A new logic in the Sufi organization: the continuation and the disintegration of the Tariqas in Modern Egypt (The Tariqa's cohesional power and the Shaykhhood succession question)

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The Tariqa’s Cohesional Power and the Shaykhhood Succession Question

A New Logic in the Sufi Organization: The Continuation and the Disintegration of the Tariqas in Modern Egypt

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Abstract
The present article examines the logic behind “succession” to the leadership (mashyakha) within the tariqas, and some factors involved in their disintegration in early 20th century Egypt.

Throughout the history, the question of succession to mashyakha has been a frequent cause of conflict among the members of tariqas, which at times led to their divisions. Until the beginning of the 19th century, however, the word “tariqa” did not necessarily refer to an organization but literally to the “Sufi Way,” which is a specific method of devotion. Actually, each tariqa consisted of a number of small groups or families headed by their own leaders (shaykhs); this implied that a tariqa did not have to be a single unified organization.

Through the institutionalization of the Egyptian tariqas initiated by the state in the 19th century, a new logic in the Sufi organization was introduced, whereby each tariqa had to be an organization headed by a single shaykh. This logic created a situation which encouraged leaders of those subgroups/families within a given tariqa, who were now ranked as deputies (khalifas), to claim that they were shaykhs of the independent tariqas.

In 1905, this new logic was stipulated in the regulations, which must have aimed at the stability and the continuity of the existing tariqas. However, this could not stop the recurrence of the divisions. Rather, a number of khalifas started to claim independence from their shaykhs.

By analysing a case of how al-Habibiyya gained independence from al-Rifaiyya, one factor responsible for the increase in the disintegration of the tariqas can be pointed out: the new logic in the Sufi organization itself provided grounds for justifying the claims of those khalifas who wanted to be shaykhs of their own tariqas. In other words, the state’s very endeavor to stabilize the tariqas served on the contrary to create instability.

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1. Introduction

While the issue of “succession” among the Sufis is generally discussed as a matter of their genealogy (silsila), this paper approaches the issue from the point of view of their organizational aspects—generally recognized as “tarīqa.”

Throughout history, the question of succession to the leadership (mashyakha) has been a frequent cause of conflict among the tarīqas, which at times led to their divisions. In many instances, these conflicts were brought about by some ambitious deputies (khalīfas) who claimed that they were not khalīfas but leaders (shaykhīs) of their own tarīqas.

In Egypt, under the centralizing policy of Muḥammad ʿAlī (who reigned through 1805-48) and his successors, which finally crystallized into a nation state, the institutionalization of the tarīqas was initiated; the Egyptian tarīqas were placed under the supervision of a unitary authority—initially, the Shaykh al-Bakrī, and subsequently, the Sufi Council (majlis al-ṣūfi)—and each group was transformed into a more rigid organization [De Jong 1978]. Although it reflected the rulers’ rather simple interest, i.e., control and taxation, the noteworthy aspect of this institutionalization was that the rulers were fully aware of the fact that in order to control the tarīqas effectively, they needed to be well organized and stabilized in the society. Consequently, the primary function expected of the institution for the tarīqas was to act as a mediator in the conflicts within the tarīqas in order to prevent the recurrence of divisions.

However, this could not bring an end to the divisions within the tarīqas; instead, we observe an increase in these divisions and an explosion of the emergent tarīqas in the nineteenth century.

From 1895 to 1905, the state intensified its control over the tarīqas by issuing regulations (lāʾiḥāt) stipulating various aspects such as the status of shaykhs and khalīfas, the relationship between them, and the conditions for their appointment. The regulations must have aimed to define the tarīqas as more systematized organizations; tarīqas should be “modernized” in order to stabilize them within the Egyptian society. However, these regulations, too, were unsuccessful in bringing an end to the recurrence of divisions. In fact, immediately after these regulations were issued, a number of khalīfas requested the government to appoint them as shaykhs of their own tarīqas.

Therefore, the following question arises: Why did the divisions within the tarīqas increase despite the state’s endeavor to stabilize the tarīqa organizations? More specifically, how could the khalīfa justify his claim of independence when his tarīqa had become a rigid organization in this period?

In my opinion, some new factors are involved in the logic of the Sufi organization that was
introduced by the very institutionalization itself.

