

# HADI AL-‘ALAWĪ AND THE HETERODOXY OF COMMUNO-SUFISM

Abdul Kadir Riyadi

Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya, Indonesia

E-mail: riyadi.abdulkadir@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Sufism is time and again being associated with heresy as a result—among others—of a controversial thought by a man called Hadi al-‘Alawī with whom this paper is concerned. Using the concept of heterodoxy, this paper attempts to access the matrix of tensions and representations inherent within his so-called Communo-Sufism. It shows that as a communist, the first phase of his life, he looks at traditional Islam as a feudalized form of religion. It is a kind of natural betrayal to the genuine religiosity and spirituality represented by what he calls the “Jahili Islam”. In his view, the Jahili Islam is authentic and that Muhammad’s version of it is a sheer distortion of true Islam. The paper also tries to show that as a communist-sufi, the second phase of his life, he came up with a distinction between the “dead Islam” and the “living Islam”. The former is represented by traditionally Muslim faithful who adhere to Muhammad’s version of Islam. The latter, in the meantime, is the continuation of the Jahili-Islam. In al-‘Alawī’s discourse, Islam can only live on if it is based on the Jahili-Islam socially and legally. Theologically, Islam must be based on the Judeo-Christian traditions; philosophically on the Persian and Byzantine episteme; ideologically on Communism; and spiritually on Sufism. Vibrant as it may seem at the surface, his premises are nonetheless anarchistic and are an anti-thesis to the existing paradigmatic form of Islam.

**Keywords:** Feudalized Islam, Jahili-Islam, the living Islam, the dead Islam, Communo-Sufism.

## Introduction

It is scientifically legitimate to assume that Sufism is a comprehensive system of knowledge. It does not only include within its core, a collection of theories and theses, but also a practical code

of conduct. It has ethical, practical, social and certainly epistemological dimensions. Its scope is so wide that individuals and communities are always part of it. From its very inception, it has always been a social and intellectual movement.

The assumption that Sufism is identical with the withdrawal from the world is not always correct. While there are representatives within it that calls for the passive mode of living, the overwhelming majority of the Sufis speak otherwise. As an object of study, Sufism has attracted the attention of the international scholars' majority of whom have a positive impression of it. There is even a tendency to treat it as a global movement. The fact that a great influx of people from across the world has adopted it not only as a way of living but also as their very own identity means that it has an international reification. This is what the likes of Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler and Gritt Klinkhammer have tried to reveal through their study on the *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality*.<sup>1</sup>

In the Islamic world, Sufism has won sympathy from those who used to reject it. The Salafis, modernists, and the liberals have equally accepted it albeit partially. Hence, Muḥammad ‘Abduh (reformist), Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (salafi), Ṭāha Ḥusayn, Qāsim Amīn dan Luṭfi al-Sayyid (the modernist-liberals) have expressed their interest and respect in it.<sup>2</sup> Even among the so-called Muslim communists such as Hadi al-‘Alawī, it has a strong appeal.

Al-‘Alawī is the object of this study. He is a man of multiple-controversies. Calling himself a Communist-Sufi, he has tried to integrate the two seemingly opposing systems of knowledge and ideology into a single formula called *al-Mashā’iyah*, literally means Communo-Sufism. This model of thinking is still at its infancy and is yet to be developed. But it had sparked a strong debate among scholars of different disciplines. Its controversy lies among others in its heterodox nature. The man and his discourse is literally against

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Geaves, Markus Dressler, and Gritt Klinkhammer (eds.), *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Scharbrodt believes that Abduh’s reformist ideals—as well as those of Rashīd Riḍā—are rooted in sufism. See Oliver Scharbrodt, “The Salafiyyah and Sufism: Muhammad Abduh and His Risalah al-Waridat”, in *Bulletin of Oriental and African Studies*, February, vol 70, issue 1 (2007). In the meantime, Ṭāha Ḥussein treats sufism as part of his “The Future of Egypt” project. This project is then carried on by Qāsim Amīn and Luṭfi al-Sayyid. See Ziad al-Marsafy, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2012).

everything relating to Islam, including the notion of revelation, prophethood, rituals, and even God-ness. Allegation of heresy against him has been common.

Drawing from his main works, this study attempts to a) elaborate his “rebellious” Communo-Sufism, b) critically) his critique on the feudalized form of Islam and b) his thesis that Sufism as a mode of a social and religious movement is independent of Islam.

### **De-legitimizing the Arab-Muslim Feudalism**

Among the contemporary Arab-Muslim thinkers, Hadi al-‘Alawī is perhaps the most liberal of all. First and foremost, he rejected the most fundamental belief of Islam, such as revelation and prophethood and presented a critique against God and His decree.

He was born in 1932 in Iraq to a very poor family. His parents are adherents of Shi‘a sect. The family lived a poor life at the outskirt of Baghdad. At a young age, al-‘Alawī studied Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence), Islamic philosophy, scholastic philosophy, exegesis, prophetic tradition and Sufism. He has also memorized the whole Qur‘an, some portion of prophetic saying, selected Arabic poems and a book on Arabic wisdom called *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

His background as a poor and marginalized man played a major role in his understanding of Islam and Muslim society. As soon as he grew up, he found justice and class conflict as the framework within which he dealt with social and religious issues. Various studies he has done on Islamic subjects are carried out within this framework. He delved into such issues as the relation between political and religious authority, Islam and politics, the rich and the poor in the Islamic community, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the ulama and the Sufis, and also the relation of man and women in Islam. All those are done within the context of class conflict according to which society is deemed dichotomous.

Al-‘Alawī joined Baghdad University in 1950 and began to study ideology and politics. Among many ideologies he came to know, Communism has the strongest appeal because it provides a theoretical basis for the struggle he is about to endure. He later identified himself as a communist. In 1976, he left Iraq for China for safety reason with a group of communists such as Khādīm al-Samawī, Hannā Minā, and Jalāl al-Ḥanafī. China turned out to be not only a new home but also a new school of thought. It was during this time that he discovered

Taoism and considered it to be the most valuable form of knowledge and wisdom. What is more attractive is, he would argue, the way Taoism is being amalgamated with the Chinese Communism resulted in a manifesto in which worldly enthusiasm is wrapped with a plethora of spirituality.

