POLITICAL ISLAM AMONG THE KURDS

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1. Introduction

The theme of Islam is not very prominent or popular when it comes to writings about the Kurds. Political analyses of Kurdish nationalism tend, almost as a matter of definition, to downplay religious aspects, which the Kurds by and large have in common with Political Islam among the Kn ethnic factors like language that mark off the Kurds.[1] Further, Kurdish nationalists tend to argue that the Kurds were forcibly converted to Islam, and that the 'real' or 'original' religion of the Kurds was the dualist Indo-Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism; this religion, it is further alleged, lives on in sects like the Yezidis and the Kakais or Ahl-e Haqq, which are thus portrayed as more quintessentially Kurdish than the Sunni Islam to which most Kurds adhere. Likewise, foreign scholars often have a particular interest in the more exotic and colorful heterodox sects in Kurdistan, which has resulted in a disproportionate amount of attention devoted to groups like the Yezidis, the Ahl-e Haqq, and the Alevis, not to mention the Christian and Jewish groups that live (or used to live) in the region. This is not to criticize such valuable and often very interesting research, but merely to state that much of the beliefs and practices of the Kurds, the vast majority of whom are orthodox Sunni muslims, is still relatively uncharted territory. Moreover, in so far as attention has been paid to Sunni Islam among the Kurds, it has mostly focused on the mystical varieties as exemplified by the local Sufi orders or *tariqas*; further, these orders, of both the Naqshbandi and Qadiri variety, have largely been studied in rural contexts.[2] The fact is, however, that the majority of Kurds are not nowadays affiliated to Sufi networks, and are thoroughly urban rather than rural, as a result of both forced and voluntary processes of urbanization. Turkey has seen an enormous labor migration starting in the 1950s, and an equally momentous transnational labor movement from the 1960s onwards; in the 1990s, the destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages by the Turkish army drove further millions of Turkish Kurds to the cities. The social consequences of this rapid and chaotic forced urbanization are yet to be assessed, but they

are likely to be dramatic. In Iraq, over 4,000 Kurdish and Assyrian villages have been destroyed in the 1970s and 1980s, with their population being relocated in *mujamma'ât* or collective towns, or in some cases exterminated. These violent episodes have to some extent masked the fact that Iraq as a whole was already predominantly urban by the late 1970s, with the Kurdish areas lagging behind only slightly (Marr 1985: 285). Next to such demographic developments, there has been another, equally momentous transformation in the means and channels of mass communication. Increasing numbers of people gained access to education, and literacy rates rose steadily (in Iraq at least up until 1990); and the products of printing and especially broadcasting became more widely available. It is precisely such factors, I will argue below, that have led to drastic changes in the character and role of religion in public and private life among the Kurds. These effects, moreover, have been rather different in Turkey and Iraq, to which I will restrict my attention here. The differences are in part due to the distinct political natures of the modern states of Turkey and Iraq, but also in part to important differences in what is usually called the 'public sphere' in these respective countries; that is, the arena or arenas where political, social, cultural and moral debates are acted out.

The heterodox groups and their relation to 'mainstream' Islam
Before embarking on the topic of contemporary Sunni Islam among the Kurds, however, I would like to briefly discuss the allegedly non- or pre-Islamic heterodox groups in Kurdistan. In fact, even these groups have an undeniable background in (folk-) Islamic traditions, and cannot be adequately understood in isolation from this background. Claims about their alleged pre-Islamic origins or purely Kurdish character may have their uses for nationalist purposes, but in scholarly debates, they are seriously misguided, if not downright misleading.
As said, the most familiar, and most widely studied, of the heterodox groups in Kurdistan are the Yezidis who have their religious center at Lalesh in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kakais or Ahl-e Haqq in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan, and the Alevis in Turkey. Of these, the only group that is exclusively Kurdish is that of the Yezidis. Many, if not most, Alevis are ethnically Turkish, and the Ahl-e Haqq sects has numerous Turcoman, Persian and to a lesser extent even Arab adherents. There has been a complex interaction of religious and linguistic factors in determining the ethnic adherence of these groups, especially in the face of the increasingly competing nationalisms trying to coopt them, as will be argued below. Debates about the ethnicity – and hence claims as to the poltical loyalties - of these groups often take the form of discussions about their real origins',- a question that has to some extent been encouraged by the preoccupations of Western linguistic and anthropological

scholarship, especially the 19th-century tradition of historical and comparative linguistics and comparative religion. Such discussions often center around the question of whether the religion, or language, of some Kurdish group displays a pre-Islamic or proto-Kurdish 'substratum'. These debates about origins and substrates are definitely important factors in contemporary contests for ethnic and political allegiance; but they are first and foremost claims to cultural and political legitimation, and should not be confused with accounts of actual religious traditions and practices.

Among Kurdish nationalists, then, and to a lesser extent among academics, there is a tendency to overlook, downplay or even deny the folk-Islamic background that all of these groups unmistakably have. In fact, however, all of these groups display significant organizational, doctrinal and even terminological similarities with varieties of folk Islam. These features can by no means be brushed aside as mere later accretions or adulterations of originally non-Islamic faiths. Both organizationally and doctrinally, these groups emerged and developed against the backdrop of local varieties of folk Islam, especially *tarîqa* Sufism. Undoubtedly, they have incorporated pre-Islamic doctrinal and ritual materials, but these cannot be seen as their essence or real origin. It is nothing unusual for a new religious tradition to incorporate, elaborate, and reinterpret existing elements of religious and cultural traditions of its surroundings. Whatever their origin, then, these religious beliefs and practices are what they are today due to their embedding in folk-Islamic doctrines, rituals, and organizations.

There is a good deal of historical evidence for such Sufi or folk-Islamic connections; I cannot discuss this claim in detail here, but a few remarks will suffice. Up until at least the sixteenth century, the Yezidis were considered a run-of-the-mill Sufi order, the doctrines and practices of which may have seemed dubious to some, but not as essentially or 'originally' unislamic. This becomes abundantly clear from a pamphlet against the Yezidis, written by the famous fourteenth-century Sunni apologist and polemicist Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE), who – as will appear below - is also a source of inspiration for present-day Islamic 'fundamentalist' figures and movements. Significantly, Ibn Taymiyya does not criticize the Yezidis (or '*Adawiyya* as he calls them) for any nonislamic articles of faith like a Zoroastrian dualism or devil worship, but only for anthropomorphism (*tashbîh*) and pantheism, or more precisely for their adherence to the doctrine of the 'unity of being' (*wahdat al-wujûd*), which originates in the work of the equally famous muslim mystic Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) and in *tarîqa* sufism.

