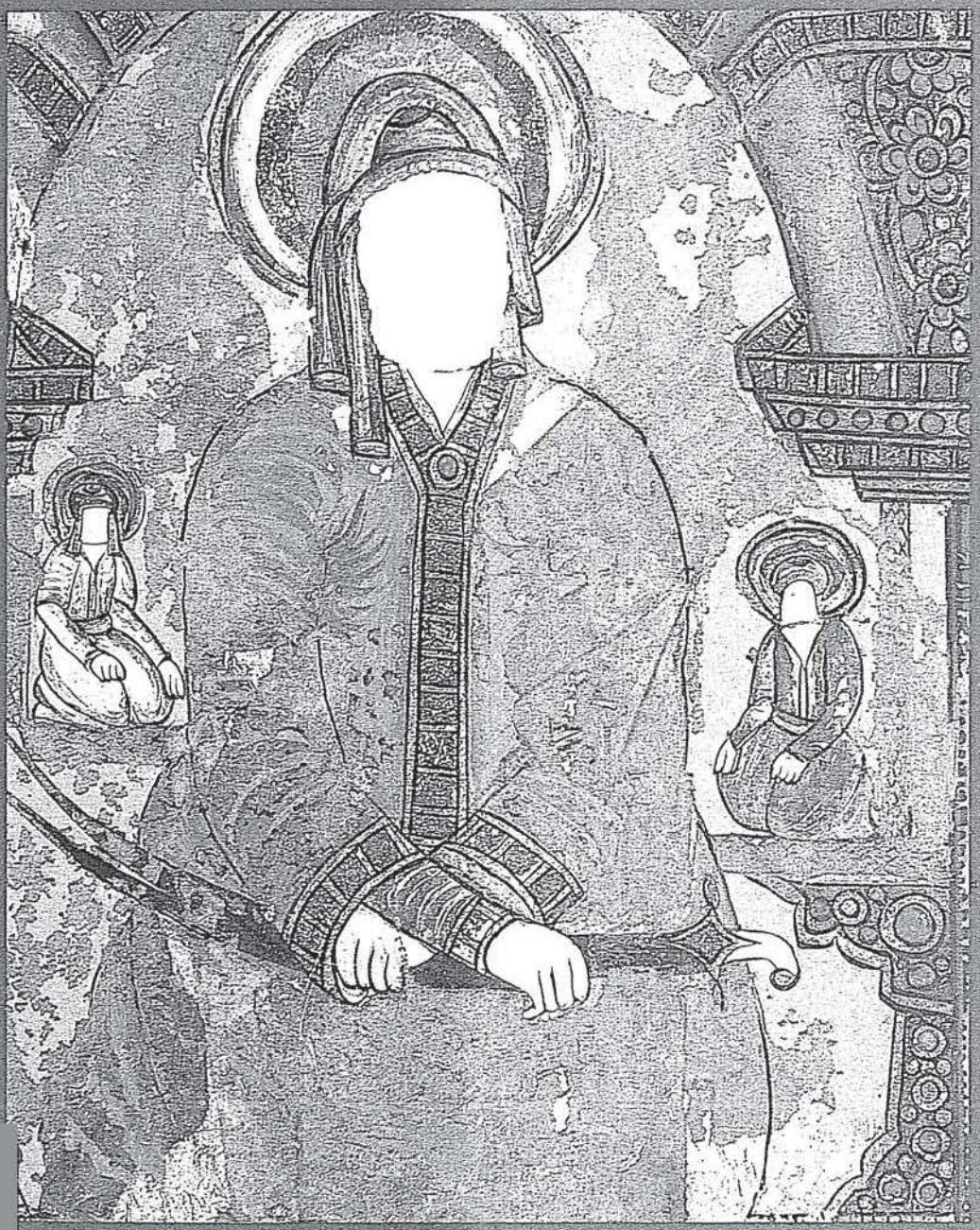
ALEVI IDENTITY



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SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL 1998

ALEVI IDENTITY

CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES

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Taqīya or Civil Religion? Druze Religious Specialists in the Framework of the Lebanese Confessional State

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Ever since European intellectuals came into contact with the secretive Druze religion in the 17th century, its very secretiveness has had a strong attraction on scholars. Most of its secret teachings were, however, relatively quickly discovered as the Druze religious writings became available in major European libraries. Even if corrected on a number of points by later scholarship, Silvestre de Sacy's monumental exposition of the Druze religion from 1838 still stands as a clear and detailed analysis of the cosmology and dogma of the early Druze religious canon which operates with a series of divine manifestations on earth, terminating in the intriguing figure of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim bi Amr Allah.