In many ways, Taoism resembles Sufism in his judgment. The Taos and Sufis have equal care for the poor and the marginalized. With no hesitation, al-‘Alawī considers the teachings of Lao Zi and Zhuangzi as having sharp similarities with the likes of al-Ḥallāj, Abū al-‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī, and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. He even goes on by saying that the founders of Taocvmfgvfrism are prophets whose mission is to save humanity and safeguard their moral virtue.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from China, al-‘Alawī spent some times in other parts of the world such as London, Beirut and Damascus. He never returned to Iraq since his self-exile. He remained at large until his natural death in September 1998. At some point, Saddam Hussein seemed to have ever invited him to return home to participate in “the rewriting of Iraqi history project”. But he, together with other exiled Iraqi scholars such as Fāliḥ ‘Abd al-Jabbār and ‘Iṣām al-Khafajī, turned down the offer.<sup>4</sup>

Notorious for his revolutionary ideas, al-‘Alawī was nonetheless regarded by his closest friends such as Mazīn Laṭīf, Rashīd al-Khayyūn, Wadī al-Abidī, Alā al-Lamī, Mālik Maslamawī, Khālīd Sulaymān, and Zayd al-Hulī as gentle, polite and pious. For al-‘Abidī, he is a hero of the poor, and as a communist, the enemy of Western imperialism and capitalism.<sup>5</sup> Amīr al-Ghabarī has no hesitation in saying that his life morally speaking is “an extension of Abū Zar al-Ghifārī, the prophet’s disciple”.<sup>6</sup> His older brother, Ḥasan al-‘Alawī

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<sup>3</sup> al-‘Alawī, *Madārāt*, 103-158.

<sup>4</sup> Jordi Tejel et al., *Writing the Modern History of Irak: Historiographical and Political Challenges* (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2012), 5. In the words of Marion Farouq-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, the works of these three scholars are among the best in the field of modern Middle Eastern history. See Marion Farouq-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, “The Historiography of Modern Iraq”, *Journal of The American Historical Review*. Vol. 96, No. 5 (December 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Mazīn Latīn, *Maḥabbah min Ḥayāt Ḥādī al-‘Alawī* (Baghdad: Dar Mesopotamia, 2013), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Malek Abisaab, *The Shi’ites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism and Hizbullah’s Islamists* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 253.

describes him in his *Umar wa al-Tashayyu'* (Umar and Shi'ism) not only as pious but also deeply concerned with the future of the Muslim ummah.<sup>7</sup> Maytham al-Janabī on his part applauds him as a “rebellious thinker” and visionary intellectual whose thought “went far beyond his Arabicate and Iraqicate”.<sup>8</sup> He is a man of universal standing who knows no geographical boundaries. Al-Janabi was more than happy to appreciate him “as one of the best and puritan thinkers the Arab society had ever had in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>9</sup>

As a scholar, al-‘Alawī has started writing academic works since 1960. Most of his works deal with politics, culture, and civilization. Islam, with its various aspects and Arabic culture with its many-fold dimensions, has been his utmost concern. He wrote more or less twenty works, seven of which are on issues relating to Islamic and Arabic culture. Judged from his works, his life might be divided into two major phases. The first is the communist phase, while the second is the communist-sufi phase.

As a communist, his life was about rebellion against the status quo and demand for the implementation of the communist manifesto. This phase started as early as his college days until sometimes during his stay in China. All of his works other than *Madārāt Ṣūfiyah* (*The Orbit of Sufism*) fall under this category.

Being communist though, al-‘Alawī claims to be Muslim and even Sufi. Paradoxically—at a theological and intellectual level—the Islam that he envisages in mind was not the orthodox and normative Islam common Muslim would think. His is what may be called the “Jahili Islam”, that is, the Islam that upholds the pre-Islamic faith and belief, norms and moral values. This is the authentic form of Islam as opposed to the already politicized and institutionalized one. He claims that the Prophet and his four guided disciples known as the al-Khulafā' al-Rāsidhūn were adherents *prima facie* of this Jahili Islam, especially during the Meccan period, and the Medinan period but with a few distortions. This Islam is identical to egalitarianism, humanism, open-mindedness, justice, and far-sightedness. The “other Islam”,

<sup>7</sup> Ḥasan al-‘Alawī, *Umar wa al-Tashayyu'* (Beirut: Dār al-Zurā, 2007), 24.

<sup>8</sup> The term “rebellious thinker” is a title of the book by al-Janabi. See Maytham al-Janabī, *Hadī al-‘Alawī: al-Muthaqqaf al-Mutamarrid* (Damaskus: Dār Mesopotamia, 2011), 59.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

that is, the political and institutionalized one, is authoritarian and feudalistic.<sup>10</sup>

The prevailing Islam at the moment is the second one, he argues. And the task of the awakened Muslims is, therefore, to resort Islam to its original version. In *Fuṣāl 'an al-Mar'ah* (Issues on Women) he touches on the advantages of the Jahili culture. He says for instance, that this culture is based on group solidarity and knows no affirmative action. All are equal in terms of their right and obligation. Their leader is responsible for looking after the wellbeing of the subjects and is elected by people. The tribe constitutes a community whose norms and laws are binding. Absolute authority is at the hand of the people, not the leader. Any decision is taken collectively, especially that which has to do with public interests. Individualism has no place and is overruled by communalism. Members of the tribe work hand in hand for the sake of all. The rich helps the poor, while the poor respects the rich.<sup>11</sup>

Loyalty to the tribe is another prominent trait of this culture. For al-'Alawī the benevolent nature of the Arab mentality is the product of the Jahili culture such as resilience, perseverance, modesty, and social care. It is no a coincidence that the Prophet Muhammad—he claims—was known for his nobility and dignity, for he himself, “is the product of the Jahili culture”.<sup>12</sup> Many great women in Islam are also a product of this culture such as Khadijah daughter of Khuwaylid, and the wife of the Prophet, Samiyah Umm Ammar b. Yāsir (the first women martyr in Islam), Umm Umarah, Umm Mani', Umm Amīr al-Asyhaliyya, and Rumaissa' Umm Sālim, all of whom fought in battles with the Prophet.<sup>13</sup>

Other benevolent characteristics of this culture, he moves on, include a) preserving the freedom of all people regardless of their race, colour and gender. Women are guaranteed their freedom. They may travel anywhere they want as long as they are saved; b) Jahili women are accustomed to covering their whole body except their face

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<sup>10</sup> Al-'Alawī's ideas concerning the Jahili-Islam is generally speaking, influenced by Ṭāha Ḥusayn. For Hussein's ideas on the Jahili pre-Islamic values, see Ṭāha Ḥusayn, *Fī al-Shi'r al-Jahili* (Tunis: Dār al-Ma'ārif li al-Ṭibā'ah, 1926). See also Ṭāha Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr* (Kairo: Dār al-Naṣr, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Hādī al-'Alawī, *Fuṣāl 'an al-Mar'ah* (Damaskus: Dār al-Kunāz al-Adabīyah, 1996), 5-7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 31.

and hands; a custom that Islam inherited; c) Jahili women used to have the same right and obligation as a man. They may also become leaders for men. Many of them had a higher position than men such as the well-known poet named al-Khansa’; d) Jahili women were given full right to decide their own future and life; e) men and women had the same right to divorce their spouse; f) women had full right to choose a man for their husband; g) they do not indeed have the right of inheritance. But they may have some portion of it on the basis of their father’s will; h) Jahili women of the certain tribe may marry more than one man such as the case of Samīyah Umm Ziyad who was said to have married nine men, i) in Jahili culture, a son has the full right over his father’s wife upon his death. The son may marry her or let her go.<sup>14</sup>

For al-‘Alawī, the success of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, particularly during its earlier periods was due to its adherence to this culture. Conversely, it is when distancing itself from it—often due to political ambition—that Islam was feudalized and derailed from its original teaching. It seems clear in al-‘Alawī’s thinking that systematic efforts to detach Islam from the Jahili culture has begun to intensify during the time of Uthmān b. ‘Affān—the second Caliph—but with little success.<sup>15</sup> The movement to feudalize it gained momentum and was at its full swing during the Umayyad Caliphate of which political assassination and tortures are its main features.

