine names, symbolize them, and constitute their consequences. Beyond that nothing can be said or asked. It is impossible to explain the actions of God in His creatures, and all that can be said is that generally every thing receives its share.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 183.

It seems that Weismann has neglected to pay full attention to the very clear normative implications of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir’s statements in this passage. He acknowledges that the Amīr considers both Muslim neglect for their *sharī‘ah* and his defeated soldiers having been enamored with their enemies’ methods as dually responsible for Muslim desire to imitate the Christians. Yet surprisingly, he fails to acknowledge the inextricable connection ‘Abd al-Qādir very clearly forged between the two phenomena in the passage—that the desire to emulate the (materially advanced) disbelievers in this respect is in fact to defy the *sharī‘ah*. Indeed, the Amīr does not present these two issues simultaneously, as Weismann seems to suggest by larding them together: first he brings up the fact that a critical mass of Muslims carries the belief that the disbelievers’ material dominance over the Muslims is an indication of God’s favor of them—hence the Muslim desire to imitate their methods. Only immediately afterwards—not concomitantly, as Weismann presents in his analysis—does the Amīr go on to explicitly declare this assumption to be false, because the Muslim who disobeys the dictates of the *sharī‘ah* is forsaken by his Lord.

As I mentioned above, the linear progression of the Amīr’s positions in this fashion very clearly suggests his establishing a concordance between imitation of the Christians on the one hand and disobeying the *sharī‘ah* on the other. In other words, the Amīr emphatically disapproves of this practice of mimicking the disbelievers and their methods, irrespective of their material advantage; from this it would follow that he would disapprove of appropriating the epistemological framework of rationalism from which their material success allegedly derives. It is quite baffling, then, for Weismann to entirely ignore as much. In fact, he seemingly deemphasizes the significance of this

concordance, by very hurriedly glossing over it as he moves on to discuss the changing manifestations of the Divine Names, which takes the lion's share of his attention in his analysis. This is not to suggest that the issue of the Divine Names is not deeply relevant to 'Abd al-Qādir's analysis—indeed it is, and Weismann's analysis in this respect winds up being quite illuminating.¹⁶³ But his having steamrolled through the equally important first explanation offered by 'Abd al-Qādir to the question posed by his devotee seems to suggest an error of omission on his part. Thus, Weismann might be somewhat presumptuous here in reducing 'Abd al-Qādir's understanding of *isti'dād* to acquiescence of European supremacy, or of appropriation of the rationalism allegedly behind that supremacy.

But as we conclude this analysis, we see that this is not an isolated incident, for Weismann has an established tendency to link *isti'dād* with concession of Western supremacy by the Amīr. That is, repeatedly throughout his analysis he draws an association between the Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir's conceptualization of *isti'dād* and his alleged support for European rationalism, without at any given point establishing that 'Abd al-Qādir conceded rationalism as European or Western in the first place. We see this tendency again in his explanation of the Amīr's attitude toward government. As I explained in the last chapter, 'Abd al-Qādir interpreted the famous Prophetic Ḥadīth commanding believers to oppose evil by the hand, by the tongue, or at the very least by

¹⁶³ As full disclosure, I did not translate this section of the passage concerning the Divine Names, namely because of my lack of familiarity with the deeply complicated metaphysics behind the phenomenon. For me to then attempt to analyze it would be to do the content of the text a great disservice.

the heart as inapplicable to the Sufis.¹⁶⁴ Rather, only political rulers, the ‘*ulamā*’, and common believers are obligated to obey this commandment:

It is incumbent upon the sultan and the holders of authority, who have been established precisely for this purpose, that they oppose evil by force. The opposition of evil by speech belongs to the doctors of the Law whose knowledge is recognized and who manifest it in public. Lastly, to oppose evil by the heart is proper to ordinary believers once they are able to recognize what is evil and this opposition by the heart consists in reproving in their interior hearths those acts or those words which the religion prohibits. For the ordinary believer that is part of his faith in the Muḥammadan revelation.¹⁶⁵

But for the spiritual elite, he explains, this is not necessary. Because for them, to oppose themselves to evil is ultimately to violate or deny the ultimate unity of God:

