Jihād in Ottoman Damascus

An investigation into the relation of spiritual and military struggle

Points of departure

This article looks into the configuration of the idea and reality of the concept of jihād in early modern South-West Asia. The text discussed here was written in a very specific situation.¹ The author lived in the second half of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century CE in Damascus in a period of inner unrest in the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman wars with Russia.² Several religious tendencies can be distinguished in the Ottoman Empire since the 16th century.³ We may think of the movements referring to a particular socio-economic malaise with a messianic imaginaire aiming at a fundamental change of the society. The social components of these movements were the nomadic and semi-nomadic people of Anatolia – possibly with some sympathy for the Iranian Safavids, the external enemy.⁴

The second group of movements may be characterized as messianic movements based on mystic approaches, supported by rural notables of Central Anatolia with followers among the peasants.⁵ Another category of movements are those emerging in the urban milieus of the Ottoman capital and beyond.⁶ The first group of these movements is a puritanical one, trying to purge Ottoman Islam especially from any Sufi tendencies that were deemed responsible for the decadence of the Ottoman society. This tendency emerged among the religious scholars, the ‘ulamāʾ.⁷ The intellectual leader of this movement was Mehmed Birgivî⁸ (d. 1573), a preacher and teacher at a madrasa, enjoying

¹ This study is indebted to the editorial work of Samer Akkach who opened up new venues for the study of the intellectual history of the precolonial Islamic world.
² The influence of environmental changes on social unrest in the Ottoman Empire has been considered by White 2011.
⁴ Ocak 1992, 186sq.
⁵ Ibid., 186.
⁶ There were another important movements and networks of scholars around the cities of Medina and Mecca having a widespread influence (e. g., Nehemia Levitzion/John O. Voll (eds.), Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1987; John O. Voll, 'Abdollah ibn Salim al-Asrī and 18th Century Hadith Scholarship, in Die Welt des Islam 42 (2002), 356-372; John Voll, Muhammad Hayyā al-Sindī and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madīna, in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 38 (1975), 32-39; Basheer M. Nafi, A Teacher of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: Muhammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī and the Revival of Aṣhāb al-Ḥadīth's Methodology, in Islamic Law and Society 13 (2006), 208-241. The author we are discussing in this pages was in close contact to these networks (see below).
⁸ There are several ways of transcribing his name.
⁹ For a short overview Emrullah Yüksel, 'Mehmet Birgivî (929-981/1523-1573)', in Atatürk Üniversitesi
some patronage by leading courtiers of his time. His writings were widely read, and copied, esp., the *Tariqa al-muhammadiyya*, a treatise on Islamic ethics. Birgivī criticized leading Ottoman religious scholars. His followers were the forerunners of the Qadızadeli movement.

The second group may appear unusual: a Judaeo-Christian tendency among Islamic Ottoman religious scholars. There are two sub-groups to be identified in this tendency. One regarding the Torah and the Gospels as not abrogated by the Qur'an, but still valid on the same level as the Quran. The other sub-group one claimed that Jesus was superior to Muhammad.

The third group emerged in urban Sufi circles and had as its religious foundation the theology of the „Oneness of Being“ (*wahdat al-wujūd*) going back to the great mystic Ibn al-ʿArabī whose often contested views have been for a long time dominant in Islamic mysticism or Sufism in the East. The Arabic word *wujūd* has several layers of meaning. It means the true reality, i. e., God, but also everything else:

„Using a typical way of distinguishing between being and existence in English, we might say that *wujūd* means Being when referring to God and existence when referring to anything other than God. But in Ibn ʿArabi’s usage of the word, it is often unclear if he means God’s *wujūd*, the world’s *wujūd*, or simply *wujūd* without specification.“

However, there is another dimension to *wujūd*. Technically in the Sufi tradition it meant the awareness, understanding and „finding“ of God. The latter is going back to the original Arabic meaning of the word. „For Ibn ʿArabi, the word wujud carries both the Sufi and the philosophical
meanings.\textsuperscript{19}

As to the „oneness“ we might distinguish three „aspects“ or „stages“ (\textit{marātīb}) of things\textsuperscript{20}:

1) What exists through itself, bringing things to existence or creating them. This is the absolute, unconditional being (\textit{al-wujūd al-muṭlaq}) and identical with God.
2) What exists through God, the „restricted“ or „limited“ being (\textit{al-wujūd al-muqayyad}), the created universe and everything in it.
3) What can not be called being but also not non-being. It is eternal, connected to the absolute being, and it has no relation to the limited being of the universe, but is – as an object of the knowledge of God – its origin and the things are coming in it into existence. It is the essence of all essences (\textit{haqīqat al-haqāʾiq}), God and universe, also called the all encompassing universal or the \textit{materia prima}. The third aspect may be the most difficult aspect of Ibn al-ʿArabiʾi’s thought but is the cornerstone of the idea of the oneness of being.

\textit{Qadizadeli movement}

During the 17th/18th century a movement tracing its origins back to the movement of Birgivī threatened other Islamic currents of thought, especially the idea of the oneness of being: the puritanical and pietist Qadizadeli movement whose eponym was a preacher in Istanbul. This movement constructed as scapegoats for the perceived crisis of the Ottoman Empire persons showing non-conventional behaviour. The still new coffee houses and their visitors were attacked for providing opportunities for uncontrolled gatherings of people – that was the point of identity of interests of the Qadizadeli movement and the Ottoman sultan. Smoking was classified as an immoral act\textsuperscript{21}, diverting the believers from piety to mere pleasure. Persons, esp. women were brought to court, for organizing gatherings of Sufis lasting from the evening to the morning, accused of providing opportunities to uncontrolled mingling of sexes or outright prostitution and so forth.\textsuperscript{22} All these people showing 'deviant' behaviour emerge as „the incarnation of all evil.”\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 37.
\item \textsuperscript{20} I am following the distinction of Hermann Landolt, „Der Briefwechsel zwischen Kašānī und Simnānī über \textit{Walḥdat al-Wuġūd}“, in \textit{Der Islam} 50 (1973), 29-81, here p. 42.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Following one of the readings of a case study in Elyse Semerdjian, „Because he is so tender and pretty": Sexual Deviance and Heresy in Eighteenth Century Aleppo“, in \textit{Social Identities} 18 (2012), 175-199. For a detailed account of the juridical situation see as a case study Leslie Peirce, \textit{Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab}, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press 2003.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Wolfgang Palaver, \textit{René Girard’s Mimetic Theory}, East Lansing, Mi: Michigan State University Press
\end{itemize}
The author whose text I will analyze has been one of the most fervent opponents of this puritanical movement.\(^{24}\) We read e. g., that friends writing to him from Istanbul advised the author to shorten his writings, eliminating passages of the texts that may not be accepted by the public (see below). He wrote fervently in a letter that his critics are only concerned with the outward appearance of the behaviour of men, not with the inner transformation of men, calling his opponents in another treatise „scholars interested only in the outer form of the words“ (‘ulamāʾ al-rusūm)\(^{25}\) or „scholars interested only in idle talk“ (‘ulamāʾ al-kalām).\(^{26}\) He wrote, e. g., a treatise on the permissiveness of smoking and was not disinclined to relish worldly pleasures like drinking coffee, using music instruments, and public entertainment, that began to transform public life in Ottoman cities, including his hometown, Damascus. However he did not negate the necessity to walk the mystical path, the ṭarīqa. He invented new ways of teaching when he turned to present mystical knowledge to a larger public lecturing in the gardens around Damascus, e. g., the theology of the oneness of being (waḥdat al-wujūd), never taught before in public. We may consider this a conscious act to challenge the puritanical movement mentioned before, not leaving public space to this movement alone. For the same reason he developed a wide network of correspondence writing to people in every part at least of the Ottoman Empire letters, often including whole treatises to be read out in public. The author was actively engaged in the socio-religious affairs of the Damascenes and often criticised the narrow-mindedness of the establishment of Islamic scholars of Damascus. He had to face much aversion and hostility from the religious establishment of the city forcing him into a lengthy retreat.

Our author was part of a larger network of intellectual exchange stretching from the Ottoman Empire to Southeast Asia.\(^{27}\) The structure of the world of the Islamic scholar of this time is dominated by a huge number of intersecting and competing movements of reform.