Al-‘Alawī wrote *al-Ighthiyāl al-Siyāsī fī al-Islām* (*Political Assassination in Islam*) and *Tārīkh al-Ta’dhīb fī al-Islām* (*The History of Tortures in Islam*) to elaborate further this point. Murder—he contends—is the stamp of Islam from its very inception at the hand of Muhammad. In a horrendous tone, he pointed out that Muhammad was responsible for many attempted murders, some of which are successful while others are not. In some cases, the Prophet would not orchestrate the murders but approved them.<sup>16</sup> Political motivation is behind these plots. Frequent war and series of conquering expedition by the

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>15</sup> In al-‘Alawī’s view, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān was wrong in trying to keep Islam away from its pre-Islamic values. He was a victim of his own policy.

<sup>16</sup> Hādī al-‘Alawī, *al-Ighthiyāl al-Siyāsī fī al-Islām* (Damaskus: Dār al-Madā, 2008), 5. Al-‘Alawī’s thesis of Islam as the religion of the assassins resembles to large extent Robert Spencer’s and to a lesser extent Bernard Lewis’s. See for instance Robert Spencer, *The Truth about Muhammad* (USA: Regnery, 2006). See also Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967).

Prophet and his disciples serve as another evidence of Islam being murderous. Al-‘Alawī quotes Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s *Tafsīr Kabīr* to validate this. When explaining the meaning of Chapter al-Ḥajj [38] al-Rāzī wrote that this verse was revealed in response to the Muslims of Mecca who requested to the Prophet to kill the infidels. He rejected the idea.<sup>17</sup> For al-‘Alawī nonetheless, this means that they do have the habit of killing.<sup>18</sup>

Al-‘Alawī listed the victims of the murders orchestrated—and approved—by the Prophet. Most of them are people of high honour, including Ka‘ab b. Ashraf, Salām b. Ubay al-Ḥuqayyiq, Uday b. Abī al-Ḥaqīq and Abū ‘Afak, all of whom are Jewish community leaders.<sup>19</sup> Others include Khālīd b. Sufyān and Rifā‘ah b. Qays al-Jushamī, leaders of Huzail and Qays tribes respectively.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from political ambition, revenge is another motive for murder. A Jewish woman named ‘Imsha daughter of Marwan was a victim of this motive. She used to frequently insult the Prophet. A disciple called ‘Umayr b. Uday al-Khātāmī out of his own will entered her house at night, found her with her infant baby at her arms, stabbed her to death, leaving the baby crying for mercy. When he met the Prophet at the mosque, he told him what he has done. The Prophet applauded him saying, “Umayr, you have done a favour to God and His messenger”. He then turned to his attending disciples saying, “if you all want to see a person that has done a lot of favour to God and His messenger, then look at ‘Umayr”.<sup>21</sup>

The political mission of Islam makes it perfect for this religion to be feudalized, he charges. As Islam is obsessed with political expansionism, violating the rights of others is a common practice. The political nature of Islam is readily observable from the very nature of the Prophet’s leadership. He, after all, is political leadership. He writes, “Muhammad is first and foremost a politician and king”.<sup>22</sup> As a political leader, he does not share the same spiritual enthusiasm as those of Jesus, Buddha, Lao Zi and Confucius whom he considers—unlike Muhammad—as prophets.

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<sup>17</sup> This verse reads, “Verily God defends the believers. He indeed hates those who betray and disbelieve”.

<sup>18</sup> al-‘Alawī, *al-Ighthiyāl al-Siyāsī*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>22</sup> al-‘Alawī, *Fuṣūl min al-Tārikh*, 13.



In his *al-Siyāsah al-Islāmīyah* (Islamic Politics), he further argues that Islam is being manipulated as a political movement.<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps worthwhile in this context of analysis to note that *al-Siyāsah al-Islāmīyah* was first published in 1974. In 1999, the work was re-published in the collection that consists of his two other works, namely *al-Ightiyāl* (Assassination) and *al-Ta’dhīb* (Tortures). The collection was then called *Fuṣāl min Tārīkh al-Islām al-Siyāsī* (Issues on the History of Political Islam). The collection—it seems apparent—was meant to reaffirm his theses that Islam is a political movement and that to maintain its ambition, it employs assassination and tortures.

Perhaps it was because of the nature of the Prophet’s leadership that his disciples—including the four guided ones—had the murderous mentality, al-‘Alawī implicates.<sup>24</sup> The situation during the leadership of the four Caliphs, especially Abā Bakr, was such that thousands of people died in a catastrophic battle against those who “rejected to pay tax and alms to the central government”. In the ensuing periods, battle upon battle, and expansion upon expansion took place in the history of Islam. When the political system of Islam was shifted from the guided Caliphate to the hereditary monarchy, the acts of murder intensified. And it was during this period that tortures as a new means of suppression was introduced.

Mu’awiyah b. Abu Sufyan was the first person to introduce torture and practice it himself. Tortures by beating, imprisoning, boiling water, and isolating are common during this time. While tortures are an act of crime, al-‘Alawī has no doubt whatsoever to assume that this practice is the direct result of Islamic teaching. “All forms of tortures that have ever been conducted in the name of Islam”, he says, “are the perfect implication of its teaching”.<sup>25</sup> The doctrine of *ḥudūd* (Islamic criminal law) for instance, encourages one to take revenge rather than to forgive. In this regard, Islam—he claims—is inferior to Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> In another occasion, al-‘Alawī says that the essence of Islam is *al-Jawhar al-Dunyāwī* (worldly). Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>25</sup> Hādī al-‘Alawī, *Min Tārīkh al-Ta’dhīb fī al-Islām* (Damaskus: Dār al-Madā, 1995), 65.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 70-78. Al-‘Alawī ignores the fact that Christianity is also anarchistic theologically and politically as studies by Leo Tolstoy, Jacques Ellul, Vernard Eller, Dave Andrews and Mark Van Steenwyk have shown. See for instance, Alexandre

The divine law attributed to Islam is not at all revealed—then interpreted by scholars—to protect the poor, powerless and the marginalized. On the contrary, this law is ordained and then manipulated to sustain the powerful and the rich. Al-‘Alawī was extremely angered by the way Islamic law is being prescribed so much so that if there is anything that can be hold responsible most for the feudalization of Islam than it is certainly the Syariah law and its interpretation by the jurists (*fuqahā*).