But if he does not belong to one of these three groups, opposing himself to evil amounts to associating with God something other than Him and to denying the divine Unicity. In fact, the divine Unicity excludes the opposition to evil by the heart, since it excludes the attribution of the act to its [apparent] agent. There is no being which could “oppose itself,” since the one single Reality is the unique Agent of all the acts which are attributed to creatures. If there were an agent other than God, there would no longer be the divine Unicity. That which provokes the opposition to evil by the heart is the existence of the act, but there is no Agent [for this act] if it is not God.¹⁶⁶

Weismann’s analysis and interpretation of this passage is both astute and intelligent. But his findings at the end of this analysis seem based on the same

¹⁶⁴ The text of the Ḥadīth, as translated by Michel Chodkiewicz in his *Spiritual Writings of Amir ‘Abd Al-Kader*, 147, reads:

It is reported in the Ṣaḥīḥ that the Prophet—On him be Grace and Peace!—said: “If one of you becomes aware of an evil, let him oppose it by force (literally: ‘by his hand’); and if he cannot do that, let him oppose it by speech; and if he cannot do that, let him oppose it by his heart—this is the least which faith demands.”

¹⁶⁵ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, “Mawqif 133,” in in *The Spiritual Writings of Amir ‘Abd Al-Kader*, 147.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

presuppositions we witnessed earlier regarding *isti 'dād*. He begins his explication here sedately enough: “The Sufis, however, do not belong in ‘Abd al-Qādir’s eyes to any of these three categories and, therefore, are not obliged to remove evil at all! They behold of the Real Actor and realize that creatures are mere accidents into which He supplants actions, things, and intentions, without their participation.”¹⁶⁷ But from this analysis he proceeds to draw a conclusion that doesn’t seem particularly grounded in the text itself: “This was clearly a call to completely shun politics, which reflected ‘Abd al-Qādir’s readiness to overlook the Westernizing thrust of the late Tanzimat statesmen for the sake of modernization.”¹⁶⁸ As I mentioned in the last chapter, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s command to avoid politics was a central aspect of his reform methodology, and dissatisfaction with this brand of political quietism led his cohort to ultimately defer to the more activist thought of Ibn Taymiyya following his death. But how, from the text as presented, can we discern that this call to shun politics reflect the Amīr’s desire or readiness to overlook the allegedly Westernizing tendencies of the Tanzimat reforms? Needless to say, Weismann leaves these Westernizing tendencies in question horribly ill-defined, which makes it difficult to scrutinize the veracity of the claim. But more importantly, it seems that Weismann is again relying on the presupposition that ‘Abd al-Qādir’s insistence on self-reliance and acquiescence to reality, by virtue of man’s *isti 'dād*, necessarily leads to his acquiescence of Western superiority, and of the need to borrow the rational method responsible for that superiority. As I have established at length, Weismann simply has not sufficiently justified that assertion thus far, so his repeated reliance on it seems deeply problematic.

¹⁶⁷ Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 191.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Before concluding this section, it is worth mentioning that ‘Abd al-Qādir inserts an interesting addendum to this *mawqif*. The dictum here is quite ambiguous, but perhaps sheds some additional light on how Weismann conceived his analysis of the text.

This question is one of those which the initiates consider the most difficult. But the gnostic who possesses the sense of spiritual discrimination knows how to distinguish the places and the circumstances and what each of them imposes as an obligation. To each place, and to each moment, he renders what is due.¹⁶⁹

The initiates of the spiritual path, then, find this obligation [to shun political affairs] among their most difficult, but are able to discern how their particular spiritual obligations change as a function of circumstance. This *could* in fact imply that the circumstances the Muslims of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s day were facing necessitated the tacit (or overt) support of this or that political policy, thereby lending some credence to Weismann’s claim. But without more information we simply cannot discern as much. And since Weismann offers no other information in support of his analysis,¹⁷⁰ at this point we can only conclude that his claims are unsubstantiated.

Conclusion

In this reading of selected passages from the *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*—namely those used by Itzhak Weismann in his historiographical work—I have provided a brief yet illuminating vista into the spiritual worldview of the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī. Two observations in particular come to mind from this analysis. First, from the sample of the

¹⁶⁹ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī, “Mawqif 133,” in in *The Spiritual Writings of Amir ‘Abd Al-Kader*, 149.

¹⁷⁰ A caveat here. In addition to citing *mawqif* 133, in the same footnote he also cites page 254 of *mawqif* 362. But the content of that page deals with mostly the same material as *mawqif* 133, albeit with more brevity. That is, it very succinctly delineates that removing evil by the hand is the responsibility of the ruler, by the tongue the responsibility of the ‘ulemā’, and by the heart the responsibility of the weak in *imān*.