He also castigates them for an allegedly exaggerated veneration for Yazîd, the sixth caliph, and for the family of shaykh 'Adi, the Yezidi sect's founder (who himself, significantly, was a Sufi from Lebanon). Ibn Taymiyya condemns the Yezidi practices in terms of

'heretic innovation' (*bid'a*) and 'exaggeration' (*ghuluww*) that were used for deviant tendencies within Islam, and does not brandish them as unbelievers with terms like *zandaqa*, which were used for clearly non-Islamic faiths like Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism. In other words, Ibn Taymiyya does not for a moment appear to consider the Yezidis anything other than a Sufi sect gone astray, and he criticizes them as such. Similar points apply to the other heterodox sects of allegedly non- or pre-Islamic character and origin. According to Ottoman documents, the Kakais or Ahl-e Haqq were still considered an unexceptional Sufi order, and thus as fully belonging to the Islamic community or *ummah*, up until at the very least the sixteenth century. (cf. Van Bruinessen 2000: 283). Likewise, the Alevis in Turkey were savagely persecuted in the sixteenth century by the Ottoman sultan Selim the Grim, not for any un-Islamic dualism or beliefs in reincarnation, but for possibly or actually constituting a fifth column for the heterodox Shi'ite Safawid movement headed by Shah Isma'il, the founder of the Iranian Safawid empire. For most of the subsequent centuries, the Ottoman authorities pretended the Alevis did not exist as a separate group, and classified them, if at all, as Bektashis, i.e., as members of yet another Sufi order, the practices of which may have been at least as heterodox as those of any other, but which was politically unsuspect. For a long time, then, Alevis were considered muslims pure and simple by the authorities, and possibly also by their Sunni neighbors.

Similar points can be made concerning the doctrines of these groups. It has been argued by some scholars that some of their most clearly heterodox aspects, like the alleged Yezidi dualism and the Kakai belief in reincarnation, are not remnants of a pre-Islamic religious substratum, but rather a doctrinal innovation of more recent times, even though such a substratum of (partly Indo-Iranian) folk beliefs and practices is quite probably present (cf. Lescot 1938: 43; Van Bruinessen 2000: 249-50). Thus, the alleged devil-worshiping practices of of the Yezidis show less affinity with the strict dualism of the pre-Islamic and Indo-Iranian religious tradition of Zoroastrianism, which acknowledges a principle of Evil as being of nearly equal standing with the God of Good, than with the Islamic mystical vision of the devil or Iblis. In this vision, the devil is not so much the principle of evil, but in fact, the most devoted of all God's servants, because in refusing to bow for Adam, he refuses the divine command but obeys the divine Will, which forbids God's creatures to worship anything but Him. In other words, the devil is pictured as the strictest monotheist of all God's creatures, and it is precisely his tragedy that he will not regain his rightful place next to God until the end of time (cf. Awn 1983).

In short, some of the allegedly pre-Islamic religious 'substrata' of these groups may in fact be folk-Islamic interpretations or reinterpretations of existing materials.

2. *Turkey*

Turning to the more orthodox Sunni forms of Islam, it appears that vast changes have taken place in religious culture among the Kurds in both Turkey and Iraq. These have likewise had complex interactions with Kurdish ethnic identity. Traditionally, religious ethnic boundaries were considered more significant than linguistic ones; and despite being for the most part Sunni muslims, the Kurds were to some extent distinguished from their Turkish and Arab neighbours in religious as well as linguistic terms. First, they belonged to the shafi'ite *madhhab* or school of law rather than to the hanafite one like their Turkish and Arab nighbours; second, they were on the whole more inclined to the organized mystical forms of Islam, especially as practiced in the Sufi orders or *tariqas*, especially of the Naqshbandi and Qadiri orders. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was the Sufi orders that were a prime vessel for social organization and mobilization, and it was primarily their charismatic leaders, the shaykhs, that were the leaders of the early Kurdish rebellions. The shaykhs were particularly well-placed to act as middlemen in conflicts, and hence to act as leaders or figureheads for broader Kurdish nationalist movements, as they were in a position to overcome the tribal divisions that had increased in importance since the Ottoman authorities had abolished the local Kurdish emirates in the mid-19th century. The most famous of these religious *cum* nationalist leaders is shaykh Said of Palu, who headed a large but unsuccessful revolt, co-organized with urbanized and secular Kurdish nationalists in 1925. Significantly, however, the leaders of this revolt did not succeed in wholly overcoming tribal and denominational differences: although it was primarily nationalistic in character, the participants were mobilized along (Sunni) religious terms; as a consequence of this, the Alevi Kurds in the region, and other tribes that had been among the victims of the Sunni tribes that in the preceding decades had constituted the Hamidiye troops or irregulars for the sultan, either abstained from participating in the rebellion or even actively opposed it.3

In the 1920s and 1930s, the staunchly secularist Kemalist government of the newly formed Turkish Republic took drastic measures against both Kurdish nationalist aspirations and religious leaders like the Sufi shaykhs. It pursued a radical and often violent secularization drive, inspired by the French idea of *laicité* as involving the outright banning of religion from the public sphere, as well as a French-inspired desire for a highly centralized style of government. At the same time that Kurdish was declared a forbidden language, all religious schools or *madrasas*, religious courts of law, and Sufi lodges or *tekkes* were outlawed. Some of them continued on a clandestine basis, but the Sufi orders did lose much of their traditional role in Kurdish society. The aim of this program, however, was less to eliminate

religion than to impose strict state control over it, and to prevent anyone from trying to use religion as an instrument for political mobilization.

Although this laicist state policy was already toned down immediately after the second World War, when party politics entered political life in Turkey, it was radically revised in the wake of the 1980 military coup. To counter the earlier left-right polarization, the generals now ordered a re-Islamization from above. Mosques were built at greater pace, and compulsory religious education was introduced in the school curricula. The importance the new rulers attached to these policies appears from the fact that, according to some sources, the Directorate for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet Isleri Baskanlygy*) at some points had a higher budget at its disposal than the Ministry of Education.4

This re-Islamization policy coincided with, and indeed formed part of, a neoliberal revolution which was initiated by the coup leaders, and carried through in the whole of Turkish society under Prime Minister (later President) Özal. This revolution involved, among others, the destruction of the more radical trade unions, and the development of a new urban middle class that was as explicitly Islamic in its morality as it was consumerist in outlook. The Islamist Refah or Welfare Party headed by Necmettin Erbakan embodied this new outlook, but it was by no means the only political formation to do so; much of Refah's cultural and moral assumptions were also visible in Özal's Motherland Party and several other mainstream parties. It should be noted that these developments affected both the Turkish and the Kurdish parts of the population (Özal, it should be remembered, was of Kurdish descent, and repeatedly said so in public).