Based on this hypothesis, I will begin my discussion by examining the manner in which this “new logic in the Sufi organization” was introduced and established within the Egyptian tarīqas; I will then proceed to answer the aforementioned question by analyzing the case of tarīqa al-Ḥabibīyya, which attained its independence from tarīqa al-Rifāʾīyya in 1925 following a serious conflict.

2. Tarīqas before 1812

With regard to institutionalization, the evolution of the Sufi organization in modern Egypt can be divided into three phases. The first phase is the period before 1812, when there were no official institutions for the tarīqas in Egypt. The second phase is from 1812 to 1895, when the institution for the tarīqas was introduced in Egypt. The last phase is from 1895 to the present when institutions for the tarīqas were reorganized and incorporated into the state’s administration.

2.1 Tarīqas and “Sufi Orders”

It is a well-known fact that tarīqas in the Arab world throughout history have not been monolithic organizations but have comprised small individual groups. In Ottoman Egypt too, most tarīqas consisted of a number of small groups headed by their own shaykhs; this implied that a tarīqa did not have to be a single unified organization [Winter 1992: 128-166].

A close analysis of the chronicles and biographies written at the beginning of the nineteenth century reveals the more important fact that during these days—and probably, even before then—these small groups within the tarīqas were not necessarily regarded by their contemporaries as branches of their mother tarīqa or as sub-tarīqas. Indeed, the word “tarīqa” did not represent the Sufi organization at all; rather, literally, it referred to the “Sufi Way,” which is a specific method of devotion: rituals (ḥizb, wāird) and genealogy (sīslīla).

‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī (1756-1825), a well-known historian of the late Ottoman Egypt, counted in his chronicle numerous Ulamas—and several Mamluks and Ottomans—who were initiated into tarīqas [Jabartī 1879-1880a: 297-299, 1879-1880b: 2, 59, 147-148]. He himself was initiated into al-Khalwātiyya. 2)

The descriptions of these intellectual Sufis almost entirely focused on their good characters (āḏāb and akhlāq), their learning (ʿilm and maʿarifa), and their genealogies (isnād and sīslīla); however, apart from the description of their participation in the dhikr sessions, there is scant material on their activities as members of the tarīqa or its organizational aspects. It appears that al-Jabartī

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2) He was a disciple of Maḥmūd al-Kurdī (1715-1781) [Jabartī 1879-1880b: 61-68].
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was more interested in the question of who succeeded to the ṯariqa than what groups they formed or the kind of activities they practiced.

On the other hand, in his references to the collective activities of popular Sufis, al-Jabartī never referred to these groups as “ṱariqas.” Here, I would like to quote two passages from his chronology, both of which clearly reflect al-Jabartī’s view on the Sufi groups.

The first quotation is a description of a saint’s birthday (mawlid), in which Sufis gathered and performed their rituals.

He (a French captain) was afflicted with syphilis, and he made a vow to hold this celebration. When he recovered slightly, he began to light some lamps and candles in the mosque and the shrine. Then, he paid the jurists to recite the Qur’ān in the daytime for studying and asked others to recite Dalā’il al-Khayyṛyāt of al-Jāzūlī at night in the mosque. Then, the situation continued to grow in scale and the people of innovations (bida’)—such as groups (jamā’a) of al-‘Afīfī, al-Sammān, al-‘Arabī, and al-‘Īsawīyya—joined to them. Among them were those who gathered in a circle and performed mock recitations of al-Jalāla, and chanters sang qaṣīdas and popular love songs. Among them were those who recited verses from Burda al-Madīḥ of al-Būṣīrī [Jabartī 1879-1880c: 39].

Presently, al-‘Afīfīyya, al-‘Arabīyya, and al-‘Īsawīyya are recognized as sub-ṱariqas (furū’) of al-Shāhdhiliyya, and al-Sammānyya as a sub-ṱariqa of al-Khalwatiyya. However, al-Jabartī did not regard them as ṱariqas at all, and instead, referred to them as “jamā’a.” As will be mentioned in the next chapter, these groups came to be recognized as ṱariqas in the nineteenth century.

The second quotation relates the activities of Sufis in the kiswa procession; in 1810. When a certain ‘Uthmān Agha restored the Zayn al-‘Abīdīn shrine, he sent for the Sufis in order to transport the kiswa to cover the tomb inside.