Mawāqif I have studied here, it seems that the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir has thoroughly grounded his idea of spiritual renewal in an Islamic milieu. That is to say, there is simply no evidence from the texts analyzed herein that his religious weltanschauung was formulated with a European or Western referent in mind. In fact, he repeatedly cautions his reader that the Muslims are facing calamities, and will continue to be forsaken, for *abandoning* their religious heritage, and that mimicking the disbelievers in their mannerisms or their rulings will only lead to more adversity. We saw several attempts by Weismann to ground ‘Abd al-Qādir’s spiritual system in contradistinction to the West, but these mostly led to dead ends. Indeed, several of the sources cited—particularly with respect to the Amīr’s sense of spiritual awakening and mission—bore no relevance whatsoever to the positions Weismann forwarded!

And furthermore, from the texts we studied here, it is simply not tenable to posit that the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī saw the use or appropriation of Western rationalism as central to his reform methodology. For as I have established at length, the texts we have read thus far provide us with no discernible reason to believe that the Amīr conceded rationality as Western in the first place. It is still ultimately possible that there is a grain of truth to this assertion, from the totality of all of the Amīr’s written works, but based on the sources provided and analyzed herein, the claim does not seem to have much basis in point of fact. Thus, while we cannot draw formative conclusions insofar as this is a selected study, we can nonetheless conclude that the analyses offered in the existing historiographical literature simply do not remain fully faithful to the sources they employ.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Implications, and Conclusion

As I bring this project to a close, I am truly amazed at how little scholarly attention the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir al-Jazā’irī has received as a purveyor of Islamic reform. His role as the great Algerian anti-colonial resistance leader is well-documented, and as we have seen previously, this stage in his career has been subject to absolutist interpretation across several ideological persuasions. To loyalists of French imperialism, he was a religious fanatic bent on establishing a medieval theocracy in Algeria; with his defeat, this argument continues, he was properly enlightened by the French civilizing mission, as perhaps best evidenced by his heroic rescue of Damascene Christians in 1860. To the British, on the other hand, he was elevated to the status of an epic hero, in order to delegitimize the enterprise of French colonialism vis-à-vis its British imperial rival. In this context, moreover, contemporary accounts like John Kiser’s recent exalting biography of the Amīr, make more sense.¹⁷¹ Extolling ‘Abd al Qādir as a practitioner and symbol of “true Jihad,” Kiser’s volume, as part of the Abd el-Kader Education Project he heads, was specifically written for the purposes of lionizing the person of the Amīr as part of a campaign to curb modern anti-Muslim sentiment.¹⁷² Kiser’s account of ‘Abd al Qādir, then, has ample precedent.

Yet even in this panegyric tradition, we see little discussion of the Amīr’s contributions to Islamic renewal, his attempts to conceptualize an organically Islamic modernity, or his reformulation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought as part of this revivalist project. Indeed, Kiser makes scant reference to ‘Abd al-Qādir’s spiritual reformist predilections,

¹⁷¹ See John Kiser, *Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2010).

¹⁷² See, for instance, John Kiser, “True Jihad,” *Commander of the Faithful* official webpage, accessed October 1, 2011, <http://www.truejihad.com/pages/true-jihad.php>.

deferring instead to the events of 1860 as more pertinent to his exile period in Damascus. The scholarly literature on the Amīr's religious reformism, moreover, is similarly lacking, with works by Itzhak Weismann and David Dean Commins being among the few academic works [in English] available on this period of his life and career. On one hand this is upsetting, as it obscures a profound and dynamic Muslim figure from several ongoing discussions in Islamic intellectual history that would likely be enriched by his thought. In particular I refer here to Islamic Modernism, whose better known figures like Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad 'Abduh, and Rashīd Riḍā, as I mentioned previously, are already well represented in the scholarly literature. The absence of the Amīr 'Abd al Qādir al-Jazā'irī in this regard, in my view, is detrimental and impoverishing to these debates.