In their populist appeal to the masses, Refah leaders criticized the ostentatious display of wealth characteristic of the nouveau riches, but its social and political programs placed more emphasis on the improvement of morals and good manners than on the redistribution of wealth and property. Thus, Refah leader Erbakan, with his rhetoric of *adil ekonomik düzen* or 'just economic order', blamed the plight of the poor in Turkey on the international economic constellation, in particular Turkey's heavy dependence on, and indebtedness to, the World Bank and the IMF; but given his ultimately conservative outlook, he did not call for radical economic reform or redistribution.5 Thus, the Welfare Party is very much a party of the lower middle class and the newly arrived town dwellers, and its ideology reflects their hopes and aspirations for economic improvement and upward social mobility, as well as their concern with morality and honor.

The public sphere and the Kurds
The early 1990s witnessed a significant liberalization of the economic and to some extent also the political sphere. The appearance of private broadcasting channels alongside state-

based broadcasting media had particularly important consequences. At the same time, there was a slight relaxation of the ban on the production and sale of Kurdish magazines, books, and cassette tapes. These measures led to an increase in the variety of, and a change of character in, the voices in the public sphere: at the expense of the more strictly political polarization between leftist and rightist groups that had marked the 1960s and 1970s, more openly nationalist (both Turkish and Kurdish) as well as religious voices emerged or re-emerged, both of the Sunni and of Alevi denomination. The increasing presence of religious voices in the privatized mass media contributed to the weakening of the grip of the Kemalist dogma that religion should be banned from public life altogether. It also increased the leeway for the articulation of religion as independent from the state, and thus as a channel for political opposition.

The steady rise of the Islamist Welfare Party in the early 1990s, which promised an alternative to the Kemalist order, and thus to the rigid Turkish nationalism and radical *laicité* that characterized the Turkish Republic, carried a potential appeal to the Kurdish electorate. In its social and economical outlook, Refah was by and large a mainstream party, but in 1994, it was perceived as sufficiently oppositional and conciliatory to the Kurds (to whom it appealed in the name of Islamic brotherhood and of its vague concept of social justice expressed in the notion of *adil düzen* or 'just order') to draw a massive Kurdish vote in the Eastern provinces (cf. Duran 1998). This sudden increase in Islamist voting behavior, however, was less a sign of a sudden Islamization of Kurdish society in Turkey, though it was in part precisely that, than a widespread display of strategic voting among the Kurds. The votes for the Welfare Party would by and large have gone to the pro-Kurdish DEP, had that party not been banned from participating in the elections in the preceding months. In the wake of the DEP ban, many Kurds in the Southeast perceived Refah as a good 'oppositional' alternative, even though in the West it ranked among the mainstream parties. But this 'Islamist turn' has not been of an enduring character. Since Refah came to power in 1996, Kurdish enthusiasm for its policies and promises has waned considerably. In the 1998 local elections, and in the 1999 parliamentary elections, Refaj lost much of its earlier vote, while DEP'S successor party HADEP, which was not banned this time around, managed to gain a large percentage (and in some places the absolute majority) of the vote in the Kurdish East, although it still failed to take the 10% hurdle nationwide, and thus to secure representation in the national parliament.6

The rapid urbanization and the neoliberal transformation of both the public sphere and the economy at large have equally affected the Alevi community. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Alevism, which was not a unified religious doctrine but rather a collection of rural and largely orally transmitted religious traditions, seemed definitely on the wane. In the

new urbanized context, it was next to impossible to maintain religious links with the traditional rural religious leaders, or to continue the practice of specifically Alevi rituals like the *cem*. By the late 1980s, however, public statements started appearing in which Alevis demanded recognition as a distinct and legitimate denomination. In part, this new public emergence of Alevism formed a reaction to the imposing of Sunni Islam as something of a state religion following the 1980 coup. The emerging Alevi movement maintained ambivalent if not contradictory relations with the state and with the Turkish and Kurdish nationalist movements.

Almost coinciding with, but largely independently from, these developments, the PKK from 1990 onwards showed signs of gaining momentum as a mass movement. In order to increase its popular appeal, and in order to counter Turkish propaganda charges that they were a bunch of 'Marxist atheists' and 'Armenian [i.e., Christian] terrorists', it started emphasizing its Sunni Islamic credentials. This populist move, however, led to renewed or increased antagonisms with part of the Alevi Kurds. For a good many people of the latter, the term 'Kurd' meant *Sunni* Kurd by definition, so that Alevis are not and cannot be Kurds; a stronger emphasis on the Sunni religion of the Kurds at large was thus bound to alienate the Kurdish Alevis. Turkish propagandists eagerly picked up the idea that Alevism was an essentially Turkish folk variety of Islam, which to them implied that the very notion of 'Alevi Kurds' was something of a contradiction in terms. This was a serious challenge for Kurdish nationalists in Turkey, especially for the PKK, which mounted a large and concerted propaganda effort in magazines and manifestations (especially in European exile), and, increasingly, in the broadcasts of the Kurdish satellite television channel MED-TV, which argued that Alevism was an originally and authentically Kurdish religion.7 At the same time, it intensified its guerrilla campaign in Dersim, the heartland of the Kurdish Alevis, with the aim of provoking intensified repression by the Turkish security forces that would increase the Kurdish national consciousness of the local population (cf. Leezenberg (to appear)).

Largely independently from these events, the increasing visibility of the Alevis (who were usually perceived as leftist) in the public sphere led to increased tensions with circles which were more to the right of the political spectrum and which saw themselves as defenders of 'orthodox', that is, Sunni Islam. The rise of tensions led to several violent confrontations, the most notorious and bloody of which were the arson attack on a hotel hosting an Alevi conference in Sivas in July 1993 and the riots in the Gaziosmanpasha slums of Istanbul in March 1995. In part, the tensions between the Alevi population and politiczed Sunni Islam coincided with the Turkish-Kurdish divide; the population of Gaziosmanpasha consisted largely of Alevi Kurds from Tunceli area. But more importantly, the riots reflected a

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general Alevi mistrust of the state, and a hatred of the 'fascists' associated with it. With some justification, local Alevis perceived the police forces as strongly associated with the extreme right (especially the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), with Turkish nationalism and with Sunni Islam or Islamism.