Then, he sent for the people of Satanic ṱariqas (ahl al-turuq al-shayāniyya) known as Sufi banner bearers (al-ashāyir). They are market men (ṣūqa) and holders of mean occupations (arbāb al-ḥiraf al-mardhūl) who attach themselves to the masters of famous shrines such as al-Aḥmadiyya, al-Rifā‘iyya, al-Qādiriyya, al-Burhāmiyya, and so on [Jabartī 1879-1880d: 120].

In the above quotation, while referring to them as the people of Satanic “ṱariqas,” al-Jabartī never regarded them as members of any established ṱariqas such as al-Aḥmadiyya, al-Rifā‘iyya, al-
Qādiriyya, and al-Burhāmiyya, but as rabble who tried to relate themselves to the founders of these ṭarīqas.

Both passages make it evident that al-Ḫabartī never conflated the members of the honorable ṭarīqas with the groups of popular Sufis even if the latter associated themselves with these ṭarīqas; he clearly distinguished the Sufi Way (ṭarīqa) from the Sufi group (jamāʿa).  

This view was also shared by contemporary Sufis. For example, Aḥmad al-Sāwī (1761-1825) is known as the founder of al-Sāwīyya, which is presently a sub-ṭarīqa of al-Khalwatiyya. However, the word “ṭarīqa al-Sāwīyya” cannot be found in his biography written by his direct disciples. He was recognized as one of the many shaykhs of al-Khalwatiyya, and his group was literally known as “jamāʿa al-Sāwī” or “jamāʿa al-ustādb” [Maghribī et al. 1928: 50, 58, 60, 69, 78].

2.2 Shaykhs’ Authority

Although “ṭarīqa” was a name given not to specify the organization but the teaching, it is clear from the description of the contemporaries quoted above that Sufis gathered and formed groups (jamāʿa) bearing the names of the specific ṭarīqas. Indeed, even the intellectual Sufis formed certain groups, or a kind of salon (majlis), where they performed dhikr under their shaykhs [Maghribī et al. 1928: 34, 37].

These groups, however, could hardly be called “organizations” in the modern sense of the word: typically, they consisted of guides (shaykhs/murshids), their direct disciples (murīds), and lay members (muḥibbs) who for the most part were attracted by the shaykhs’ personality, charisma, or blessings. In most cases, these groups maintained their unity by the face-to-face relationship between the shaykhs and the other members; therefore, when the shaykhs passed away, these groups would easily dissolve.

Indeed, there were shaykhs in some ṭarīqas who appeared to represent the ṭarīqas symbolically; in many cases, however, they were the heads of the saint-families rather than the actual leaders of Sufi groups. The core of al-Ĥmadiyya, al-Qādiriyya, al-Rifāʾiyya, and al-Burhāmiyya—generally known as the four principle ṭarīqas in Egypt—were in fact collectives of saint-families, and the

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3) There were exceptions, of course; it is probable that al-SA’diiyya and al-Īsawiiyya were considered as both ṭarīqa and jamāʿa, known to practice peculiar rituals [Jabarī 1879-1880c: 39-40; Jabarī 1879-1880d: 190].

4) It is probable that the same view was shared even by ‘Abd al-Wāḥḥāb al-Shaʾrānī (d. 1565/66), one of the most famous Sufis in medieval Egypt. According to Michael Winter, al-Shaʾrānī, himself initiated into al-Ĥmadiyya, blamed other members of the ṭarīqa. Winter explains this incoherence as follows; “The explanation for this seemingly paradox lies in Shaʾrānī’s concept of Sufism and in the nature of the Ħmadiyya which was not a compact ṭaʿīya, like the Shāḥdiliyya, but a widespread and rather vague movement which expressed itself on different social levels .... For Shaʾrānī the main thing in any Sufi relationship did not necessarily mean belonging to a certain order, or even practicing a saint cult.” [Winter 1982: 99-101].
mashyakha of the tariqas was inherited by the heads of the most important family among them. However, these shaykhs’ actual authority over the other members was very limited [De Jong 1978: 14-19; Winter 1992: 133-138]. In al-Ahmadiyya, for example, which consisted of 13 families (bayt, pl. buyūt), the heads of the al-Marzūqī family inherited the title of its mashyakha from the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, their authority over the members of al-Ahmadiyya was limited to Cairo and the neighboring areas, and the right to supervise the shrine of Aḥmad al-Badawi in Ṭanṭā—the most important shrine in al-Ahmadiyya—was in the hands of the al-Shinnāwī family. The authority of the shaykh of al-Qādiriyya, which was inherited by the heads of al-Jīzī family, was also very limited. While there were numerous tekkes inhabited by the members of al-Qādiriyya in Egypt, many of them were outside the supervision of this shaykh and run by their own leaders. As for al-Khalwatiyya and al-Shādhiliyya, there were no shaykhs who could represent the tariqa even nominally. Al-Khalwatiyya was a collective of small groups that comprised individual shaykhs and their direct disciples, and there was no supreme authority that could unite these groups. For example, the biography written by the direct disciples of Aḥmad al-Sāwī, a Khalwati shaykh, does not reveal any indications of a substantial relationship or fellowship sentiment among the brothers (ikhwān) beyond the relationship they had with their master.5