Throughout the ages, this particular faith in a divine manifestation in a human being has been considered a grave heresy by Muslims, as is witnessed by a number of very hostile fatwas on the Druze religion by Sunni authorities such as ibn Taymiya. The traditional reaction to Sunni hostility has, so it seems, been the confinement of Druze religious teaching even within the community to the selected few, the *uqqāl*, and a strong communitarian discipline. This has allegedly taken the form of a permission for the individual Druze to conceal his religion and claim another religion when amongst non-Druze.

Known as *taqīya*, this principle of concealment or secrecy has developed into a key concept in scholarly investigations of Druze religion and identity. This is quite remarkable, since, for obvious reasons, we are not in a postion to determine or even investigate how widespread this practice of concealment has actually been throughout the ages.[1]

One possible explanation for the prevalence of *taqīya*-centered explanations could be the 19th century historicist and evolutionist focus on origins and on religions as consisting of belief and dogma canonized in holy scripts. According to this understanding of religion, in order to understand the behaviour of contemporary adherents of a faith all we need to do is to study their holy books, and if they don't behave according to their holy books they must be either ignorant or bad members of their community, or they must be deceiving us, as in the case of *taqīya*. Although few scholars of today would endorse such a crude view of religion, there still seems to be some reluctance to accept the idea that basic tenets of a religion may change over time.

Another explanation for the *taqīya*-centered explanations is politics. It is no secret that the French Mandate of Syria based its policy on the experience of its Moroccan

1 Whether the principle of *taqīya* is in fact rooted in Druze religion at all has recently been questioned by Qais Firro in the article "The Druze in and between Syria, Lebanon and Israel" in Milton Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 185-97.

enterprise which may be summarized in the fomula of divide-and-rule. The territory of Syria, divided into Ottoman administrative districts, was re-divided into statelets, complete with flags and parliaments, based upon the religious divisions of the Syrian population. The only survivor of these states is the state of Lebanon, but there was also a separate Druze state on the Jabal Hawran in southern Syria. Thus, a separate and unified Druze religious identity was encouraged by the French administrative authorities, and attempts by Druze chiefs and intellectuals to define the Druze religion as a branch or particular school within Islam were dismissed as *taqīya*. This tension between, on the one hand, claims to a Druze particularism outside the religion of Islam, and on the other hand, claims to a Druze identity within Islam, is by no means a thing of the past. Many Druze would claim that the state of Israel has pursued policies identical with those of the French, creating separate Druze courts and the like and thereby cutting them off from their Muslim brethern. In Lebanon, too, there have been tensions between exclusivist Druze identitites and a politically dominant group who advocated a Druze identity within Islam.

In all of this, it can be argued, some sort of *taqīya* is clearly at play. Those who advocate a Druze religion within an Islamic framework are undoubtedly aware of the political benefits of this position. Moreover, it is true that there are important Druze religious and political leaders - in Mandatory Syria as well as in present-day Israel - who have stressed a Druze particularism outside Islam. *Taqīya*-centered explanations, then, are not merely the product of Western scholars, but based on Druze scriptures as well as on evidence from at least some contemporary Druze.