At present, however, there is no unified Alevi political movement, and there is even more disagreement concerning the political and ethnic affiliation of the Alevi Kurds. The neoliberal policies pursued by the successive governments have, in Turkey as elsewhere, led to a steady depoliticization among the poorer strata. Neither the traditional leftist parties nor the pro-Kurdish HADEP have been able to mobilize significant numbers of either Alevi or Kurdish voters in the urban centers of Western Turkey. But in any case, Turkish law no more allows for the creation of parties based on confessional particularisms like Alevism than of parties based on ethnicity, whether Kurdish or other. At present, the Alevis are as far from forming a unified social or political movement as ever. Kurdish ethnicity is but one among many cleavage lines among the Alevis, and perhaps not even a major one. With the demise of both mainstream and radical leftist parties, and with the failure of the Kurdish armed insurgency, Alevi Kurds are presented with a range of new options. Alevis nowadays seem to move more towards the political center, and away from traditional leftist politics. Instead, they increasingly participate in various folklore organizations, which usually are relatively depoliticized, despite being in fierce competition with each other (cf. Vorhoff 1999). Numerous Alevi federations have emerged during the 1990s, at varying distances from the Turkish state. Likewise, Dersimis have founded organizations that aim at collecting, preserving and promoting the cultural traditions of their region of origin. The appearance of these *Dersim vakyflary* or 'Dersim foundations' was primarily triggered off, it seems, by the violent destruction of their traditional culture by the Turkish army. These activities are informed by an urgent sense of the importance of preserving local customs on the verge of disappearing forever, but far less by political, let alone territorial claims. The intensification of Alevi Kurdish initiatives of the late 1990s, then, is perhaps not an ethnic or confessionalist movement as much as a folklorist and regionalist one.

This new, literacy- and mass communication-based form of Alevism has been characterized as having dialectically developed out of a confrontation with 'scripturalist' (i.e., more scholastic, legalistic, and doctrinal) forms of Islam;8 but such claims downplay the massive changes that have taken place in 'mainstream' scripturalism as well. The development of these new varieties of Alevism reflects tendencies in the Islamic world at large. In Turkey, religious voices in the public sphere no longer are the monopoly of traditional religious leaders and institutions; increasingly, lay people with a higher (and state-based) education join in the debate. For these new intellectuals, such formerly significant institutions like

madrasa education, the shafi'ite and hanafite law schools, the Sufi orders and the Alevi dedes, have lost much of their relevance. Many people who publicly speak and write on such matters have had a state-based and often even secular education. Earlier, Islam could be used as a channel or instrument of separation; nowadays, it acts more often as a factor of integration and conciliation, especially between Turks and Kurds.9 In short, the emergence, or re-emergence, of Islam on the Turkish political scene from the late 1980s onwards, took place in a radically reshaped cultural, social, and economical landscape. The new forms of Islam do not appear to attach much importance to traditional distinctions between law schools and Sufi orders, they do, however tend to emphasize more strongly than before the antagonism between Sunnis and Alevis. Moreover, they are far less conducive to political mobilization specifically, let alone exclusively, among the Kurds.

3. Iraq

Religious life among the Kurds of Iraq has run a rather different course. During the last decades, Sunni Islam may have been a less visible or prominent part of public life in Iraq, certainly in comparison with Arab and Kurdish nationalism, communism and 'Arab socialism', or even in comparison with Shi'ite Islam; but it has never been absent. Iraq has never known the kind of radical attempts at secularization that were pursued in republican Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s. *Madrasas* and Dervish lodges were not closed, even though state-sponsored education was reformed along secularist, and subsequently along nationalist and socialist lines from the mandate period onwards. Until the present day, the Sufi ritual of the *zikr* is carried out every week even in the cities; it is clearly despised by the higher-class Kurds. Even in its most radically socialist (or apparently socialist) phase in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Ba'th government never tried to antagonize religious groups as such. Despite its secularist and modernistic posturing, the Ba'th often tried to co-opt as much as to coerce Islamic groups and leaders into political loyalty; this holds far more strongly for Sunni than for Shi'ite groups.

One reason why Sunni Islam was never a dominant channel for political opposition as it was in, for example, Syria or Egypt, is the simple demographic fact that the Sunni Arabs form a numerical minority in the country.10 More in general, in the 1950s and 1960s, Islam as a source of mobilization, whether Sunni or Shi'i, definitely seemed to be on the wane. In the 1950s and 1960s, Iraqi politics was dominated by the largely, if not militantly secularist competing ideologies of Arab and Kurdish nationalism and communism. Sunni Islamic activities, the most important of which was probably the Iraqi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, were small in scale and politically insignificant. The Iraqi Muslim Brethren were headed by one Mohammad Sawaf (1912-1992), and, significantly, a Kurdish

religious scholar, shaykh Amjad al-Zahawi; 11 in Iraq, that is, the Muslim Brotherhood could apparently mobilize equally well among Kurds and Arabs. Not much is known about the history of this branch, though, apart from the fact that it does not appear to have ever had a large following.12

Apparently, the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood was relatively autonomous with respect to the Egyptian branch. Until the 1960s, it seems to have been relatively open, and even accommodating to Shi'ites. This openness apparently led to dissent (which Sawaf only with some difficulty could contain) and, possibly, to infiltrations. In the late 1950s, according to some sources, it lost much of the already small following it had, when it was shown, or alleged, to have been infiltrated by the CIA; Sawaf reportedly left Iraq for Saudi Arabia in 1959, never to return. From the late 1960s onwards, therefore, it became more secretive, and had a closed membership (cf. al-Azami 1997a: 134-5; 140n46). Even though he was in exile, Sawaf continued to be seen by many as the legitimate religious if not organizational leader of the Iraqi MB.

More importantly perhaps, the Muslim Brotherhood does not appear to have taken an oppositional stand against any of the succeeding Iraqi governments, all of which were dominated by Arabs from the Sunni belt. In late 1964, the then Iraqi president 'Abd al-Salam Arif is alleged to have intervened with the Egyptian government on behalf of the MB intellectual Sayyid Qutb, and to have invited him to settle in Iraq (Algar 2000). Qutb, however, remained in Egypt, and subsequently was arrested once again and hanged in August 1966.