Hence, al-‘Alawī identified the jurists—in addition to political elites and bourgeois—as the forces behind the derailment of Islam to its political and feudalized form. He holds that the jurists are the most responsible among the three considering that they are the ones in charge not only in offering a proper interpretation of Islam but also in producing knowledge and moral conduct appropriate for their ummah. By scrutinizing the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), al-‘Alawī finds both jurists and their discourses guilty of misrepresenting Islam. In *Fuṣūl ‘an al-Mar’ah* for instance, he contends that *fiqh* in principle is counter-productive to the very essence of Islam. While Islam is humanistic, *fiqh* is fatalistic and discriminative. He brought up many examples to support his argument such as a) *mut’ah* marriage; b) the fact that husband is allowed to punch his wife; c) *diyah*, the money a murderer has to pay to compensate the family of the slain. All jurists except Abū Ḥanīfah, maintain that the *diyah* paid to women is half to that of man because “the blood of women is cheaper by half to that of man”; d) the dowry for women in marriage is too cheap; e) the veil for women is too strict; and f) polygamy is not doing any justice to women.<sup>27</sup>

Women in Islamic jurisprudence have always been an object of assault and insult. Historically, such insult has begun at the end of Umayyah Dynasty era. Initially, women are not allowed to enter the mosque.<sup>28</sup> They are then not allowed to gather with men at the same

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Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (UK: Andrews, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>28</sup> Concerning the view that women are not allowed to come to mosque, al-‘Alawī cited al-Ghazālī who wrote in *Iḥyā’* that, “the Prophet used to allow women to come to mosque. But I said, not at the moment”. Ibid., 40.

congregation.<sup>29</sup> They were subsequently prevented from travelling on their own more than three days without a company of their close relatives and were even not allowed to do any work outside their homes. They were confined and restricted. By some jurists, women are viewed as a source of evil and sin. Some of them inflicted women as responsible for moral corruption in society to the extent that they are being likened as shoes and sandal.<sup>30</sup>

These propositions developed by al-‘Alawī look as though Islam is always guilty of social disorder. These do not always do full justice to Islam and its discourses. Islam is too multi-faceted to be treated one-sidedly. While dealing with it in this way may be legitimate, to reject other possibilities as non-existent is simply inappropriate. Islam is not all about malpractices. Some of al-‘Alawī’s views are in themselves antithetical to historical and intellectual facts.

In some respect, he is correct in saying that politic is the main cause of Islam to be feudalized. He is equally correct that the “capitalistic” form of Islam is responsible for its relegation to the parochial social and belief system. But he appears to be too naïf in considering that Islam is always about politic. He ignores the fact that Islam is also about faith, belief, law and morality. From this perspective alone, al-‘Alawī’s definition of Islam—and by implication his epistemological construction—is erroneous.

The way he approaches Islam is also mistaken. As he himself repeatedly said, he is a communist, and would accordingly look at Islam from the historical-materialistic point of view.<sup>31</sup> This undertaking is not only insufficient but also dangerous as it would betray the very nature of Islam as religion. While Islam might consist of the materialistic dimension, there are aspects that materialistic approach will never be able to indulge in. One will definitely be destined to failure if he/she is to see Islam merely as pursuing the power of wealth and worldly pleasures.

Concomitant to his historical-materialistic approach, al-‘Alawī’s perception of Islam is such that what matters most to this religion is

<sup>29</sup> With regard to women being disallowed to gather with men, al-‘Alawī quoted a prophetid saying narrated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Ibid., 32.

<sup>30</sup> al-‘Alawī, *Fuṣūl ‘an al-Mar’ah*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> He often calls his approach a historical intellectualism. Ibid., 16. With regard to this approach and what it implies, see for instance Iyad Khallaf Hussein, “al-Manhaj al-Māddī fī Dirāsāt al-Fikr al-Islāmī: Hādī al-‘Alawī Namūdhajan” (PhD Thesis--University of Baghdad, 2007).

material interest. Hence, he explores issues related to the tenets of Islam, its teaching and dogma, history, philosophy and society only to demonstrate the acceptability of that premise. He produces in that process discourses which he dealt with simply from a materialistic point of view.<sup>32</sup>

Looking at al-‘Alawī’s approach from the perspective of sociology and philosophy of religion would reveal yet another mistake. He ignores the already paradigmatically accepted notion that religion—Islam included—consists of not only the profane but also the sacred. What al-‘Alawī has done is to desacralize Islam by treating the Qur’an as a book prone to error, Prophet Muhammad not as an immune person and subject to the fallacy, and even God as having committed mistakes. As an academic, he has failed to put one aside from his prejudices and negative pre-assumption. His views are ideologically motivated and are dictated by subjective political tendencies.

As a man of little interest to “the idea of the holy” borrowing Rudolf Otto, al-‘Alawī has shown a close intimacy to Abū ‘Alā al-Ma‘arrī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Ibn al-Rwandī.<sup>33</sup> There is a little doubt indeed that al-‘Alawī is the main—perhaps the most prominent—heir to their legacy in modern time. From al-Ma‘arrī he inherited many ideas ranging from the notion of social Sufism to what he calls atheistic spirituality.<sup>34</sup> From al-Razi and Ibn al-Rwandī he learnt the concept of *rubūbīyah*, namely the idea that God does exist but whose existence may sufficiently be apprehended via reason.<sup>35</sup> Revelation and prophethood are consequently not needed. Al-‘Alawī accepted the thesis that prophets are liars because their message is a natural denial of reason.

Al-‘Alawī also inherits from other major Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj, al-Bisṭāmī, Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī. But their teaching has been reformulated within the context of intellectual materialism.

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<sup>32</sup> al-‘Alawī. *Fusul ‘an al-Mar’ah*. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Majid Fakhry considers the three, especially al-Rāzī and Ibn al-Rwandī as the “naturalist free thinkers”. See Majid Fakhry, *A History of Philosophic Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 94-107.

<sup>34</sup> al-‘Alawī, *Madārāt*, 132-135.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 22.

## The Fantasy of “Living Islam”

For apparent reasons, Jacque Berque considers al-‘Alawī, the most dangerous Arab thinker of all time.<sup>36</sup> He exceeds Thaha Hussein, whom he very much admires and any other Arab intellectuals—classical and contemporary—not necessarily indeed in the depth of his thinking or in its value, but in terms of controversy, it has created.<sup>37</sup>

As a communist, al-‘Alawī is under the influence of Communism, including in regard to its denunciation to religion. Communism is known for its “religion is opium” doctrine. His scrutiny of Islam and its various aspects is aimed solely at showing its fallacies. While being communist represents the first phase of his life, being communist-sufi is the second phase of it. And it is during this second phase that he introduces what he calls *al-Mashā’iyah*, literally means Communo-Sufism.