\'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī

Who is this author? The name of the author is \'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641-1731 CE), born

\(^{24}\) For an interesting attempt to situate him in the field of intellectual discussion in the 17th century see Khaled El-Rouayheb, „Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century“, in International Journal of Middle East Studies 38 (2006), 263-281.

\(^{25}\) The Arabic word rasm (rusūm) here means the written form of a word without any reference to its meaning.


\(^{27}\) For the network including Southeast Asian scholars see Azyumardi Azra, The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern ‘Ulamāʾ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Crowns Nest/Honolulu: Allen & Unwin/University of Hawai‘i 2004.
into a well known Damascene family. Khaled El-Rouayheb called al-Nābulusī one of the two „intellectual giants of the 17th century.“

May be the best-known defender of the ideas of the theology of the oneness of being, he was a member of two important Sufi orders, the Naqshbandiyya and the Qādiriyya, a commentator of Sufi writings like the famous poems of the Egyptian Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and of one of the most important texts by the founder of the theology of the oneness of being. All these commentaries he claimed to have written relying entirely on divine inspiration or mystical „verification“ (taḥqīq). We may add his famous travelogues, his worldly poems, collected in „The Wines of Babel“, his book on the interpretation of dreams, still popular today, a study of Hadith literature, a short treatise on the – almost equal – status of non-Muslims in the Muslim realm, and – may be a kind of surprise – a book on agriculture (less surprising if we know that his family owned large estates in the Damascus region).

To give an impression of the habitus of ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī a few lines of a poem may be appropriate:

„Respond to the callers for youthful desires and support the group, and replace abstention form love with openly seeking pleasure. And adhere to excessive desires and burning passion, and leave behind the words of advisers, and stop listening to them. Only the brave wins the pleasure, while the coward and the hesitant fail to reach it. Do not think that happiness will last; nor will sadness; endless as it may seem, it will not come to an end.“

As the editor of the letters of al-Nābulusī puts it:

„This avowed interest in worldly pleasures should not be seen as necessarily irreligious or anti-religion. In fact, it is consistent with ʿAbd al-Ghanī's understanding and practice of 'urban piety', which is not against recreation, public sociability, entertainment, and material wealth. Indeed,

through his life experience and his works expressed a remarkable intertwining of religious and worldly interests, presenting a model for a creative confluence of spiritual and sensual pursuits.**32

An interesting aspect of the thought of al-Nābulusī is the preference for rational speculation. In a commentary on a work on Islamic dogmatics (‘aqīda) we read about rational speculation (nazar) that one of the most important obligations is to attain

„knowledge of God – He is exalted. But indeed knowledge of God – He is exalted – will not be attained by reason because it is an obligation incumbent on mankind (taklīf) but through correct rational speculation (nazar ‘aqli). Rational speculation is the foremost duty of the believer who is obligated to follow the rules of God (mukallaf) to attain this knowledge. What is meant by knowledge is the knowledge of religious scholars.“**33

The „knowledge of religious scholars“ indicates the pride al-Nābulusī took in being a member of the group of leading religious scholars**34 of Damascus. James Grehan writes:

„The most articulate members of Damascene society, who come closest within earshot, were the ulama, the members of the Muslim religious establishment. […] They were also quite aware of their cultural preeminence and took no pains to hide it. […] Verbal skill was very much part of this refined and superior image that the ulama cultivated. […] A dexterous tongue was one of the indisputable certificates of learning and good breeding, which set them apart from other townspeople.