In its turn, the Ba'th regime is said to have tolerated and perhaps even encouraged the activities of the Muslim Brothers in return for their loyalty to the regime and abstention from any political activities. Upon coming to power in 1968, the new Ba'th regime appointed a Muslim Brotherhood member, one 'Abd al-Karim Zaydan, as a cabinet minister. Information concerning the subsequent development of relations between the government and the Iraqi MB is extremely scanty, but except for a few isolated incidents, it does not appear to have ever had the character of a violent confrontation. Given its rejection of armed *jihâd*, even the more oppositional figures of the contemporary Iraqi MB do not reject out of hand the possibility of a dialogue with the Iraqi government (cf. al-Azami 1997b: 163). Reportedly, in the late 1990s the Ba'thist government has even delegated social (and political) control of some of the popular quarters of Southern Baghdad to MB groups. Being Sunni and relatively loyal, these may help it in keeping the large and potentially restive Shi'ite segments of the urban population at bay. In short, with the exception of the bloody confrontations with Iraqi Shi'ites in the late 1970s, social and political conflicts in Iraq were usually articulated in terms of class, ethnicity and

nationalism, rather than in terms of religious categories. Before addressing the radical changes on this front, which occurred from the 1980s onward, however, I would like to briefly summarize developments among the heterodox minority groups in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Yezidis and the Kakais in Ba'thist Iraq

Developments among the heterodox groups dwelling among the Kurds of Iraq have been rather different from those among the Alevi Kurds in Turkey. Although in Iraq urbanization has been no less massive, and probably even more destructive, than in Turkey, it has had totally different effects on existing social networks like the tribes and religious orders. In Turkey, the destruction of such independent loci of power and organization has been an integral element of Kemalist domestic policies until the Second World War. The successive Iraqi governments, by contrast, including the Ba'thist government that has ruled Iraq since 1968, have never been as unambiguously opposed to these ties and networks, but more typically tried to exploit them for their own ends. From the early 1980s onwards, they were even actively strengthened in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Ba'th government enlisted (or even created) tribal leaders to act as paramilitary chieftains, but also middlemen for the distribution of food, goods and service in the relocation camps or *mujamma'ât* to which thousands of rural Kurds had been deported (cf. Leezenberg 1997b: 49-50). Tribal and religious leaders could thus maintain or even strengthen a degree of leverage with the central government,- but this position as middlemen at times required rather delicate balancing acts.

Minority groups like the Yezidis, the Shabak and the Kakais maintained an ambiguous ethnic position, and some of them were less than fully commmitted to the Kurdish nationalist movement. In the 1980s, the Iraqi government increased the pressure on these groups, either by simply declaring them to be Arabs by fiat, or by forcing them, notably in the 1987 census, to describe their ethnicity as either Arab (which implied political loyalty to the regime) or Kurdish (which could, and on several occasions did, result in condemnation by the regime as being 'oppositional'). In this period, the question of whether the members of these groups were 'really' Kurds or Arabs became a more central question for both the government, the group members and their leaders. The fact that many Kakais are multilingual (speaking Sorani Kurdish, Arabic, Turcoman and/or a variety of Hawrami locally called 'Macho') has made the question of their 'real' national identity even more intractable.13

The competing claims to ethnic, and political allegiance, have led to various splits in these groups. Their members have also suffered at the hands of the government, especially in 1988, when many of their villages were destroyed, and their inhabitants were deported (cf.

Leezenberg 1997a). Following the 1991 uprising, competition for political and ethnic allegiance did not abate, however, but shifted to the local Kurdish parties, and increasingly to Turkish and Turcoman organizations.14 The most destructive years of the 1980s are over, but the ethnic and political position of these groups remains as ambiguous and precarious as ever. Although it remains unclear how the more recent developments of the 1990s have affected these groups, especially in government-held territory, there are indications that their leaders have been able to maintain or even strengthen their position as middlemen, either with the government in Baghdad, or with the local Kurdish party in control. (Leezenberg 1997a; cf. Jabar 2000 for the general pattern of retribalization in Iraq in the 1990s). There are also scattered reports that, with the rise of political Islam in the region, the Yezidis have increasingly been the target of criticisms and attacks by Islamic activists, but it is difficult to give a reliable assessment of such claims.

Political Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan

To outside observers, one of the most significant and surprising developments in Iraqi Kurdistan after the 1991 uprising against Saddam Husayn's regime seemed to be the apparently sudden emergence of a vigorous and influential Islamist movement. Foreign Islamic charity organizations soon started engaging in substantial welfare programs of a distinctly Islamic character, which were most clearly visible in the quick spread of newly constructed mosques, in cities and countryside alike.15 But also local Islamist organizations emerged, at first sight almost out of the blue. Their emergence did not square well with the often-heard claim, eagerly repeated by secularized Kurdish nationalists, that traditionally the Kurds were less strict in observing religious practices and duties than their Arab neighours.16 The most significant of these was the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (*Bizutnewey Islami Kurdistani 'Iraq*) led by mullah Othman bin Abdulaziz from Halabja; in later years, other organizations, notably the Islamic League (*Rabitay Islami*), an Islamist welfare organization, and an affiliated political party, the Islamic Union (*Yekgirtuy Islami*) gained prominence. 17 Here, I will restrict my attention to the Islamic Movement; further, given the lack of detailed and reliable information, the present account is no more than a first sketch.

In secularized nationalist circles, and among foreign aid workers (many of whom were affiliated to Christian charity organizations), the Islamic Movement has received a rather consistently negative press; it has been accused of numerous assassinations, threats against rival party members and against secularized women, and even of carrying out bombing campaigns against ladies' hairdressers. But whatever the truth of such accusations, violent methods and the attempt by political parties to influence every part of the public and private

life of the population are by no means new to Iraq's Kurds, who have suffered under the Ba'th party's totalitarian rule for decades, and who have likewise experienced violent tactics and attempts at dominating public life by the other local Kurdish parties in the 1990s. What is new, however, is the specifically Islamic discourse in which the new movement's actions are couched; moreover, it appears totally different in character and organization from Islamist movements in neighbouring Turkey. Unlike the Welfare Party, for example, the Islamic Movement propagates an armed struggle or *jihâd* against the Iraqi regime and other enemies. It is a guerrilla movement rather than a civilian political party; apparently it recruits most of its active cadre tribal warriors, and possibly youths from the urban destitute classes.

The explanation for the rise of political Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan often given by educated locals is that following the upheavals of the Gulf War and its aftermath, many Kurds have turned to religion as a source of consolation and security. Political Islam would thus be an expression of disappointment with the Kurdish nationalist movement, and of anguish about the dire social and economical conditions obtaining since the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent uprising against the Iraqi regime.18 But this folk explanation can hardly account for its activist, and at times violent, character, nor for its essential novelty. Moreover, Islamist activities in the region go further back in time than is often thought, and well predate the infighting and corruption of the nationalist Kurdish leadership of the 1990s. The first Islamist-type assaults of which I am aware were said to have occurred in Sulaymania around 1983, when muslim conservatives conducted a campaign of throwing acid on their exposed legs of urban women wearing skirts they considered too short. This kind of Islamist action is by no means simply a reassertion of traditional Islamic values and practices: acid assaults are not a traditional Islamic way of punishment or combat.19 The new Islamic movements are not a straightforward outgrowth of the older Sufi orders, either; rather, their intellectual and organizational origins appear to lie with more recent developments in the Islamic world at large. Likewise, the Islamic Movement has regularly been accused of receiving funds from, and thus being no more than a straw man of, Saudi Arabia and Iran, but it should not be considered simply an agent for these states (between the two of which, it should be noted, there is a bitter rivalry on the international Islamist stage). And indeed, there are indications that the Islamic Movement depends at least as much on relatively informal and less state-based networks as on direct state patronage. The most important of these networks are those of the Muslim Brotherhood and of Pakistani organizations like the Jama'at-i Islami, as I will argue below.