This concept may be said as an attempt to imbue Communism with spirituality hitherto absent within it, or otherwise to emphasize the materialistic dimension of Sufism. But it is also meant as a mechanism to criticize Communism. At some point in his life, he came to realize that Communism alone is not sufficient. The Western version of it has become too repugnant and ideological. But above all, Communo-Sufism is also a tool to further put Islam on its knees and to promote Sufism as a new—and the most important—dimension of what he calls the “living Islam”.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it is at this stage that he speaks of the “dead” and the “living” Islam. The dead is the Islam of the jurists whose abstractions of it are discriminative and intimidating, while the living is the Islam of the Sufis.<sup>39</sup>

Paradoxically though, the kind of “living Islam” he speaks about is not the one common Muslims would have in mind. It is not that which is based on revelation ordained by God to Prophet Muhammad through Archangel Gabriel. Nor is it that which relies on the Qur’an and prophetic tradition as its primary sources. What al-‘Alawī means by “living Islam” is that which is theologically based on

<sup>36</sup> Latin, *Maḥabbah min Ḥayāt*.

<sup>37</sup> In the words of Alexandre JME Christoyannopoulos, al-‘Alawī’s ideas in general and his *Madārāt Ṣūfiyyah* in particular are about creating anarchy. See Alexandre JME Christoyannopoulos, *Religious Anarchism: New Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 283.

<sup>38</sup> Hādī al-‘Alawī, *Fi al-Islām al-Mu‘āṣir* (Damaskus: Dār al-Madā, 1993), 12.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

the Judeo-Christian traditions; socially and legally on the pre-Islamic values and social system; intellectually on the Persian and Byzantine philosophy; ideologically on Communism; and spiritually on Sufism. The fact that Islam is a religion of an absolute divinity is in itself an indication that it is Judaism-oriented. It's Christian root in the meantime, maybe traced from some of its teachings including that of trade and ownership. Al-ʿAlawī argues that chapter al-Tawbah/34, which reads “and those who hoard gold and silver, give them tidings of severe punishment”, is clearly derived from the Biblical verse in the Book of Matthew (6:19-21) which reads “do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be”. On this ground, there cannot be a religion called Islam, and that the proper name for this religion is rather “Yahmes-Salami”, an abbreviation for *Yahudiyyah* (Judaism), *Masihīyah* (Christianity) and Islam.<sup>40</sup>

As much as Islam drew from Judaism and Christianity for its theology, the pre-Islamic tradition for its social system, as well as from the Persian and Byzantine philosophy for its epistemological foundation, it must also learn from other sources available if it is to survive and develop. These sources that have an abundance of reservoirs, especially as far as ideology and spirituality are concerned are Communism and Sufism.

As to Communism, al-ʿAlawī is specifically interested in the Chinese version of it particularly because of its ability to merge with Taoism. And it is this form of Communism that he thinks has the potential to be integrated with Sufism.

Sufism itself by its nature is very much communistic, he argues. It has two forms, namely, social and epistemological. The former is to do with resistance against the rich and the powerful, while the latter is about the rejection of religion and its authority represented by the jurists.<sup>41</sup> Sufism is independent of Islam and is founded by the Sufis

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>41</sup> al-ʿAlawī, *Madārāt*, 57.

themselves deserve to be treated as prophets. Al-‘Alawī, at some point, even considers the Sufis greater than the prophets.<sup>42</sup>

But he also sees Sufism—like any other Muslims—as the moral and spiritual dimension of Islam. He used to hate it and see it as—borrowing Husain Mirwah—“stone piles in stagnant water”.<sup>43</sup> But subsequently, he looks at it as the “very heart of civility”.

He himself claims to be a Sufi, a claim supported by his close colleagues such as Ahmad Abdul Husain, Mazin Latif and Rashid Khayyunaw. He expressed his emphatic love for the Sufi sages in his *Madārāt*. Some of the Sufis he adores include Salmān al-Fārisī, Abū Dhar al-Ghifārī, al-Ḥallāj, al-Biṣṭāmī, al-Ma‘arrī, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Sab‘īn, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī. The latter he believes is the last Sufi after whom Sufism is mere literature and thought and not a social and spiritual movement. The Sufis that appeal to him are those that displayed not only spiritual quality but also defended the fate of the poor and the marginalized. In many ways, Sufism resembles the Taoist Communism. They are “not only ideas, culture or ideology. They are also love and affection for which people would naturally adore”.<sup>44</sup>

In *Madārāt* al-‘Alawī announces emphatically that, “my heart is communist, while my soul is sufi”.<sup>45</sup> He claims to have lived his life according to the sufi principles such as al-Biṣṭāmī’s teaching that, “a Sufi is he who does not possess anything, nor is he possessed by anything”; or al-Jīlānī’s exemplary asceticism; or al-Ḥallāj’s commitment to “death” and his piece of advice that, “men may acquire the essence of life through different means such as “death”, because it is through death that they experience sweetness and accomplish an eternal life. Through death too, they become creative and innovative, because at such state their imaginative faculty works at best”.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 79-80. Having seen Sufism in this way, al-‘Alawī’s construction of it is very much distorted. Carl Ernst and Alexander Knysh have anticipated this and expressed their concern that in modern time, Sufism is among the most vulnerable forms of knowledge to distortion. See Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> Husayn Muruwah, *al-Naẓ‘at al-Madhyah fi al-Falsafah al-‘Arabīyah al-Islamiyah* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilām al-Arabī, 1986).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The kind of Communism and Sufism that he adopted is that which may complement each other. From Sufism he took that which has the “communist” nuances and from Communism that which has spiritual wisdom. To the extent that al-‘Alawī is selective in adopting a particular form of Communism, Mazin Latif is partly correct in saying that he is a Marxist.<sup>46</sup> But this applies only to the first stage of his life. The truth is that he has moved beyond Marxism. Husain Mirwah has aptly described that “al-‘Alawī has evolved from Stalinism to Leninism, to Marxism and ended up in ‘Taoism’”.<sup>47</sup> The final stage is the phase in which he resisted the European forms of Communism and charged the Western communists—except Karl Marx, Lenin, Tolstoy and Goethe—as corrupted and misled.<sup>48</sup>

Being communist-sufi is therefore about endorsing Communo-Sufism as the most important part of “living Islam” and keeping the “dead Islam” at bay. Under its banner—it implies—only the sufistic version of Islam that may be deemed authentic and genuine. Other forms including that which is brought about by Muhammad is fake and heretical.<sup>49</sup>

Al-‘Alawī speaks equally highly of the Taoist and Sufis. They are treated as a heavenly human being. His *Madārāt* is written to promote Communo-sufism, but also to praise and salute these masters. Here he speaks of the Taoist preachers even before some of the greatest Sufis as if there is a sense of superiority. But Ibn ‘Arabī was discussed ahead of them all. The Taoist masters that he spoke of include Lao Tzu (b. 601 BCE), Meng Tze, Mencius (b. 289 BEC), and Chuang-tzu.<sup>50</sup> Looking at the scale and extent to which al-‘Alawī shows his affection toward these Taoist masters, it is fair that *Madārāt* is a monument to celebrate their fame and greatness. But it is the Sufis that actually steal the show at *Madārāt*. Here al-‘Alawī allocated a great part of the book to speak of their teachings and wisdom.

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<sup>46</sup> Latin, *Maḥabbah min Ḥayāt*.

<sup>47</sup> Muruwah, *al-Naḥ‘āt al-Madīyah*.