The ulama had very clear ideas about the impression that they wanted to create. Muhammad Khalil al-Muradi (d. 1791/2), an eighteenth-century mufti […], collected the biographies of all the occupants of his office from the beginning of the Ottoman period to his own day. As a preface, he put together a sketch of the ideal mufti, listing all the most desirable attributes. He envisioned a man who was conscious of everything that he said and did, and realized that others were watching too. In person, the mufti was to carry himself with an air of serenity, dignity, and patience. Laughing and jesting were out of the question. Gossip, lies, insults, and all kinds of unbridled speech were abhorrent and dishonorable. So too were displays of anger, haughtiness, and bravado. If, while performing his duties, he was approached by petitioners who seemed uncouth or outlandish, he

32 Ibid.
34 Evidently seeing himself as a member of the upper strata of this group, the „elite of the elite“ (ḥāṣṣ al-ḥāṣṣ) sometimes mentioned by him.
should not gawk or make them feel uncomfortable; rather, he should treat them politely and proceed with business as usual. He understood that his own conduct would serve as a model for fellow townspeople, who ought to see how a good Muslim should properly live. These fine manners could only grow out of a secret discipline, an unwavering self-control, which was the surest anchor to the virtuous life. Careless glances, motions, and gestures were unacceptable and attracted unfavorable comment. Speech did not escape this inner vigilance. The most exemplary ulama were extremely attentive to words and handled them with care. They never raised their voice or used inappropriate or coarse language. Commenting on some of the rituals performed by Sufis, who represented the mystical tradition within Islam, al-Nabulsi was unable to hide his distaste for the most uninhibited worshippers, who babbled incomprehensibly and emitted cries which 'resembled the braying of a donkey'. Spiritual ecstasy must not come at the cost of dignity.\footnote{James Grehan, „The Mysterious Power of Words: Language, Law, and Culture in Ottoman Damascus (17th to 18th Centuries)“, in Journal of Social History 37 (2004), 991-1015, here p.993-994.}

In other treatises, e. g., al-Nābulusī „could gravely warn his readers against excessive laughter, listening to gibberish, or telling a lie\footnote{Ibid., p.1008.} and against other acts of losing self-control. So our author attacks the non-learned followers, e.g., of the Qadizaddedi movement, for not being able to live up to the standards of the learned scholars. He criticized their attempt to attack the status of the Islamic scholars without having the appropriate habitus that would allow a critique according to the rules of the learned elite.

A less known book of al-Nābulusī is the collection of his letters, many of these concerned with religious affairs. This collection is called Wasāʾil al-taḥqīq wa-rasāʾil al-tawfiq, „The Means of Truth-Seeking and the Letters of Providential Guidance“. Al-Nābulusī wrote the letters between 1675 and 1703 CE to Arab and Turkish friends. One of the letters is on self-censorship caused by hostility against the permissibility of smoking. He writes:

„You mentioned to us in your distinguished letter that against [our treatment of the] question of the permissibility of smoke, called tutun, in our commentary on the al-Ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya\footnote{ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, K. al-Ḥadīqa al-nadiyya, Šarḥ al-Ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya, 2 Vols. Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat-i ʿĀmire 1873.} those of the people who are uncapable [of understanding] objected and disapproved it. So it is necessary to avoid that the commentary mentioned above is circulated among the people. You recommended to us to erase the part on smoking and remove it from the commentary mentioned
above so that the commentary will be accepted, used and circulated among the people.”\[38\]

However, to the end of this letter al-Nābulusī writes that he intended to write a separate treatise on smoking (mentioned above). He himself, he writes, did not smoke and had no inclination to do it. Al-Nābulusī continues: „But our deep ingrained aversion to it [smoking] does not justify – from our point of view – in itself a reprehensibility from a legal point of view.”\[39\]

I will focus now on the treatise on jihad, in the third letter of the collection. The letter was sent in late December 1677\[40\] to Istanbul and was a lengthy epistle on the significance of struggle (jihād) in Islam, titled „The Glance of Providence and the Presence of Guidance“\[41\]

Risāla on Jihad

The addressee of the letter is a high-ranking Ottoman official, may be a military officer. However, we do not know the identity of the addressee.

Al-Nābulusī begins with congratulating his friend for the preparation of a „jihadic movement“ (ḥaraka jihādiyya) against the unbelievers, i. e., the Ottoman-Russian war of 1676-1681 and its second part beginning in 1677, not a success for the Ottomans.\[42\] Al-Nābulusī says he intends to give some advice (naṣīḥa) helping him to get the necessary divine provisions. He stresses the importance of the love for the religion of god (muḥibbat li-dīn allāh) and his prophet. Moreover he reminds him that every deed is just for the majesty of god. When organizing his actions under the guidance of this love, he will be secure under the protection of god and will get the rewards for his endeavours. The addressee is reminded that the prophet himself told the troops he was dispatching to be led by a feeling of piety (taqwa) towards god – and to fight courageously against the unbelievers.