But on the other hand, what I have uncovered thus far in this study about the Amīr's role in Islamic reform is quite exciting, as it suggests several opportunities for further study that have thus far gone unexplored. Needless to say, any further research would first require a reading of 'Abd al-Qādir's spiritual thought in its totality, beyond the glimpse offered in this study. Once that has been addressed, it would be quite interesting to situate 'Abd al Qādir in the context of the other major figures and representatives of Islamic Modernism. Despite his circumstances having differed considerably from Afghānī and 'Abduh, for instance, all three men seemed especially interested in the role of reason and scientific progress in Islamic reform. Granted, what I present here is a crude juxtaposition, but my point is simply to illustrate that despite 'Abd al-Qādir's peculiar religious and geographical milieu, there nonetheless seems to be both a temporal and a conceptual overlap between his religious reformist thought and that of

the major figures affiliated with the Islamic modernist trend. It would be instructive, I think, to explore this relationship between the thought processes of these major thinkers further, not simply for the sake of drawing shallow symmetrical comparisons, but to explore how both the similarities *and* the particularities of their engagement with the same overarching concern—how to appropriately engage the modern world—can collectively lead to renewed discussions on this same debate.

This approach, which Ebrahim Moosa terms “contrapuntal readings,” can lead to exciting and hitherto unexplored panoramas on the question of Islam and modernity. As Moosa points out, “we undertake contrapuntal readings when we engage the work of some extraordinary writers in order to produce new readings of their work from our specific vantage point.”¹⁷³ By adding the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir to this discussion of Islamic engagements with modernity, what can we say, for instance, about the relationship between Sufism and reason in this context? Figures like ‘Abduh and Riḍā chastised the superstitions of popular manifestations of Sufism as diametrically opposed to the rational impulse they hoped to inculcate among their followers, whereas ‘Abd al-Qadir’s reading of the Akbarīyya doctrine was, it seems thus far, precisely what motivated him to emphasize reason as fundamental to man’s *isti’dād*. What can we draw from these peculiarities in approaching the same overall concern?

Or, what can the Amīr’s career tell us about the role of first-hand experiential engagement with the West in Islamic reform efforts? Whereas figures like Muḥammad ‘Abduh and ‘Allāma Muḥammad Iqbāl of India spent formative time in the West, and were partly educated there, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s education was entirely undertaken in the

¹⁷³ For more on the idea of contrapuntal readings, see Ebrahim Moosa, “Contrapuntal Readings in Muslim Thought: Translations and Transitions,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2006): 107-118.

Muslim world, geographically speaking. Injecting the career and spiritual reformist thought of this hitherto neglected nineteenth-century Algerian Sufi would do much to enrich the debate over how the Islamic intellectual heritage has and should engage with the issue of the modern world.

Indeed, a contrapuntal reading of the reformist thought of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī could prove fruitful in exploring broader questions concerning human potentiality, possibility, and promise—both within and outside a distinctly Islamic context. For instance, I think it would be a very interesting exercise to do a contrapuntal reading of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s conceptualization of *al-insān al-kāmil*, the Perfect Man, in conversation both with the interpretation of the same concept (of *insān i-kāmil*) offered by Muḥammad Iqbāl, as well as with Friedrich Nietzsche’s notion of the *Übermensch*. Much as Muḥammad Iqbāl has been repeatedly juxtaposed with Nietzsche for his conception of *insān i-kāmil*, as it deals with the larger issues of human potential addressed in the idea of the *Übermensch*, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s reading of the idea weighs in on precisely these concerns as well. For ‘Abd al-Qādir, the Perfect Man is the ideal of humanity, for he “mirrors God the eternal but not created, on the one hand, and the world, the created but not eternal, on the other. He was created as God’s vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on earth while the entire world is a particularization of what exists in him.”¹⁷⁴ Both men, moreover, drew explicitly on strands of Akbarīyya doctrine to formulate their conceptualizations of mankind’s ideal.

‘Abd al-Qādir departs starkly from Iqbāl, though, to the extent that he outright rejects the interpretations of fourteenth-century Yemenite scholar and Ibn ‘Arabī

¹⁷⁴ Itzhak Weismann, “God and the Perfect Man in the Experience of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī,” *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 30 (Autumn 2001): 64.

exponent ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī. Whereas Iqbāl draws heavily on Jīlī in his conceptualization of *insān i-kāmil*, ‘Abd al-Qādir instead argues that Jīlī’s immanent explication of Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine is dangerous insofar as it apotheosizes the figure of the Perfect Man. In so doing, ‘Abd al-Qādir feared, Jīlī’s approach would set the stage for antinomianism, with charlatan Sufi leaders proclaiming to have reached the status of the Perfect Man, and with hapless commoners adopting a fatalistic attitude toward such impostors—that is, Jīlī’s interpretation would encourage the cult of saints, and anti-modernity.¹⁷⁵ The points of departure between Iqbāl and ‘Abd al-Qādir in this respect, I believe, would make a contrapuntal reading of the two, in conversation with Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, especially intriguing, and may lead to a richer understanding of human ephemeral aptitude more broadly.