<sup>48</sup> al-‘Alawī, *Madārāt*, 149.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 158. Sometime al-‘Alawī acknowledges Muhammad as prophet too. But he quickly distinguishes between true prophethood and political prophethood. The former is represented by the likes of Jesus and Lao Tzu, while the latter by Muhammad. Political prophethood is identical with political ambition whose mission is merely to pursue power and worldly authority. See al-‘Alawī, *Madārāt*, 120.

<sup>50</sup> al-‘Alawī, *Madārāt*, 107-116.



Al-‘Alawī distinguishes between three kinds of Sufism, namely scientific, *‘irfānī* (epistemological) and social Sufism.<sup>51</sup> But he sometimes simplified this distinction into two, namely epistemological and social Sufism.<sup>52</sup> The former is represented by the likes of al-Bistami, Samnun al-Baghdadi, Junaid al-Baghdadi, Sirri al-Saqathi, Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn Sab‘īn, while the latter by al-Husain b. Mansur al-Ḥallāj, Abu ‘Ala al-Ma‘arrī and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, among others.

The epistemological Sufism teaches about the concept of existence and love. The main premise developed by this segment of Sufism is that existence is rationally constructed. Any existence has meaning, and meaning may be apprehended by means of one’s rational—and not always spiritual—faculty. It also distinguishes between what is called *tawājūd* and *wujūd*. The former is physical—hence empirical—, while the latter is meta-empirical. *Wujūd* is higher than *tawājūd* in the hierarchy of existence, to whom men must direct their love. At the very top of *wujūd* is God, the abode of men’s heart and soul.<sup>53</sup> God is perfect in His essence, names and attributes. To love Him is to put Him above anything. Love is everything, without which God would not create earth and heaven.

The greatest epistemological Sufis of all time are Ibn ‘Arabī followed by Ibn Sab‘īn and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī. In *Madārāt*, al-‘Alawī discusses the teaching of these three masters in the same chapter. Their doctrine is essentially philosophical, although there might be a social aspect in it. Their main teaching is *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (the Unity of Being), which al-‘Alawī interpreted as implying—among others—the unity of religions. But it also implies that once man and God are united, nothing—including Prophet—is required given that “man has become God in the state of unity with Him”.<sup>54</sup> Man of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is higher in his spiritual position than the Prophet and has the ability to reach God with his natural spiritual ascension.

Prophethood is therefore rejected in al-‘Alawī’s discourse. A man by his nature tends to be godly. His spiritual and religious tendencies are God-given. Prophethood, with its doctrine and law,

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<sup>51</sup> al-‘Alawī, *Madārāt*, 50.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

denies this and treats man as if he has gone astray. He cries, “prophethood is natural defiance of God’s decree. It is heretical”.<sup>55</sup>

Provided that the Prophet has no capacity to lead human being with his claims, he does not logically deserve to receive revelation. Al-‘Alawī teaches that what has been perceived as revelation is actually an imagination.<sup>56</sup> The very essence of prophethood is a myth.<sup>57</sup> It is not scientific. So, like al-Ma‘arrī, al-Razi and Ibn al-Rwandi before him, al-‘Alawī holds the view that Prophet has no ability to communicate with God due to his spiritual and intellectual capacities being overshadowed by his overwhelming fantasy. At some point in his life, Prophet Muhammad became even mad, lost his mind and thought of committing suicide, writes al-‘Alawī.<sup>58</sup>

Apart from the notion of existence, epistemological Sufism also teaches the concept of love. The essence of love is to acquire closeness with the beloved one. Love has five dimensions, these are, a) one’s love to his own self, b) one’s love to someone that has done good to him, helped him to acquire what is good, guided him to do good and avoid what is dull, c) one’s love to someone the way he/she loves him/herself, d) to love anything good and beautiful, and e) spiritual love, that is love between individuals on the basis of spiritual connections.<sup>59</sup> These are worldly loves.

To these, he added another one, which he believes to be the essence of all love, that is, divine love.<sup>60</sup> This kind of love is about God being the source of love and the object of love. In contrast to the worldly love which leads to what he calls “mundane luxuries”, divine love leads to “sacred sanctity”.<sup>61</sup> Worldly love—such as marriage—may be misappropriated resulted in men and women to suffer. In marriage, the spouses betrayed each other under the disguise of love. Not to marry is, therefore, the answer to avoid living

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>60</sup> al-‘Alawī’s distinction of love is identical to many *‘irfānī* Sufis. Rabī‘ah al-Adawīyah for instance distinguished between what she calls Hubb al-Hawa (love of passion) and *Maḥabbah* Allah (love for God). The latter is selfish love seeking paradise, while the latter is selfless love seeking God’s pleasure. See Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 53.

in suffering. Al-ʿAlawī himself has never been married. And he referred to many Sufis that did the same such as Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, Bashr al-Hafī, and Maʿrūf al-Karkhī.

All epistemological Sufis are exponents of divine love. These Sufis—while differing in some details—advocate the idea that love is the origin of existence. The concept of love evolves from time to time, each of which has its own distinctive traits culminated in ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, the last sufi after whom Sufism ceased to progress due partly to the orthodox resilience.<sup>62</sup> Al-Jīlī developed his own concept making use of the reservoirs he inherited from Ibn ʿArabī. At his hand, the notion of love in particular and the concept of Sufism, in general, have been perfected. What is notably interesting is the fact that at this final and perfect stage, epistemological Sufism has gone from a theistic form of knowledge to the atheistic one, implying therefore that the idea of God as an absolute existence is dropped off.<sup>63</sup> In other words, Sufism is simply atheism.

Al-Jīlī himself was an atheist Sufi, al-ʿAlawī claims. At his hand, the concept of love became the only mechanism for the unity of God and man. This is quite similar to Ibn ʿArabī's model. But for al-Jīlī, as opposed to Ibn ʿArabī, unity in love implies that God has no longer acknowledged His own divinity, just as man is no longer deemed as profane. The two are both God and man at the same time.<sup>64</sup>

Al-Jīlī brought in some arguments to justify his view. He, for instance, says that “the existence of God is to be found in the existence of His creature, and the existence of His creatures is to be found in His manifestation. God cannot see His creatures except through His own existence”.<sup>65</sup> He adds elsewhere that, “the highest degree of a man being God's manifestation is when he is intimately united with Him. So intimate that the two can no longer be differentiated. In such state, God skips the attribute “servant” from man and substitutes it with “God”. Therefore when a man is called “O, God”, he would turn around and respond”.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The idea of who is the last sufi saint has always been problematic. Ibn ʿArabī used to claim that he is the last—hence the best—sufi saint. Such claim cannot be justified, as Sufism as a form of knowledge is continuously evolving and developing as long as human being have spiritual demands.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