In the Kurdish North, it seems that Sunni religious leaders as such were not typically at odds with the Ba'th regime. As noted, Sunni Islam, especially of the kind preached and

practiced by the MB, apparently was a source of accommodation rather than confrontation with the Baghdad regime. Hence, it is not surprising that the future leader of the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK), Mullah Othman Abdulaziz, who was a member of the Iraqi MB, does not appear to have taken a strongly oppositional stance vis-a-vis the Iraqi regime until the late 1980s. In the same period, mullah 'Ali, his brother and heir to the IMIK leadership, was a peshmerga, but for the secular-nationalist PUK rather than any Islamic organization. In the fifties, both brothers had moved from their native village of Hasanawa to the nearby town of Halabja, where they became the imams of the Othman Pasha mosque; subsequently, they opened a madrasa or religious school in the Kani Ashqan quarter. According to some sources, Othman was educated at the famous al-Azhar Islamic university in Cairo, but IM spokesmen deny this. Whatever the truth of this, he has had, and maintained, close links with the Muslim Brotherhood, especially, it seems, through the good offices of its Iraqi leader Sawaf (cf. al-Azami 1997b: 162).

There are conflicting claims as to the founding date of the Islamic Movement. Some sources speak of 1978, some of 1986 or 1987, and yet others argue that it did not emerge as a fully fledged party until after the 1991 Gulf War. There may be a measure of truth to all these claims: they point to the gradual formation, and transformation, of an organized urban religious group centered around mullah Othman into a political party, a process that apparently had not yet quite finished by the time of the 1992 elections. Be this as it may, in Iraq, as elsewhere, Islamist ideas and movements received a great boost with the successful Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Even during the early 1980s, it is reported, some of the conservative muslim leaders in the Sulaimaniya and Halabja areas more actively and explicitly fulminated against Kurdish nationalists and communist activists than against the government. The turning point, at least as far as the emerging Islamic Movement was concerned, occurred in 1987. In May of that year, it appears, mullah Othman called for a *jihâd* or holy war against the Iraqi regime, in reaction to the destructions and chemical attacks on Kurdish villages in the region. These operations had been stepped up after Saddam's cousin 'Ali Hasan al-Majîd had been appointed the head of the Ba'th party's 'Directorate of Northern Affairs'; they had forced numerous people from the surrounding countryside to flock to the city of Halabja. Demonstrations or possibly a full-blooded revolt against Saddam Husayn's regime then broke out in some parts of the city. The extent of these protests is somewhat unclear, as is the matter of in how far they were spontaneous, and in how far a response to Mullah Othman's call for a *jihâd*; but the regime reacted swiftly and violently. In retaliation for the demonstrations, al-Majid ordered the destruction of the entire Kani Ashqan quarter of Halabja where the demonstrations had taken place, and

where mullah Othman's *madrasa* was located.20 An unknown number of demonstrators were arrested.

Mullah Othman, together with his brother mullah 'Ali and a number of followers, fled to Iran, a move that subsequently tended to be given a religious meaning: party representatives pictured it as a *hijra* or retreat of the kind the prophet Mohammad had made when leaving Mecca for Medina in 622 CE. But an even stronger catalyst for the emergence of an Islamic opposition movement among the Kurds was the Iraqi regime's notorious chemical attack on the very same city of Halabja in March 1988.21 This attack, in which some 5,000 Kurdish civilians perished, was widely publicized due to the reports of foreign journalists brought in by the Iranian army. It galvanized an entire generation of Kurds into renewed action. In the more secularized and nationalist Kurdish circles, it was represented as an expression of the Ba'th regime's racist or fascist character. In more pious religious circles, by contrast, it was interpreted as an act of unbelief (*kufr*) by a secular nationalist regime. In other words, the cataclysmic events of 1988 were given a religious significance, and mobilized a large number of more conservative (and possibly, until then relatively quietist) Kurds, as becomes clear from the biographies of some of the Islamic Movements leading cadres. A number of Kurdish activists also appear to have switched allegiance from especially the PUK to the Islamic Movement, possibly as a result of the PUK's ambiguous and fateful role in the Iranian occupation of Halabja, which had provoked the bombing.

Both the 1987 call for *jihâd* and the 1988 attack against Halabja were grounds for estrangement from the Muslim Brotherhood, the main international network to which mullah Othman belonged. First, the MB rejected violent methods such as armed struggle against local governments, and second, the Kurdish Islamists were bitterly disappointed by the failure of the Arab MB branches to condemn the Halabja attack. Mullah Othman continued to be a member of the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood, but increasingly went his own way. In Iranian exile, the fledgling organization had ample occasion to organize its people; but it seems to have drawn its inspiration at least as much from Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Pakistan, the IM's closest allies apparently were the Jama'at Islami founded by Abu'l Ala al- Mawdudi and the Jama'at al-'Ulama al-Islami headed by Maulana Fazlur Rahman.22 In Afghanistan, the IM seems to have maintained especially close ties with Burhanuddin Rabbani, who also belonged to the Jama'at-i Islami network; they strongly disapproved of the violently anti-shi'ite methods of the Taliban.23 A considerable part of its cadre appears to have been educated in Islamic education centers in Pakistan, such as the university of Sind and the Islamic universities of Peshawar and Islamabad. Apparently, these links were established primarily through the networks of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially through Sawaf (who apparently had been living in Saudi Arabia ever since

leaving Iraq), but also through more activist *jihâdi* groups which were engaged in fighting the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. Peshawar in particular was a focus for Islamist activities in nearby Afghanistan. It was primarily the Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani Jama'at-i Islami that were the local organizational centers of these activities. There were numerous Arabs in this area,- the so-called 'Afghans' in their countries of origin (cf. Rubin 1997; Roy 1998; Kepel 2000).