Even so, there are great problems with raising *taqīya* to a position where it can be used to dismiss all evidence contrary to a Druze particularist explanation. First of all, it is clear that, taken so far, *taqīya* suddenly becomes a ploy or a practice which, ironically, enables outsiders to define Druze religion and religious identity without allowing the Druze a say in the matter. This is evidenced by a number of books written by Christians during the civil war in the 1980s, all of them aiming at preventing an alliance between the Druze and the Muslims by depicting Druze religion as a flagrant heresy to Islam and dismissing Druze statements and claims to the contrary as mere *taqīya*.[2]

Another problem would be the sheer number of Druze who seem to be quite comfortable confirming their relationship with Islam. The upholders of *taqīya*-centered explanations may end up building their interpretation on a fairly limited group of "authentic" Druze statements and doing away with a rather greater corpus. How far could this be taken before it became absurd?

Related to this is the interesting phenomenon of literature on the Druze religion published by Druze - a mere handful of books in the first half of this century but since the mid-1960s - and especially the 1990s - several books a year, practically all of them affirming the Islamic identity of the Druze. Although admittedly most of these books could be described as apologetic and very selective in their rendering of the Druze theology and history, publication of books certainly is a far cry from the traditional definition of *taqīya* whereby an individual hides his true religion by claiming to belong to another. It is hard to believe that such a vast body of literature should be the product of a deliberate and organized strategy on the part of the Druze - and that it should neither reflect the true convictions of its authors nor affect the convictions of its readers, especially since at least in Lebanon some of these books are part of the curricula in Druze schools and have clearly been written for Druze consumption.

2 Here mention could be made of the first edition of the Druze holy Script, *al-Ḥikma*, published anonymously around 1980, or the book *Bayna'l-'Aql wa'n-Nabī* from 1985 published under pseudonyms, but habitually attributed to Maronite scholars at the University of Kaslik.

Werner Schmucker, who analyzed these books in the 1970s, has pointed out that they typically take their point of departure in the concept of *tawhīd*, a key concept in Druze Scripture but equally central to 20th century reformulations of Islam.[3] In the books, the Druze religion is depicted as rational, flexible, scientific and morally superior, favoring among other things the legal equality of women and men. In addition, the Druze are said to have a long history of succesful defence of the Arabs and Muslims against crusaders and imperialists, and their conservative attitude to the Arabic language and social mores is singled out. The Druze, in these books, are depicted as model Arabs. Finally, in the influential interpretations of the Druze religion by figures such as the political leader Kamāl Junblāṭ and the American University of Beirut (AUB) professor Sāmī Makārim the Druze religious doctrine is an advanced and elitarian Sufism, which may be the reason why not all Muslims are capable of understanding it.[4]

Now, in a *taqīya*-centered interpretation this may be said only to prove the point that the Druze - now in a collective, public enterprise - are striving to appear like the religions around them and to prove their Arabic and Islamic credentials. Alternatively - and much more convincingly, I believe - it could be seen to confirm the ideas of Peter Berger, Ernest Gellner and others, that in a modern setting, religions will be subjected to modernist interpretations that will tend to rationalize, moralize and stress religion as a collective historical identity rather than as an adequate and sufficient transcendental explanation of the world. It should come as no surprise, then, that people who live in the same time and place and share a great number of basic values and world views interpret their various religions in ways that are broadly similar and may even - consciously or unconsciously - borrow some ideas from each other. Indeed, it would be much more surprising if this were not the case, and we would be well advised to search for an adequate explanation. The Druze, in short, have developed a reading and interpretation of their history and religion which confirms their moral, political and communal world-view of today, and in this they are hardly different from what adherents of other religions have done. To identify anything the Druze have in common with Islam as a conscious *taqīya* is to deny the Druze the right to inspiration, or the borrowing or downright theft that other religions have always practiced, and more broadly to deprive the Druze religion of development and history.

A final problem in relation to *taqīya*-centered interpretation would be the Druze statelet that emerged in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 1983. For a period of seven years the Lebanese Druze community - always the strongest and most self-assured of the Druze communities - was in a posititon to set up its own administration and run its own territory under the leadership of Walīd Junblāṭ. How did they make use of it in terms of elaborating on the Druze identity? Nobody has analyzed this in any detail, but from my own investigations of the schoolbooks they introduced and the radio-station they set up, the answer is that it had little impact on the self-image of the Druze. This material insists on describing the Druze as model Muslims, model Arabs and model Lebanese who have always defended the liberalism and integrity of Lebanese territory. Once again it can be argued that the Druze knew very well that, sooner or later, they would be reintegrated into a larger Lebanese entity and therefore continued their practice of *taqīya*. Still, Sunni and Shia radicals did not feel these inhibitions when calling for an Islamic state, and, more

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3 Werner Schmucker, *Krise und Erneuerung im libanesischen Drusentum*, Bonn, 1979, pp. 163-66.