But alas, the available commentary on the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir al-Jazā’irī essentially forecloses the possibilities for further inquiry into his thought, of the type I describe above. This is not to suggest that I am discarding the scholarly value of the work analyzed here by Weismann and Commins in their totality; as full disclosure, it would have been unfathomable to have completed this study without the insights offered by Weismann’s thought-provoking analysis of the history of religious reform in Syria in general, and of the person of ‘Abd al-Qādir in particular. But in reducing the intellectual output of a Muslim anti-colonial resistance leader to an effect of his colonial experience, and by unjustifiably injecting a Western/European referent at the center of his worldview, scholars like Weismann have done a disservice to the critical study of this figure.

As a caveat, it is worth mentioning that analysis of knowledge production in a colonial context is often plagued with blind spots like these, with it being often difficult

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

to separate intellectual inquiry from the colonial milieu in which it operates.¹⁷⁶ But even then, if Weismann wanted to study an Islamic modernist who based his reform methodology on mimicking the West and appropriating its rational methods, there are far more apposite figures to choose from. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan of India, for instance, is a Muslim modernist figure that operated under precisely these auspices, having established an educational institute for Muslims, now known as the Aligarh Muslim University, on what he perceived to be Western education and sciences. Insofar as he felt the methods of the West were necessary for Muslim progress, Khan went as far as urging his religious brethren to support British colonial rule in lieu of seeking their independence. Indeed, figures like Khan, who operated with a Western referent in mind as they contemplated Islamic reform, are adequately represented in Muslim intellectual history. But based on the sources analyzed in this study, particularly those consulted by Weismann, the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir al-Jazā’irī simply does not qualify as one of those figures.

The question then becomes, what are the implications of the problematic analyses of ‘Abd al Qādir outlined in this study? Some, like Hamid Dabashi, would argue that the assertions made by scholars like Weismann in this respect constitute nothing short of committing epistemic violence:

Only in the mind of incurably racist assumptions is “the West” the center of the universe and the whole world its periphery. That periphery is already in the center, for that center was roaming through its peripheries causing calamities and stealing resources. Intermingling of diverse communities of sentiments having gathered in “the West”

¹⁷⁶ This is a basic problem in postcolonial theory. See, for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

from all the colonized lands prevents any essentialist assumption about any collectivity anywhere in the world.¹⁷⁷

Strong words by Dabashi, for sure. But I think it might be excessive to brand these analyses, or the scholars that produced them, as categorically racist. For even without going that far, we can nonetheless see that the paradigm they are employing is deeply problematic. I will end this study by offering insight into a theoretical paradigm that, in my view, more appropriately explains and contextualizes the blind spots we have seen in the existing literature on the Amīr and his spiritual reform methodology.

I refer here to Dipesh Chakrabarty's theory of Provincializing Europe. In this thesis, Chakrabarty ascribes the reductionism of the type we saw in Itzhak Weismann's reading of the Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī as neither isolated, nor motivated by spite or prejudice, but as endemic to the practice of history-writing itself as we know it. For "history" as an academic discourse continues to place "Europe" as the sovereign subject of *all* histories:

I have a more perverse proposition to argue. It is that insofar as the academic discourse of history—that is, "history" as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university—is concerned, "Europe" remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call "Indian," "Chinese," "Kenyan," and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe."¹⁷⁸

And as part and parcel of this master narrative, he continues, "modernity" is assigned by default to Europe. "Europe," in other words, has become "the primary habitus of the

¹⁷⁷ Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (London: Routledge, 2008), 139.