A particular source of inspiration for the Islamic Movement's conception of *Jihad* appears to have been the Palestinian Abdallah Azzam, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood who was killed in Afghanistan in 1989 and a key figure of the Arab-Afghan activities. Ideas and quotations from Azzam's writings repeatedly appear in some of the statements of Islamic Movements spokesmen, together with those of Said Hawa, one of the leaders of the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.24 Reportedly, there were significant numbers of veterans from the Afghan war among the fighters of the Kurdish Islamic Movement. Several leading IMIK members maintained close personal contacts with Azzam. In other words, the 1980s brought the Islamic Movement closer to the so-called *salafi-jihâdi* or 'fundamentalist-holy war' groups in the Islamic world, i.e., activist groups, mostly with links to the Afghan war, that take their distance from both Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood. Azzam was a main theorist for these groups, with his call for more active struggle against foreign invaders of Islamic lands (cf. Kepel 2000). An older source of inspiration for the *jihâdi* groups is the very same Ibn Taymiyya mentioned above, who fiercely fought the Mongol occupation of Islamic territory, with both the pen and the sword. In its interpretation of *jihâd* as armed struggle, the Islamic Movement differs from the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood at large and from the Rabita in Iraqi Kurdistan, which do not have an armed wing and emphasize peaceful means like education and public morality, and which seem to mobilize among the more educated urban groups.

Perhaps remarkably for a contemporary *salafi-jihâdi* movement, however, the IM is not strongly or dogmatically anti-American as far as international political relations are concerned. Reportedly, it has been much criticized by its fellow groups for this attitude. As such, the IM would seem to be indicative, if not emblematic, of the serious rupture among the Islamist movements that was caused by the 1990 Gulf Crisis and the ensuing Gulf War pursued by a coalition of states against Iraq (see Piscatori (ed.) 1991 for some early analyses). To the dismay of its traditional supporter, the Wahhabi state Saudi Arabia, the Muslim Brotherhood declared itself in support of Saddam Husayn. The Kurdish IM, having called a *jihad* against the Iraqi regime, could not of course side with this approach, so organizational links with the Muslim Brotherhood were further loosened. IMIK representatives have repeatedly declared that they will not negotiate with the Iraqi regime,

and claim that their movement aims at overthrowing the Ba'thi regime and replacing it with an Islamic state, but in practice, it does not appear to have taken much military action against Iraq either before or after the 1991 uprising. In the 1990s, it has more often been engaged in local conflicts with other Kurdish parties, especially (but not exclusively) the PUK, which it accused of being 'communist'.

After the 1991 uprising, the Islamic Movement quickly filled the vacuum left behind by what was left of the Iraqi welfare state. It did much grassroots work among the urban destitute, who tended to be ignored by the other Kurdish parties and by the international humanitarian agencies alike. By the 1992 elections, it had become the largest political party in Iraqi Kurdistan after the KDP and PUK, taking some 5% of the vote. Closer analysis of the election results shows that IMIK was especially strong in the Ranya area where it had its headquarters, the urban centers of Arbil and Sulaymania, and of course in Halabja, mullah Othman's mainstay (here, it drew votes in numbers comparable to those of the PUK and KDP); moreover, its electorate was overwhelmingly urban. Remarkably, the Islamic Movement received less than 2% of the vote in the northern Badinan region, which is less urbanized and often considered more tribal and less 'modernized' than the regions further South. It may be precisely this alleged 'backwardness', however, that accounts for the lack of the Islamic Movement's appeal in the North. Badinan is a traditional KDP stronghold, and tribal structures and Sufi orders have remained relatively strong. Subsequently, it was the Rabita rather than the Islamic Movement that made inroads in this area, but once again, and significantly, primarily in the urban areas like Duhok.25

In December 1993, and again from May to August 1994, the Islamic Movement was engaged in a bloody confrontation with the PUK, in which both sides were alleged to have committed serious human rights violations against captured fighters (cf. Amnesty International 1995). IMIK spokesmen, like those of other parties, routinely denied having committed any such offences.26 In late 1995, a settlement between the two parties was reached due to Iranian mediation. In April 1997, however, new rounds of fighting between PUK and IM occurred along the Iranian border; on May 16, a truce was signed, reportedly again under strong Iranian pressure. Since the early 1990s, the Islamic Movement appears to have lost some of its urban constituency, in part because of its violent methods. In the March 2000 municipal elections in the PUK area, it was the Islamic Unity Party rather than the Islamic Movement that gained a significant percentage of the votes; in all, Islamic groups received some 30% of the votes in the Sulaimaniya area. But the Halabja area is nowadays strictly IM territory. The movement imposed *hudud* (Islamic legislation) in this area in 1997, and is the uncontested ruler here.

In June 2001, however, a serious rift occurred in the IMIK ranks, when Ali Bapir (who was alleged to have been approached earlier by Iran to form an Islamist organization of his own) split off and formed his own group by the name of 'Islamic Association of Kurdistan' (*Komalay Islami Kurdistan*), which concentrates its activities in his mainstay, the Ranya area; the remaining IMIK branch continued under the name of 'United Islamic Movement of Kurdistan'. According to some sources, mullah Krekar (an Afghan veteran and former IMIK guerrilla leader), together with one Mohammad Barzinji, effectively formed a third Islamist splinter party in the city of Sulaimaniya, called the 'Center Group' (*Jama'at al-markaz*). It is too early to make any predictions about the future of these respective Islamist groups.

Not much is known about the doctrines or the dynamics of mobilization in the Halabja area; but IM representatives often take pains to distance themselves from the Wahhabi movements with their strong dislike of Shi'ites, sufis and saint worship. Such remarks do not seem to be mere window dressing aimed at legitimizing the existing links with Iran. Similarly, in the Halabja area, the IM does not seem to be strongly opposed to local tribes and tarîqas. On the contrary, some of its leaders are linked through intermarriage to the descendants of the famous shaykh Othman of Tawêla, and it seems to continue the mediation in tribal conflicts that had made mullah Othman a locally respected leader.

4. Conclusion

What, then, should we make of the emergence of political Islam among the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq? One should beware of treating both simply in terms of a generic 'resurgence of Islam': although there are factors common to both countries (like a rapid urbanization, the demise of Communism and other secular political doctrines, and neoliberal reforms of the economy, not to mention a prolonged armed conflict between Kurdish nationalists and the respective governments), these have had rather different effects. Turkey has rather more of a public sphere, or perhaps, an entirely differently structured public sphere, than Iraq: in the 1990s, more room was created for civilian party politics, privatized mass communication channels, and local charity work. Consequently, political Islam in Turkey is by and large civilian, especially if we disregard the case of the notorious Kurdish Hizbullah, a shady organization which for years appears to have been largely tolerated, if not actually supported, by the Turkish security apparatus (cf. Dorronsoro 1996, 1999: 129-31). The developments in party politics and the reshaping of the media landscape in the 1990s have allowed a plurality of voices to be heard. Ba'thist Iraq, by contrast, with its long-standing monopolization of all institutions of civil society and mass communication, has not (or possibly not yet) witnessed the emergence of durable

institutions of civil society. Given the Ba'th's rigorous ways of dealing with any form of political opposition, it was natural, if not inevitable, that an oppositional Kurdish Islamist movement should emerge as a guerrilla organization. Following the 1991 uprising, The collapse of the strong state apparatus; the ensuing social, political and economic chaos; and the gradual erosion of Kurdish nationalism as a mobilizing force, all created room for Islamist organizations like IMIK and Rabita to gain social and political influence.