4 Kamāl Junblāṭ's views on the Druze religion have been analysed by Bernadette Schenk in *Kamal Joumblatt*, Berlin, 1994, especially pp. 138-47. Samī Makārim's views are expressed especially in *The Druze Faith*, N. Y. 1974.

importantly, one may ask how strong an attachment is to a postulated "genuine" Druze religion beneath the *taqīya* if it is not allowed to manifest itself under any conditions - and is even confined to a minority of initiates - whilst the so-called *taqīya* interpretation of Druze religion and history has held sway for decades.

From my point of view the uniquely divided character of the Druze community, still has relevance in a discussion of the study of the Druze, no doubt because it is split between three states pursuing very different minority policies: Lebanon, Syria and Israel. At least, I have touched upon a number of similarities - or perhaps only apparent similarities - between the situation of the Druze and that of the Alevi: among these similarities are sociological points such as new urbanized literate strata challenging the old initiates and lineages with new interpretations, widely published in a new literature on the religion; and there are some ideological points such as the stress on being patriots and model citizens in the nationstate, and the stress on the Islamic character of the faith, sometimes seen as a form of advanced Sufism. These and other features should be compared in order to investigate the positions and strategies of formerly heterodox religious movements in dealing with Islam and Islamic resurgence within the framework of a modern state with proclaimed freedom of religion. But one more theme mentioned must not be overlooked: that of a substantial division within the religious community itself as to its basic identity, and the fierce struggle among its political and religious leaders over the right to define the position of the community within the greater framework of the modern state.

It is this theme that I shall develop in this second half of my paper. I shall concentrate on the Lebanon and on conditions which seem to me specifically Lebanese, namely the set-up of the confessional system and the role of the Druze religious head, the *Shayk al-'Aql* therein.

The Lebanese Confessionalism

Politics in Lebanon is inscribed within what is commonly referred to as the confessional or inter-sect system, according to which ministries, seats in Parliament and high-level administrative positions are shared by the country's 17 religious communities roughly in accordance with their numerical size.

The Lebanese Constitution of 1926 spoke of the confessional power-sharing as a temporary phenomenon which should be abolished when other identities than the strictly confessional had taken roots in the Lebanese population. It seems, however, that far from contributing to an abolition of confessional identities among the Lebanese, the political system has effectively consolidated such identities. No matter how irreligious he is as a person, a Lebanese will still be forced to accept his religion as his basic identity in Lebanese society, determining which courts, offices and sometimes even schools and sporting clubs will let him in. The confessional system has effectively weakened the state by turning government and the administration into a battlefield where communal leaders fight over spoils for their client groups. And what is worse, the confessional system ensures that positions are distributed according to confessional identity and connections rather than qualifications and achievements. Politics in Lebanon is about families, patrons and clients.

The main beneficiaries of this religious clientilism are the major communal leaders within each political community, normally referred to as the *zu'amā*. Although sometimes referred to as feudal lords, the *zu'amā* are not a survival of the past, but modern politicians with access to state patronage through control of high offices from which they can distribute jobs and contracts to their client groups. A precondi-

tion for the *za'īm* is a state that renders services and a clientele that wields some political power of its own which it can deposit with him.[5]

Turning from the political leadership to the religious leadership and organization of the different communities, we note a great similarity between them in structure and legal status. This is due to the fact that although the Lebanese state in principle acknowledges the autonomy of the religious groups in internal affairs, this has not protected them from penetration by the confessional system.

The main reason for the great similarities between at least the Muslim communities is that they have copied each other. The 1960s laws setting up the Druze and the Shia internal organizations were based upon Decree 18 of 1955 regulating the Sunni religious administration. All three confessional communities are granted autonomy in their internal affairs, which are to be run by a council empowered to legislate in communal affairs. Among the ex officio members of the council are all ministers and MPs, that is, the *zu'amā* and their clients are present and dominate the council.