We may read these passages as a good way to encourage an officer preparing for war, a war that is known to cause a massive loss for the Ottoman army.

Al-Nābulusī then turns to a juridical discussion. He introduces the well-known distinction between the lesser jihad and the greater jihad.\[43\] The first paradigmatic case he mentions is the attack of the forces of the unbelievers at the fortresses of the Muslims. This imminent danger forces every Muslim to assist the Muslims that are attacked.\[44\]

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\[38\] Akkach 2010, p.190 (ar.).
\[39\] Ibid., p.191 (ar.).
\[40\] In 1697 he was asked by the Shaykhülislam in Istanbul for spiritual support for the Ottoman troops (Akkach 2007, p.106).
\[41\] Akkach 2010, p.56.
\[43\] For an important analysis of non-juridical views see Asma Afsaruddin, Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 2013.
\[44\] Akkach 2010, p.39-41 (arab.).
However, ʿAbd al-Ghanī reminds his friend that he is not fighting for and by himself. God is the cause of his possible success. He is "striving to see the face of God, searching the acceptance of God, not for the victory against them, not for the spoils of war, conquering their lands or taking them prisoners of war". In this setting, the juridically accepted defence of Muslim lands is acceptable for our Sufi author since there is another struggle at hand.

For al-Nābulusī, there is no problem that there are unbelievers on earth since their unbelief does not harm the religion (ʿīn) of the Muslims. Much more important is the existence of evil passing thoughts (khawāṭir sīʾa), thoughts full of doubts in the carnal soul of men. "This will cause harm for his religion." The jihad against these thoughts is the greater jihad (jihād akbar).

"This jihad takes place in the carnal soul to expel these thoughts against Gods law from it. The believer is permanently fighting a jihad with his carnal soul to be on guard against the corruption arising from them until he dies in contrast to the jihad against the unbelievers with takes place only at certain times."  

There are thoughts that are not accompanied by any action. It is not possible to avoid these passing thoughts, e. g., envy or hate, since God created them in the heart of men. If a believer does not accept these thoughts in his heart, they will not harm him; if he accepts these thoughts, he will be judged according to the rules of God.

"This is like the situation in which a Muslim and an infidel are imprisoned together in one cell. If the infidel speaks his words of unbelief and worships other than God-most-high, this will not harm the Muslim because he neither agrees with what is being said nor accepts it from the infidel, yet he..."

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45 Ibid., p.40 (arab.).
46 To explain this concept in the writings of al-Nābulusī see ibid., p.99sq.: „The term khawāṭir, plural of khāṭir, derives from the noun khaṭar, “danger,” “clout,” “power,” and the verb khaṭara, “to strut”, “to prance.” Describing their nature, ʿAbd al-Ghanī wrote, “al-khawāṭir appear in the heart and disappear quickly; thus, they belong to the heart and are of a source that is outside man’s power. The khāṭir does not stand firm unless it is tied down by man.” Thus understood, khawāṭir are clearly distinguished from the mind’s mental processes – tafkīr, “thinking,” and naẓar, “reflection” – through which an individual “ties down” the flashes of the heart. The significance of khawāṭir hinges on three basic propositions: first, that fleeting thoughts bring ideas and instigate actions; second, that they belong to the realm of the heart and not the mind; and third, that the cause of their random appearance lies outside self-consciousness and individual rational power. The concept of khawāṭir presents an area of fundamental difference between premodern and modern psychology, which invented the idea of “the subconscious” in order to accommodate what is inexplicable in rational terms.: “In this sense the khawāṭir bear a certain resemblance to the incorporated rules of the social (and religious) game (Akkach gives an example using the metaphor of „game of being“, ibid, p.100sq.) called habitus by Pierre Bourdieu.
47 Ibid., p.40 (arab.).
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
cannot part company from him.”