In sum, the organizational aspects of the tariqas until the beginning of the nineteenth century—that is, until the end of the Ottoman society in Egypt—can be understood as follows: in general, the tariqa was not a single, unified organization but a collective of small groups or families. Each group/family, while sharing a common teaching or, more likely, just bearing a common name, stood independently under the control of its own shaykh, where there were no organizations or orientations to unite them. It appears that contemporary Sufis were more interested in the succession and manifold of their teaching (tariqa) than in the continuation of their groups (jamā’ā).

3. Institutionalization of the Tariqas

3.1 Tariqas under the Authority of the Shaykh al-Bakrī

In 1812, Muḥammad ‘Alī, the governor of Egypt, issued a decree declaring the jurisdiction of the shaykh of the al-Bakrī family (Shaykh al-Bakrī), one of the notable Sharifian families in Egypt, over the tariqas in Egypt. Shaykh al-Bakrī was authorized to supervise the activities of the tariqas under his jurisdiction and to intervene in their affairs. By virtue of this decree, an institution for the tariqas was introduced in Egypt for the first time, and the state’s control over Sufi groups was initiated [De

5) Biography of Aḥmad al-Sāwī hardly indicates that there existed any substantial relationship between Aḥmad al-Sāwī and other Khalwātī shaykhs.
In 1847, an agreement (ṣakk) was reached between the shaykh al-Bakrī and the shaykh al-Azhar, in which it was confirmed that the affairs related to the ṭarīqas should be under the jurisdiction of the shaykh al-Bakrī and that the shaykh al-Azhar would not interfere in such matters. This agreement must have reflected the ruler’s desire to undermine the resources of al-Azhar, which was growing increasingly powerful from the latter half of the eighteenth century. Since many Ulama of al-Azhar were members of the ṭarīqas, this institution deprived al-Azhar of Sufi resources. However, the actual effectiveness of this agreement was unknown.

Participation in this institution, or more accurately, acceptance of the jurisdiction of the shaykh al-Bakrī, was in fact more voluntary than compulsory. As a consequence, the ṭarīqas that did not benefit from this institution or those that were active in areas unaffected by the authority of the shaykh al-Bakrī remained independent. Although the institution secured the authority inherited among the successive shaykhbs within the al-Bakrī family, its actual effectiveness was largely dependent on each shaykh’s abilities.

3.2 A New Logic in the Sufi Organization

First, I would like to examine the reasons for introducing an institution of this type. What were its benefits for the state and the ṭarīqas? For the state, the institution could serve as a useful tool for the control of the populace.

First, this institutionalization can be understood as a part of the state’s centralizing policy. The shaykh al-Bakrī of the time, himself residing in Cairo, placed his agents (wakīl al-mashyakha) all over Egypt. These agents acted as intermediaries between the shaykh and the ṭarīqas in the regions. By placing a supreme authority in the center and keeping its agents in the regions, the state attempted to reinforce its control over the populace extending to all corners of its territory.

Additionally, the institutionalization served the purposes of taxation; as some ṭarīqas contained groups of people who were not organized in the guilds, the state could order the shaykhbs of these ṭarīqas to collect tax from these groups through the institution. For example, Muḥammad ‘Alī assigned Muḥammad Yāsīn, who was in the position of the Leader of the Merchants (shāḥbandar al-tujjār), to the shaykh of al-Rifāʿiyya in order to collect tax from snake charmers, jugglers, and acrobats, many of whom were members of al-Rifāʿiyya and were not organized into any guilds [De Jong 1978: 37].