The council is presided over by the traditional religious head of the community, and both the council and its president are elected by the confessional group. The Lebanese state has been careful to place these religious heads on an equal footing with equal positions in the state protocol. This function as an official spokesman of a religious community within the framework of the modern state is an important addition to the traditional responsibilities of these religious offices and yet another example of the impact of the confessional system. Whatever differences may once have existed between the supreme offices of the various religious communities - Mufti, Cardinal, Patriarch, *Shaykh al-'Aql* etc.- to the Lebanese state they are all functionaries with equal functions, salaries and status.

It is also precisely the function as official representative and spokesman which makes the religious head an important player in the internal political affairs of the religious communities. No wonder, then, that the elections of the religious head amongst the Sunni, Druze and Shia have never gone smoothly but been a major battleground for the power struggle between the *zu'amā*.

The Lebanese Druze

Such is the framework for Druze social and political life in Lebanon. We note that, like the other major religious communities, the Druze have access to certain top positions in the state - usully two or three ministries, the defence ministry traditionally among them - and a number of key positions in the administration and the army. The Druze community in Lebanon had traditionally been affected by severe rivalry between two factions, the Junblāṭīya and the Yazbakīya. In the 19th century the Arslān family, which had been relatively neutral in this rivalry, was promoted by the Ottoman administration to the position as official heads of the Druze, a move which invariably involved it in the traditional factionalism, in which it came to represent the Yazbakīya against the dominant Junblāṭī family. When the state of Lebanon was created in 1920 and the confessional system put into place, these two families, Arslān and Junblāṭ, immediately came to dominate Druze politics, and their traditional rivalry has continued within the new framework of the state and its institutions. The two dominant Druze *zu'amā* after independence, Majīd Arslān and Kamāl Junblāṭ, were

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5 On the Lebanese confessional system and the *zu'amā*, see Arnold Hottinger, "Zu'ama in Historical Perspective", in Leonard Binder, *Politics in Lebanon*, New York, 1966; and Michael Johnson, *Class and Client in Beirut. The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State*, Ithaca, 1986.

strongly opposed to each other although they sat in numerous governments together during the period between independence and the civil war. As was the habit in Lebanese political culture, both of them teamed up with *zu'amā* from the other confessions, Majīd Arslān primarily with the dominant Maronite politicians, Kamāl Junblāṭ more daringly with a number of popular forces on the Muslim left, including the Palestinians.

As mentioned, since its earliest days the Druze community has been divided into two groups, those initiated into the religious secrets, the *'uqqāl*, and the larger group of non-initiated, the *juhhāl*. The *'uqqāl* have never enjoyed the political power which has been in the hands of certain dominant families. For some hundred years, at least, an intermediary office has been in existence, a representative of the *'uqqāl*, who has had an active political role, serving among other tasks as a conciliator and mediator between the Druze peasants and their feudal lords, and occasionally between the feudal lords themselves. This man, the *Shaykh al-'Aql*, was not elected by the *'uqqāl* but, as far as we can see, simply appointed by the dominant Druze political prince with whom he was in close cooperation.[6] Since 1825 the office has been divided into two - or even three - *Shaykh al-'Aql* positions, reflecting the Junblāṭī-Yazbakī split.

When the Druze were incorporated into the independent Lebanese state as an official religion, a law was passed assuring the independence of the Druze community in religious matters and establishing an electoral procedure for the office of *Shayk al-'Aql*, now officially recognized as the spiritual head of the Druze and their representative in Lebanese society. He was also made permanent president of the newly established Communal Council responsible for the community's social life and finances, including its religious trusts - clearly a key position with great political implications. This law of 1962 still operated under two *Shaykh al-'Aql*s, but when one of them died in 1970 - and a grosteque campaign for the office followed in which none of the 14 candidates was found worthy of the office, Majīd Arslān and Kamāl Junblāṭ agreed to cancel the elections and work for a revision of the law to provide for only one *Shaykh al-'Aql*. This work, however, was never completed due to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, and the law of 1962 still awaits revision. In the meantime, the surviving *Shaykh al-'Aql*, Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā, continued as the *de facto* sole *Shaykh al-'Aql*.

Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā and the Reformulation of Druze Identity

It would be hard to overestimate the role of Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā in the formulation of a Druze religious identity within the Lebanese state. Already appointed *Shaykh al-'Aql* in 1948 - the year when a Law of Personal Status of the Druze Community was promulgated marking the official recognition of the Druze as a distinct religious community - Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā was at the forefront of Druze communal politics until his death in 1991, one year after the end of the civil war. Although originally the Yazbakī *Shaykh al-'Aql* and thus linked to the Arslān family, Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā developed close ties with Kamāl Junblāṭ, and it was their cooporation, especially in the 1960s, that led to the reformulation of the Druze religious identity as an Islamic spiritual tradition akin to that of Sufism and of the Brethren of Purity.

Acting upon the Law of 1962 which made *Shaykh al-'Aql* the official head of the Druze Community, Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā set out to construct the formidable "House of the Druze Community" in the fashionable Beiruti district of Verdun to

6 On the history of the *Shaykh al-'Aql*, see the informative article by Judith Harik, "Shaykh al-Aql and Druze of Mount Lebanon: Conflict and Accommodation", *Middle Eastern Studies* 30/3 (1994), 461-85.

serve as the seat of the Community Council and the *Shaykh al-'Aql*'s daily administration. He took steps to organize the most important *'uqqāl*, the *ajawīd*, but they resisted.[7]

Abū Shaqrā also sought to trace the position of *Shaykh al-'Aql* back to the Fatimids and the institution of the Imam. This move would, if successful, have enhanced is political position considerably, but his endeavours to politicize the office were looked upon with mistrust in many Druze quarters.[8] When, in 1965, the wave of Druze publications on the Druze religion was initiated with a book by 'Abd Allāh an-Najjār - the first book to quote from the Druze holy scripture - Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā and Kamāl Junblāṭ decided to let Sāmī Makārim write a refutation, but they themselves were on the reform-side, quite willing to discuss Druze religion and spirituality in public.

A recurrent theme in the books by Sāmī Makārim and Kamāl Junblāṭ was the Islamic character of the Druze faith. This was also the position of Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā, one of whose more lasting achievements was the resurrection of a monthly magazine on Druze affairs, significantly named *aḍ-Ḍuḥā*, the Morning Light - a reference to the Koran's sura 93. Among the recurring themes of this magazine are, of course, communal politics among the Druze, but rather more space is taken up by themes such as the political suppression of Muslims around the world or great personalities in the Islamic spiritual tradition.

The Islamic interpretation of the Druze religion became politically crucial during the civil war. When, in 1975-76, during the initial stages of the war, Kamāl Junblāṭ and Sāmī Makārim were strongly divided over which policy to pursue, Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā emerged as the spokesman for overall Druze communal interests. On a number of occasions he met with the Shia religious Head Mūsā Ṣadr and the Sunni Mufti Ḥasan Khālid to issue joint statements to the media on the war, criticising Christian political dominance and calling for a redistribution of power to the benefit of the Islamic communities. Moreover, as state services declined during the war, Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā's political influence enabled him to provide needy Druzes with medical treatment, jobs, and other services normally exclusively controlled by the *zu'amā*. Although Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā's relations with Kamāl Junblāṭ's son Walīd were often strained, by the end of the war it was clear that the position of *Shaykh al-'Aql* had consolidated itself as an important power base at the interface between politics and communitarian identity among the Druze.