¹⁷⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27.

modern.”¹⁷⁹ Accordingly, the material progress so often associated with the modern world is, in turn, localized to Europe as its source of historical origin. The fact that this conception of “Europe” is entirely imagined, and demonstrably so, does not make it lose or diminish in currency, for it is structurally and institutionally embedded in the practice of historicism: “A certain kind of historicism, the metanarrative of progress, is thus deeply embedded in our institutional lives however much we may develop, as individual intellectuals, an attitude of incredulity toward such metanarratives.”¹⁸⁰

The metanarrative of European progress, Chakrabarty continues, persists unabated largely due to how the process of historicism conceptualizes the notion of time. For the academic historian, he argues, time is organic, and indistinguishable from the forces of nature. And this naturalized conception of historical time presupposes a secular worldview, in which spirits and the “supernatural” can claim no autonomy:

History’s own time is godless, continuous and, to follow Benjamin, empty and homogeneous. By this I mean that in employing modern historical consciousness (whether in academic writing or outside of it), we think of a world that, in Weber’s description, is already disenchanted. Gods, spirits, and other “supernatural” forces can claim no agency in our narratives...The time of human history—as any popular book on the evolution of this universe will show—merges with the time of prehistory, of evolutionary and geological changes that go back to the beginning of the universe. It is part of nature.¹⁸¹

The process of historicism, thus, homogenizes historical experiences that do not precisely correspond to this secularized and disenchanted narrative, for it presupposes that people

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 88.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 73.

exist in a naturalized historical time, which exists *a priori*, independently of their particular cultures and experiences.¹⁸²

Chakrabarty then goes on to offer a counter-narrative based on his unique expertise in Bengali labor history. In so doing, he demonstrates that “modernity” had in fact been actualized in Bengal, without Bengali modernity necessarily modeling the experience of Europe. In Bengali modernity, gods and spirits featured prominently, and there was no ostensible European referent undergirding or motivating the call for modernization. That is to say, the European or Western experience with industrialization was neither viewed as normative, nor was the Bengali modern subject classically bourgeois, in the European sense of the term. But we mustn’t see these tendencies as indicative of a *lack* in Bengali modernity, however justified some critiques of that modernity may be—with respect to patriarchy, the valorization of the home, and so forth. Those tendencies can be critiqued on their own terms, while remaining cognizant of the fact that the particular Bengali experience with modernity operated on its own historical consciousness, and not on some presupposed naturalized conception of time with an underlying European referent.¹⁸³

It is in the context of Chakrabarty’s thesis, I conclude, that we can best come to terms with the treatment of the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir al-Jazā’irī and his thought on spiritual reform in contemporary historiographical literature. As I have demonstrated throughout this study, historians like Itzhak Weismann seem to have been operating on the premise that material progress has its roots in the West, to the point that they were insufficiently motivated to justify or ground this assertion. And a closer look at the Amīr’s own words

¹⁸² Ibid., 74.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 217.

on the matter suggests that, based on the sources consulted in the existing scholarly literature, he emphatically did not subscribe to the same metanarrative of European progress. This misplaced fixation on Europe as the primary habitus of the modern, though, is not necessarily an act of intellectual dishonesty on the part of Weismann, but may be better understood as part of the institutional framework in which his discipline (of academic history-writing) operates.

Rectifying these odious tendencies in the practice of historicism, moreover, will require a commitment to disentangle the totalizing metanarrative of Europe, while remaining equally committed to problematizing the local histories we seek to extract from that metanarrative. The goal is not to resort to cultural relativism, or to disregard European thought. After all, European thought, for all its homogenizing tendencies, has been a blessing to us all in many respects, and ought to be respected as such.

In the case of the subject at hand, our task as students of the thought of the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir ought to be to disentangle his very particularized engagement and conceptualization of modernity—which, the sources thus far suggest, was couched in a distinctly Islamic framework—from the nonexistent European referent thrust upon him by scholars like Weismann. But equally important, we must problematize his experience and engagement with modernity, and dissect the contradictions in his thought, while resisting the temptation to overemphasize the more admirable aspects of his life—like his having saved thousands of Damascene Christians from massacre in 1860. Just as we must hermeneutically engage the events of 1860, we must pay equally close attention to the seemingly contradictory policies he occasionally implemented during his rule in Algeria. The goal is not to lionize or the person of the Amīr ‘Abd al Qādir al-Jazā’irī, but

to rescue his organic narrative of engaging modernity from the totalizing tendencies of the European master narrative. And once we have done that, the process of contrapuntally engaging this fascinating Islamic modernist reformer can finally begin.

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