There are other thoughts coupled with actions in the outer world. These thoughts are judged because the believer has accepted them in his heart. The acceptance, the decision (tasāmīm) to act is a sin, which is punished, not the action itself. So it is always the inner soul, the heart that is the main theatre of war, not the outer battlefield. Al-Nābulusī continues with further citations from the Prophet and eminent Muslim scholars to support his argument that the inner struggle against the soul’s carnal desires is the real jihād. Then ʿAbd al-Ghanī turns to an illustration of this inner struggle analogically with military imagery and war metaphors – quite appropriate for his addressee. Setting up his hermeneutical strategy, he writes:

„Now that it has been established through this that the target is the edification of the outward and the inward, this can be achieved by knowing the major jihād, which is the struggle with the carnal soul, [and knowing] the enemy waiting to fight you in this [major] jihād, their soldiers, the king to whom you belong in this jihād, the Muslim soldiers on your side, the forts, castles, and secrets upon which the jihād occurs, and the weapons used in the jihād by the two sides. I will explain all of this to you, my brother, and clarify, God willing, with utmost clarity.“

In setting up his metaphoric scenes of the battlefield and the fighting armies, ʿAbd al-Ghanī introduces the major jihād. For him it is not as a mere subjective personal struggle, but an existential one with cosmic magnitude, a natural outcome of his theology of „Oneness of being“. After all, the emergence and free roaming of khawāṭir, good and bad, are neither of man’s own making nor under his mental control. They belong to the conditions of being-in-the-world and to the controlling forces of the game of being. Detailing the existential picture of the inner battlefield, ʿAbd al-Ghanī writes:

„And of the existing universes there is the world of earth and heaven and that which is in-between, the so-called “lower world” (al-dunyā). The same can be found in the world of man: his body corresponds to earth; his soul’s world corresponds to heaven, and the ethics that lie in-between [the body and the soul] correspond to the lower world and its people. Vigilance is one of Islam’s kings, whose soldiers are good passing thoughts, while negligence is one of unbelief’s kings, whose soldiers are evil passing thoughts. Reason acts as a minister for the king

50 Ibid., p.41.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., p.46-47.
of Islam, when he is winning, managing all of his affairs correctly, and acts as a minister for the king of unbelief when he is winning, managing all of his affairs erroneously. Faith and Islam are two forts protecting the worshipper, lofty and impenetrable in the likeness of Mecca and Medina. The five prayers, fasting, praying, almsgiving, and pilgrimage correspond to the forts and citadels while religious duties, traditions, and desirable practices correspond to the protective fences for these forts and citadels. Lawful, doctrinal, and practical issues correspond to weaponry and the ammunition of war. The king of Islam, who is always vigilance, is constantly at war fighting the king of unbelief, who is negligence. The former’s soldiers, who are the good thoughts, are battling the latter’s soldiers, who are the bad thoughts. In this war, there perish from the two sides those whom God wills to perish, and survive those whom God wills to survive. Battling and fighting are always pursued in order to take control of the mentioned forts and citadels. Every fort claimed by the king of vigilance is built and maintained by sincerity, certainty, and piety, and each fort claimed by the king of negligence is destroyed and ruined by hypocrisy, scepticism, and arrogance.\textsuperscript{53}

After this scene-setting, ʿAbd al-Ghanī begins to discuss in detail successive events of fighting, identifying the fortresses under attack in each event, the conflicting thoughts and reasoning involved, and the fighting tactics each knight uses. The first fortress that comes under attack is the “fortress of faith” (ḥiṣn al-īmān), being the first to be built in one’s heart, the greatest, and “the noblest for the sultan of vigilance.”\textsuperscript{54}
In fact, it is “the seat of this sultan” and the centre of his kingdom. Such is its nobility that it represents the fortress of Mecca among all the fortresses of the world. The fight over the fortress of faith centres on the relationship between God and man, divinity and humanity, involving weaponry of rationality and revelation. The knight of the good thoughts defends faith in God’s transcendence with weapons of revelation and tradition, while the knight of the bad thoughts attacks faith in God’s transcendence using weapons of reason and scepticism. These events are followed by the battle over the fortress of Islam, which represents the revelation of one’s faith. In the world of the human body, the status of this fortress is the state of Medina among the fortresses of the natural world. Then comes the battle over the fortress of fasting, then over the fortress of alms-giving, and so forth. These battles, which constitute the major jihad for ʿAbd al-Ghanī, are not restricted to issues of religious morality and personal ethics but extend to the battle of faith and reason, the mother of all battles during his period. To summarize these battles:

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p.50.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p.51.
religion. On both sides, knights arise the knights of the good passing thoughts and the knights of the bad passing thoughts with all sorts of weapons clashing inside this human world."  