Walīd Junblāṭ, who came to the fore after his father's assassination in 1977, succeded in establishing an autonomous Druze territory in the Shuf mountains from 1983 and for seven years reigned supreme as Mājid Arslān had just died and had been discredited among the great majority of the Druze for his support of the Israeli invasion in 1982.[9] Walīd Junblāṭ was much less interested in the Druze religion than his father and the most important ideological initiative during his unchallenged reign was a revision of the schoolbook curriculum, especially in history, where a new set of books extolled the Druze Lebanese patriotism from the 17th century emir Fakhr ad-Dīn to the time of the civil war. The Druze identity stressed in these books was not primarily religious but rather a "community of fate" - and this identity must have corresponded well with the sentiments of many Druze who were not initiated and, besides, had little interest in the contents of the Druze religion but whose Druze identity had been firmly consolidated by the war's general sectarianism.

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7 'Afīf Khiḍr, "Mashaykhat al-'Aql bayna's-siyasa wa'r-ruhānīya", *ad-Diyār*, Febrary 2, 1995.

8 On Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā's political initiatives in the 1960s, see Josef van Ess, *Zerstrittene Drusenscheiche, Die Welt des Islams*, N. S. 12 (1969), 99-125, pp. 108-109.

9 See *Herald Tribune*, July 12, 1982.

However, Walīd Junblāṭ made another move of great potential importance for the Druze ideological commitment to Druze religion: he devoted a wing of the national museum of Beiteddin to the memory of this father, the martyr Kamāl Junblāṭ. There is today among Lebanon's - and even Syria's - Druze a veritable Kamāl Junblāṭ cult - no doubt primarily due to his political achievements but also in recognition and warmly admiration of the spiritual aspect of his life, including his poetry, his asceticism (he even had a guru in India whose ashram he occasionally stayed in) and his spiritualized Socialist tiers-mondism. According to the latter, the Druze are the true heirs of the Orient's spiritual traditions and have a unique mission in the future in spiritualizing Western materialism and promoting a just global democracy. One suspects that to the majority of the Lebanese Druze, these ideas may be overly grand and visionary and far beyond their immediate interest, but they are nevertheless important because they provide the Druze religion with a place and a vocation in the modern age - something it had badly needed. They are certainly not to be dismissed as *taqīya*.

Druze Identity and the Role of the *Shayk al-'Aql* in Post-War Lebanon

The Taif Accord of 1989 and the following constitutional amendments of 1990 laid out the future of Lebanon's political system and called for the dismantling of the confessional system after a period of transition. As of yet, no step has been taken in the direction of an abolition of the confessional system which seems to be as consolidated as ever, as witnessed in the general elections in 1996. The *zu'amā* are back in government - not necessarily the old *zu'amā* but new and powerful ones, some of them the major warlords who have been allowed to trade their military position for central positions in the state. This is the case with Walīd Junblāṭ, who has been an important minister since the Lebanese government resumed its functions in 1991. Many forces both inside and outside the Druze community have tried to promote Majīd Arslān's son Ṭalāl to challenge Junblāṭ and reestablish the classical state of Druze factionalism, but so far in vain. In the electoral laws of 1992 and 1996 Walīd Junblāṭ succeeded in obtaining special exemptions for the size of the electoral districts in the Mount Lebanon, thereby preserving the Shuf, Aley and Upper Matn areas as his fief. As a result, Talāl Arslān had a poor result in the elections in August 1996, in which all his allies lost and he himself only just made it to Parliament. His promotion to Minister in October 1996 must be seen as a strategy by Prime Minister Rafīq al-Harīrī the check to power of his ally Walīd Junblāṭ. Druze factionalism is reborn, but Walīd Junblāṭ is still far too strong to be challenged on his home turf.

One day before he died in 1991, Muḥammad Abū Shaqrā appointed an interim successor, the businessman Bahjat Ghayth. Such an appointment was a circumvention of the Law of 1962 according to which there is no such thing as a deputy *Shaykh al-'Aql*, and the *Shaykh al-'Aql* must be elected, not appointed. Still, Walīd Junblāṭ accepted the appointment until elections could be made, and Bahjat Ghayth has been in office ever since. The revision of the Law of 1962 has been jeopardized by the rivalry between Walīd Junblāṭ and Ṭalāl Arslān, who cannot agree among themselves as to the correct procedure for the appointment of an interim council to organize the election of the *Shaykh al-'Aql*.