Within the context of atheistic Sufism, al-Jīlī teaches that Devil is the most faithful creatures of God. His faith is so pure that he refused to bow before Adam.<sup>67</sup> On this issue, many Sufis before al-Jīlī have indeed offered their perspectives. Prominent among them is al-Ḥallāj known for his controversial stance. Following al-Ḥallāj and al-Jīlī, al-ʿAlawī also defended the Devil's position for two reasons. First, the Devil is correct in rejecting any mediator between him and God. Second, a man like Adam is not an object of worship. Only God is worthy of worship. Al-ʿAlawī then applauds al-Ḥallāj for praising the Devil who says, "even if God punishes me in a severe torment for eternity, I will never bow before a despicable creature called Adam".<sup>68</sup>

On the issue of Devil, al-ʿAlawī went further by criticizing God and blames Him for doing the wrong thing. "God's mistake" claims al-ʿAlawī, "lies in His contradictory command. On the one hand, He prohibits polytheism, but on the other, He ordered angels to bow before Adam".<sup>69</sup>

The atheism of al-Jīlī is also apparent from his belief that religions other than Islam are true. He, for instance, accepted the doctrine of Trinity and acknowledged that Jesus is God for two reasons. First, "the unity of God can be manifested in multiplicity".<sup>70</sup> Second, "Jesus is the essence of God's existence. Jesus's substance is His substance. Religious truth is not the monopoly of any single religion. It is distributed to all religions. An infidel is a believer too so long as he is the servant of God. There is no such thing as an infidel given that any person—provided that he is God's servant—is a worshipper of God".<sup>71</sup>

### **Social Sufism: The Disruptive Discourse**

This is the anathema of al-ʿAlawī's preaching. The "innovation" that he has invented disrupted not only theological, legal and philosophical foundations of Islam but also created disorder and intellectual anarchism. His fundamental theory is that Sufism is originally a social movement. Its scientific paradigm was a later development. To speak of it is actually to speak of the spiritually-

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

oriented social system. His exposition of the epistemological Sufism serves as a prelude to juxtapose another—yet more important—form of it, called social Sufism.<sup>72</sup>

The idea of Sufism as a social movement is supported by various arguments al-‘Alawī found from different sources. The *Lisān al-‘Arab*, for instance, defines the Sufis as the pious people sent to bring about social wellbeing. Al-Munawī, in his *Sharḥ al-Jāmi‘ al-Shaghīr* reports that Alī b. Abī Ṭalib used to say that, “the ascetics are not better than other groups of people because of their asceticism, prayer, fasting or rituals. They are better because of their social conducts”. In the meantime, al-Sha‘rānī in his *Tanbih al-Mughṭarrin* wrote that Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that, “an ascetic does not enter paradise because of his prayer and fasting but because of his humility and morality”. Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām, on his part, acknowledges that Ibn ‘Arabī was very caring to other peoples and attentive to their rights. And finally, some Sufi sages are commonly called *Dhana’in*, meaning those who protect themselves from negative and destructive deeds socially.<sup>73</sup>

Identifying Sufism as originated from the social activism of the Sufis, and not from the tradition of the Prophet, al-‘Alawī maintains that at its formative period in the hand of Ibrāhīm d. Adham as its founder, Sufism contains four main teachings, namely a) asceticism, b) combating hedonistic way of life, c) rejecting the dichotomy between the rich and the poor, and d) rejecting the hegemony of the rulers over their subject. As a social movement, it has two stations, that is, the station of social care and social resistance. The former is an attitude resulted from asceticism, modesty, patience, and serenity.<sup>74</sup> The latter in the meantime results from a spiritual journey, exile, realization, and divine discoveries.<sup>75</sup> Salmān al-Fārisī, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalib and Abū Dhar al-Ghifārī are among the practitioners of social Sufism as far as caring to others are concerned. Their modest lifestyle has been exemplary. Each lived a poor life, so poor that Salman, for instance, has never had a sandal on his foot; al-Ghifārī defended the

<sup>72</sup> Attention to the social aspect of Sufism has been minimum. Among the few studies on this aspect—and perhaps the latest one—is that of Seema Golestaneh’s. See Seema Golestaneh, *The Social Life of Gnosis: Sufism in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (PhD Thesis--The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 42.

poor by rejecting friendship with the rich; while Ali often has no food of the day to eat and preferred to share his food with the poor.

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī is another example of how simple and caring early social Sufis are. Al-Jīlānī was reported to have given away a huge amount of his wealth to the poor and the needy.<sup>76</sup> In the teaching of al-Jīlānī “to feed the hungry and the needy and to create a peaceful environment” are the first things that the Sufis should do”.<sup>77</sup> Al-Jīlānī in addition was reported to have said that, “many people have done noble things. But for me, the noblest of all things is to feed the hungry and the poor. Had the whole world been my property, I would have distributed it all to the hungry”.<sup>78</sup>

Like al-Jīlānī, Ibrāhīm b. Adham before him was also known for his ascetic life. In *Hilyat al-Awliyā’*, it is said that he inherited a huge amount of money from his parent. He took the whole money to the poor people and distributed to them all.

Another example of socially caring Sufism came from Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, known for his polite attitude not only to the fellow human being but also to the animal, plants and grosses. Al-‘Alawī quoted a piece of the story from *Mir’at al-Zamān* which goes that, “one day Abū Yazīd was washing his clothes at the backyard of his home. A friend of his told him to hang the washing on the wall of the yard. Abū Yazīd replied that the owner of the wall would not allow that. The friend said to hang the washing on the tree instead. Abū Yazīd refused the idea because that will cause damage to the branches. The friend proposed to dry-out the washing on the grosses. Abū Yazīd also rejected because that will cause the grosses to die out. In the end, Abū Yazīd decided to hang the washing on his own back until it gets dry”.<sup>79</sup>

Junaid al-Baghdadi in the meantime has taught, as reported by Ibn Abi al-Hadid in his explanatory notes on *Nahj al-Balāghah* that, “a man cannot be said to be morally good unless he/she becomes like a silent and noiseless soil on which people walk regardless of how good or bad these people are; or like a shade that protects people from heat

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. On al-Jīlānī’s bad terms with the Khalifah see also Abdul Kadir Riyadi, *Arkeologi Tasawuf: Melacak Jejak Pemikiran Tasawuf dari al-Muhāsibī hingga Tasawuf Nusantara* (Bandung: Mizan, 2016), 169-176.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 62.

regardless of how good or bad these people are; or like rain that sends water to the people regardless of who they are”.<sup>80</sup>

These are—and many more—examples that al-‘Alawī brought in to justify his view on the socially caring nature of Sufism. But social Sufism is not simply about caring to others. It is also about revolting to others. In fact, rebellion the highest station of social Sufism, al-‘Alawī proposes. Social care—the first station—is a prelude to the station of rebellion.<sup>81</sup> Three segments of people are the targets of his rebellion. These are the political, economic and religious elites. For him, the political elites are Satan, the bourgeois is greedy animals, while the jurists are idiot bigots.<sup>82</sup> What social Sufis have done all along, al-‘Alawī claims is to resist them and to wipe them out from the face of the earth”.<sup>83</sup> Amir al-‘Anbari fought against ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān and Mu‘āwiyah, and was exiled to Hijaz by ‘Uthmān and to Sham by Mu‘āwiyah as a result.<sup>84</sup> Al-Ḥallāj fought fiercely against Ali b. Isa, Hamid b. al-Abbas and al-Muqtadir in order to establish his own state based on justice. Al-Dhahabī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Manawī explain that al-Ḥallāj received support from as far afield as India, Central Asia, Iran and Irak.<sup>85</sup> Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Nīfārī also fought against the Fatimid ruler in Egypt at the time, and tried to establish his “socialist state”.<sup>86</sup>