In contradistinction to the relatively pluralist character of the public sphere and the political domain in Turkey, the threat or use of armed action and violent methods have been more characteristic and effective political strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan, as have ties of patronage and tribal links. Iraq has witnessed the reproduction and strengthening of patronage mechanisms, especially in the face of the radical retreat of the state welfare system from the late 1980s onwards. Almost all Kurdish parties in Iraq tend, or are tempted, to monopolize public debate, or at least to co-opt possible sources of dissent. This seems to be a heritage from the Leninist tradition that identifies party and state, which also informs the Ba'th's political practice, but does not originate with it.

In Iraq, it seems, Islamist networks are personalized rather than purely doctrinal; ideological differences, like those over the Gulf War or the attitude towards the United States, may not be wholly irrelevant, but they do seem of secondary importance.

Turkey has a very diversified, and largely privatized, public sphere, within which all kinds of debates and rivalries are acted out by non-violent means. It also has its own autonomous Islamist networks, which are largely unrelated to those of the Muslim Brotherhood. There have been, and are, some contacts between the different Islamic groups. Afghanistan was one cause that united Sunni muslim activists; more recently, Chechnya has been another. But these isolated, and largely symbolic, causes do not allow us to speak of a unified Sunni internationalist movement. For the most part, the Islamist organizations work within a national framework, and acquire many of the traits that other parties in their respective countries have. They may even have a strongly local character, witness the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan, which, following its earlier successes in the entire region, appears to have fallen back on its traditional stronghold, the Halabja area.

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1 There are some studies, however, of the complex interaction between nationalist and religious factors, esp. Van Bruinessen (1992: ch. 4, 5; 2000).

2 The most famous and detailed of these studies is, of course, Van Bruinessen (1992), esp. ch. 4.

3 See Van Bruinessen (1992: ch. 5; 2000; 143-158) for more details on the nationalist and religious dimensions of the Shakyh Said rebellion.

4 For more on the Directorate, cf. Shankland (1999: 28ff.), who, incidentally, questions the budget claim.

5 Cf. Shankland (1999: 209-14) for translations from Erbakan's 1994 pamphlet of the same title.

6 In fact, not only the electorate, but also party personnel moved back and forth between the parties relatively freely. There are numerous Kurdish politicians at both the local and national level which switched, or reverted, their allegiance from Refah to HADEP in the 1998 and 1999 elections.

7 In later years, PKK propaganda has shifted to a more accommodating multiculturalist discourse, which emphasized the rich and colorful variety of the 'Mesopotamian' heritage.

8 Notably by M. van Bruinessen in his 2000 inaugural lecture, 'Muslims, minorities, and modernity: The transformation of heterodoxy in the Middle East and Southeast Asia', published in part in *ISIM Newsletter*, no. 7.

9 Dorronsoro (1999) and Cizre-Sakallioglu (1998) likewise emphasize the fact that with the demise of the Sufi orders, religion has lost much of its salience as a catalyst or organizational channel for Kurdish ethnic or nationalist movements

10 One should beware, however, of the still widely prevalent reductionist analyses of Iraqi society that postulate the ethnic cleavages between Sunnis and Shi'ites, and between Kurds and Arabs, to be unambiguous, rigid, and all-determining.

11 A relative of Zahawi, one Fadil Muhammad Salah Zahawi, appeared on top of the 1992 electoral list of the Islamic Movement, albeit as an independent candidate.

12 I owe much of what scant information I have on the development of political Sunni Islam in Iraq to interviews with anonymous Iraqi informants; cf. also al-Azami 1997a, b; Karikar 1997.

13 Such contestations of the Kakais' ethnic allegiance were also acted out in theological terms. Government sources argued that the Kakais, being descendants of the Shi'ite and Arab imam 'Ali, were by definition Arabs themselves. Kurdish nationalist religious specialists of the Kakais retorted that their leaders were reincarnations rather than direct descendants of Ali, and could thus very well be Kurds.

14 Thus, all the *ghulât* or heterodox Shi'ite groups were suddenly claimed to be 'really' Turkish, as part of the – preposterous – claim that Iraq counted some 2,5 million Turcomans. Members of these groups were given food rations and financial assistance by Turkish welfare organizations on condition that they sign a declaration that they were Turkish. All of these measures were obviously part of a campaign to counter Kurdish nationalist claims to the region.

15 It should be added that numerous European and American Christian charity organizations active in the region were equally engaged in proselytizing.

16 There are reasons to doubt the validity of such claims also for earlier periods. Thus, Batatu (1981: 582) quotes figures from the 1947 census, which lists a total of 4,828 urban and 769 rural religious institutions. The majority of the urban institutions are in Shi'i territory, but the vast majority of the rural ones (714) appear to be in the Kurdish-inhabited area. The organized religiosity of the rural Kurds thus outstripped that of both Sunni and Shi'i rural Arabs.

17 The Rabita, much like the IM leadership, seems to be an offshoot of the Iraqi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood; its aims are similar to IMIK's, but it wants to reach these through education and welfare work rather than through violent tactics.

18 Cf. Leezenberg (1997b) for a characterization of the political and social instability in the region up until early 1996.

19 I suspect that these assaults are an import of South Asian (perhaps Pakistani) origin, where throwing acid in enemies' (and especially women's) faces has become a sadly widespread practice; but I must admit I have insufficient knowledge about these matters.

20 See Document no. 7 in Middle East Watch's collection of Ba'th documents captured in the 1991 uprising, *Bureaucracy of Repression* (1993).

21 Cf. Leezenberg (in prep.) for more details.

22 Interestingly, the Jama'at al-Ulama also appears to have maintained close ties with the Baghdad regime, from which it received funds during the Iran-Iraq war, because of its strongly ant-shi'ite and thus anti-Iranian stance (cf. Ahmad 1991: 168).

23 Thus, an IMIK spokesman expressed his disapproval of the establishment of a Shi'ite Hasaniyya in the staunchly Sunni city of Sulaymaniya, which his party perceived as a provocation by the PUK at the behest of Iran; but he said his party would not let itself be provoked into taking action against it.

24 It is not clear in how far Mullah Othman developed his views on *jihâd* independently from these authors, as some IMIK spokesmen claim.

25 A university was founded in Duhok in 1992, in which subsequently a Faculty of Theology, sponsored by Saudi Arabia, was opened. The Rabita is often alleged to mobilize especially among these Theology students.

26 Interviews, Iraqi Kurdistan, August 1994.