Although he is only deputy *Shaykh al-'Aql*, Bahjat Ghayth has maintained a high profile in office. He makes statements to the media and takes his official function as spokesman of the Druze very seriously. This has on several occasions annoyed Walīd

Junblāṭ - and also some influential *'uqqāl* who never found him worthy of the office in the first place. Matters came to a head in the fall of 1995 when Ghayth openly defied Junblāṭ in his support for a candidate for presidency in Lebanon - eventually the elections were cancelled - and spoke at a Shia meeting organized by Junblāṭ's most powerful political rival Nabīh Berrī. At a meeting in the Shuf village of Baaqlin, Junblāṭ obtained a resolution calling for the dismissal of Ghayth, and on October 25 Prime Minister Rafīq al-Harīrī complied with the wish of his ally and appointed another deputy *Shaykh al-'Aql*, Salmān 'Abd al-Khāliq. Bahjat Ghayth, in turn, has refused to accept his dismissal. He raised a case against Harīrī's appointment at the Conseil d'Etat, and although it was rejected in January 1996, he simply stayed on in the Community House. Some sort of compromise can be expected to materialise after the elections of 1996, but even though Walīd Junblāṭ is in a very strong position, politically, it seems doubtful whether he will be able to fully control the office of *Shaykh al-'Aql*, which appears to have acquired a public role to be reckoned with.

This argument seems to be borne out by another development - and the last one to be mentioned here - namely, the slightly altered role of the religious heads in the post-war so-called Second Republic. As mentioned, they hold equal status in the protocol of the state. They were and are regularly invited to official ceremonies, and the obligatory photo of all the Christian and Muslim religious leaders in their variegated dresses and headgear is a familiar symbol of national unity in the Lebanese media. This in itself is not a new phenomenon, but after 15 years of civil war in which these leaders were focal points of their various communities, this symbolism has gained greatly in significance. In this sense it can be said that the unity of these religious leaders is a forceful expression of a Lebanese religious pluralism which approaches the status of a post-war national ideology: individually these men represent their own religions, but taken together they could be said to represent Lebanon as a whole.

This civil religious development has been institutionalized, if only tentatively, in the new Constitution of 1990. As mentioned, this Constitution calls for the abolition of the confessional system and the introduction of a non-confessional Parliament. This, however, will not mean a complete abolition of confessionalism, but rather its relegation to alternative and perhaps less mundane bodies than Parliament itself - a move which could hopefully defuse the confessionalist penetration of practically all political issues. Confessionalism would then primarily survive through the establishment of a Senate with due representation from all the confessions and an explicitly national vocation, as stated in article 22: "With the election of the first Parliament on a national, non-confessional basis, a Senate shall be established in which all the religious communities shall be represented. Its authority shall be limited to major national issues."[10]

Moreover, for the first time the Heads of State are given a constitutional role: article 19 stipulates that it is only they - or the President, or the Prime Minister, or ten MPs - who can raise an issue in the newly established Constitutional Court which has already manifested itself as an important political institution in Lebanon. While it is unclear what this newly acquired right of the religious heads may entail in practice, it certainly endows them with a constitutional legitimacy of some weight. The Lebanese confessions - and their religious representatives, such as the *Shaykh al-'Aql* - seem to be moving towards a position as symbols of national unity in a new Lebanese civil religion.

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10 A translation of the Lebanese Constitution of 1990 can be found in *Beirut Review* 4 (1983), 119-60.

Conclusion

Since the creation of Lebanon, its Druze community has been moving towards an increased public presence which seems to be a far cry from any form of *taqīya*, even if its adherents - like those of any other religion - have a highly selective interpretation of Druze history and have advanced a number of relatively novel formulations of Druze identity, stressing the Islamic identity of their faith. This move has partly been inaugurated by Druze individuals who - many of them non-initiates - decided to publish books and articles on Druze religion. It has, however, been greatly furthered by the institutionalization of an official Druze communal identity through the Communal Council and the *Shaykh al-'Aql*, and by their policies during the Lebanese civil war. Today this public communal identity is well established and may be expected to survive a political de-confessionalization if the latter follows the lines set out in the recent Constitution.