The Sufis’s rebellion is not only directed toward the rulers but also to their apparatus, of which Ibrahim b. Adham is a clear example. He hated not only the king but also his soldiers. It is said that “any time he saw the soldiers passing by in front of his home in Sham, he would throw away his bucket to the well so that they would not be able to use it to collect water”.<sup>87</sup>

The most rebellious Sufis of all time are ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, according to al-‘Alawī. This Baghdad’s sage refused to be befriended

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>85</sup> Many like Louis Massignon and Herbert W. Mason proposed that political motive was behind the murder of al-Ḥallāj. See Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Herbert W. Mason, *al-Ḥallāj* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> al-‘Alawī. *Madārāt*, 133

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 107.

by the Abbasid Caliph. The Caliph often wanted to visit him at his house, but he refused it. And when he intended to give him financial aid, al-Jīlānī replied fervently, “I do not accept aid obtained from the blood of the people”.<sup>88</sup> In *Qalā'id al-Jawāhir*, al-Jīlānī is reported to have robbed some Caliph's goods and distributed them to the poor.<sup>89</sup> He hated Caliph al-Muqtafi and condemned him on various occasions. In one of his sermons, he described him as a “bee”, symbolizing his habit in sucking people's blood. He pronounces, “O bee, never cheat your subject, or I will chop your head off”.<sup>90</sup>

Elsewhere, Caliph al-Mustanjid is reported to have visited al-Jīlānī in his home bringing with him ten bags of precious presents, each of which is carried by one assistant. Al-Jīlānī rejected them all instantly. But surprisingly he took two of them, and put them in his hand, the one on his left and the other on his right. Not long after that, the two bags turned to blood. Al-Jīlānī said, “O *al-Mustanjid*, do not you shy for having enriched yourself by subjugating your subjects?”.<sup>91</sup>

The rich and the bourgeoisie is also the object of Sufis' rebellion. For al-ʿAlawī, this group of people are the most cursed ones and “have been expelled from the Kingdom of God”.<sup>92</sup> The bourgeoisie like to monopolize by making the poor their prey. During the time of Bishr al-Ḥafī, as narrated by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, “a woman came to give him a bucket of the grape as a present. But Bishr al-Ḥafī refused it on the ground that the bucket and the grape were washed at the “holy river”.<sup>93</sup> “Holy river” is a term for a canal owned by a rich man called Ṭāhir b. Ḥusayn, who misused his influence to exploit people.

Staying away from the bourgeoisie is the only way not to get exploited, al-ʿAlawī advises. But more importantly, being rich is the most effective means to prevent exploitation. This preventive method is part of social Sufis's teachings.<sup>94</sup> Some of them are rich themselves,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 36. Al-ʿAlawī claims that these are the words of Jesus.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 36.



at least financially independent such as Sarrī al-Saqatī, Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Sufyān al-Thawrī, al-Shāfi‘ī’s father and al-Ghazālī’s father.<sup>95</sup>

The last enemy of the social Sufis is religious elites, especially the jurists. It is this segment of people that al-‘Alawī put the blame the most for bringing Islam to its current static state. Since the jurists are the extension of Muhammad, it is he who should ultimately be counted responsible. Al-‘Alawī is harsh in his stance against the Prophet and is not hesitated in rejecting his prophethood. All social Sufis, he claims, are against prophethood such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-Kalabadhī, and al-Sarrāj.<sup>96</sup>

Al-‘Alawī believes that prophethood is not only meaningless but also dangerous, lethal and heretical. Mistakenly interpreting al-Makkī’s view, al-‘Alawī once said that “there is nothing more dangerous for a human being than religion”.<sup>97</sup> Therefore to accept prophethood and to listen to the jurist is the most foolish thing one could have done. Al-‘Alawī describes the jurists who follow the Prophet as “a group of gangsters who started their life as robbers”.<sup>98</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Born into a very poor family and in a desperate situation—in addition to the unstable and troublesome environment—are the factors behind the transformation of al-‘Alawī from a normal citizen into an ideologist whose mission in life is to rebel against the status quo. Looking at the way he launched an attack on the objects of his frustration, he seems to have lost faith in the social system and religious belief he found himself in. The fact that nothing within his society and religion pleases him is in itself a strong indication that he is disillusioned and embittered.

Inconsistency is one of the main traits in his thinking. At some point, he would wrestle the theological and social system of Islam. But it is the same system that gave him the ground for his intellectual project. He rejected prophethood and charged Prophet Muhammad as a liar. But it is the same Prophet that he acknowledged as

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 67. What al-Makkī said was the following, “*laysa ‘alā al-makhlūq adbar min al-Khalīq*”, which literally means, “God is the most dangerous Being upon the creatures”. This is metaphorical statement, and is meant as a reminder that God’s punishment is severe for those who transgress.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 122.

producing many Sufis he has high regard of. What makes him and his discourse quite astonishing is his embellished and chronic “criticism” of God; something no one in the whole history of Islam has ever done.

For many, he has been dubbed a “young al-Ḥallāj”. To the extent that the two are anarchistic intellectuals, the nickname is proper. But the fact remains that al-‘Alawī is more dangerous than al-Ḥallāj in the way his discourse deals with the most sacred symbols of Islam.

Another problem with al-‘Alawī is a sense of anger and animosity found in almost all of his works. While it is legitimate to be critical of religion, it is nonetheless regrettable that a work of academic nature is not observing scientific objectivity.

The idea of Communo-Sufisme should be appreciated as a concept apart from its controversies and delusions. What is disturbing is, however, not the way it is being presented but the way Islam as a religion is being treated as an object of his criticism. Within this concept, Islam is perceived as dead and deadly. Scientifically this proposition is unacceptable. To say that Islam is dead is a gross violation of the most basic scientific rules of history, philosophy of science, logic, and all sorts. As a theory, this idea and other related themes remain useful as an alternative to look at Islam, Sufism and Muslim communities. But the careful and critical assessment of his theory and discourse is fundamentally required.

The works of al-‘Alawī are nonetheless distinct from another respect. And that lies in their ability to access the matrix of tensions in Islamic and Arabic intellectual discourse. His fomenting ideas show that Muslim and Arab scholars betrayed what he calls “the Living Islam”. He deserves appreciation in this regard. But his discourse is in itself betrayal to the traditionally recognized authentic Islam. It depicts heterodoxy rather than orthodoxy. As the controversial option within the larger Muslim community, his discourse—according to its own internal logic—is simply anarchy.

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