Al-Nābulusī is successfully transforming the scapegoat mechanism present among the puritanical Qadizadeli movements chasing everybody who does not believe their way into the process of interiorization and self-critique and -reform. Thus making it possible to turn the temptation of the identification of a scapegoat to be burdened with all faults of the community into a declaration of necessary self-reform, fighting the negative thoughts resident in the \textit{nafs}, the carnal self, that is understood as "a veil which prevents men from knowing his own true nature" as Chittick puts it. It is the lowest part of human nature, his animal nature. 

This self-reform is based in the concept of God as being compassion. Al-Nābulusī writes in a long treatise on Islamic dogmatics, a commentary on a treatise by one of the leading scholars of the school of \textit{wahdat al-wujūd}, Ahmad al-Shinnāwī (d. 1619), when discussing the interrelatedness of all beings, of everything in the universe and the creator, the absolute being (see above) in the first chapter on His compassion (\textit{rahamūtiyya}):

"Based on the fact that in everything there is the substance (\textit{ma' nā}) of everything. - 'Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! No knowledge have we that which Thou hast imparted unto us. Verily, Thou alone art all-knowing, truly wise.' (Sura 2, \textit{al-baqara}, 32) – the only proof (\textit{burhān}) will be arrived at as a conclusion from the text; the textual evidences are decisive. 

And the consensus is that His benevolence (\textit{lutf}) has priority over His absolute power (\textit{qudra}), and His compassion (\textit{raḥma}) is superior to his wrath (\textit{ghaḍab})."

Other Correspondence on War

55 Ibid., p.59-60.  
59 Translation Muhammad Asad.  
60 There is no elaborate discussion needed to understand and interpret this verse of the Qur'an.  
61 His absolute power to do with the created beings what he wants to do.  
In the Wasā’il, there are other letters on the Ottoman military efforts. One short letter by the Šeyhülislām as-Sayyid Fayḍ Allāh Effendī to al-Nābulusī, sent in April-May 1698, is included.63 The Šeyhülislām is lamenting the success of the enemies who are “inflicting damage on the Muslims”.64 He is asking al-Nābulusī to pray for the victory of the Ottoman troops. In his answer, sent in April-May 1698, ʿAbd al-Ghanī talks about the necessity of the Muslims to stand together, to pray to god for the victory of the Muslim armies quoting a number of Hadiths and some other sources in this respect.65

Here we see a renowned scholar supporting the military efforts of the Ottoman army understood – as we read above – as a defensive war. Striking is the shortness of this letter compared to the longer epistle we studied before. It is an official declaration a leading scholar has to make in support of his ruler; the theoretical-theological status of this declaration is only understood when referring to the longer epistle.

We understand there exists a distance between the spiritual and the military struggles of his time for this pre-modern Muslim scholar. The spiritual struggle is detached from the military one even if the author discussed here supports the war efforts of the Ottoman ruler. For al-Nābulusī, there is a struggle that is more important than any military campaigns. So it is not the Ottoman caliph66 exercising total control about the intellectual life of his empire nor the Ottoman religious bureaucracy. The community of scholars stays away from the political sphere. This is in consonance with the general development of the relations of ruler and societal elites in post-formative Muslim societies. Ovamir Anjum speaks of “a ritualistic understanding of the caliphate and depoliticization of the Community”67 in the post-formative and pre-modern periods.

63 Akkach 2010, pp.337sq.
64 Ibid., p.338.
65 Ibid., p.339sqq.
66 For the Ottoman concept of caliphate see Inalcik/Quataert 1997, p.20sq.; for a comparison with Moroccan-Saʿdī claim for the caliphate see El Moudden 1995.
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