In addition, a central authority of this type provided certain benefits to the shaykhbs of the ṭarīqas. Nominal as it might have been, mashyakha al-ṭarīqa was an attractive position that was accompanied by a certain authority over its members and a measure of property such as zāwiyas and shrines. Consequently, as I stated at the beginning, the question of the succession to mashyakha has
been a frequent cause of conflicts at least among the candidates. By associating themselves with the shaykh al-Bakrī, those shaykhs in position could maintain their authority and their property. Since the shaykh al-Bakrī, along with his rival the shaykh al-Sādāt, had long been an influential figure among the Sufis and Ulamas in Egypt, frequently acting as a mediator when conflicts arose among them, it was natural for him to be chosen as the supreme authority over the Sufis. In some ways, this central authority functioned to protect the vested interests of those existing shaykhs.

Regardless of the benefits that both sides may have enjoyed, the institutionalization brought about a drastic change in the form of the ṭarīqas.

The institution for the ṭarīqas, by its nature, required supreme authority in each ṭarīqa. In order to ensure the proper functioning of this institution, each ṭarīqa was represented by only one shaykh—shaykh al-ṭarīqa—who was not merely a nominal leader but was now responsible for “his” ṭarīqa and was authorized to manage all the affairs therein. As a result, the autonomy enjoyed by each group within the ṭarīqa until then was considerably restricted. The leaders of these subgroups, who were now ranked as Khalīfas of the ṭarīqa, had to choose from the following options: accepting the control of shaykh al-ṭarīqa, retaining his independence, if possible, outside the jurisdiction of shaykh al-ṭarīqa, or leaving the existing ṭarīqa to establish his own ṭarīqa.

In fact, we observe an explosion of emergent ṭarīqas in the nineteenth century. Many of the subgroups that were known as “jamā‘a,” “tā‘ifa,” or “bayt”—but never “ṭarīqa”—began claiming that they were independent “ṭarīqas.” For example, the houses (buyūt) of al-Ahmadiyya came to be recognized as its sub-ṭarīqas (ṭarī‘). As mentioned earlier, al-Affifiyya and al-Sammāniyya, which were known as jamā‘a by al-Jabartī, came to be known as independent ṭarīqas during this period.

This change in the form of ṭarīqas can be explained as the introduction of a new logic in the Sufi organization; in other words, a ṭarīqa has to be an organization headed by a single shaykh. While the basis of the organization is its teaching—specific rituals and genealogy—the continuity of the teaching can be achieved by the continuity of the organization. Here, we can recognize the present and generally accepted understanding that “ṭarīqa” means “Sufi Organization” or “Sufi Order.” Now, one ṭarīqa cannot contain several subgroups and it must be a unified organization; moreover, the divisions of the organization were understood as the divisions of the ṭarīqa itself and vice versa.

This process of the transformation of the ṭarīqa into an organization can be traced, albeit roughly, by paying attention to the changes in the meaning of the word “ṭarīqa” in contemporary sources.

As we have seen, the word “ṭarīqa” itself did not represent the actual Sufi groups in the chronicle of al-Jabartī. Indeed, even in the decree issued in 1812, this distinction was observed; while we
cannot find the word “ṭariqa” in the text at all, the expression “the groups of the Sufis (taqā’if al-fuqarā’ al-ṣūfīyya)” was used [Bakrī 1905: 377]. In the agreement between the shaykh al-Bakrī and the shaykh al-Azhar, issued in 1847, the expression “shaykhs of the ṭariqas (mashāyiḥ al-ṭuruq)” appears [Bakrī 1905: 43]; however, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not “ṭuruq” (pl. of ṭariqa) in this context signifies the actual Sufi group. In ‘Alī Mubārak’s geography published in 1886-88, the word “ṭariqa (al-ṭariqa al-ṣūfīyya)” clearly signifies substantial Sufi groups [Mubārak 1886-1888: 129-130]. Moreover, the title of “the supreme shaykh over the shaykhs of the ṭariqas (shaykh mashāyiḥ al-ṭuruq al-ṣūfīyya),” which was initially held by the shaykh al-Bakrī and subsequently by the chairperson of the Sufi Council, was said to appear for the first time in the 1880s [De Jong 1978: 124]. It appears that in the 1880s at the latest, the word “ṭariqa” came to signify both “the Sufi Way” and “Sufi group.”

4. The Making of “Sufi Orders” in Egypt

4.1 Regulations for the Ṭariqas

Eventually, the institution was reborn with the reform initiated from 1895 by Muḥammad Tawfīq al-Bakrī (1870-1932), the shaykh al-Bakrī of the time. In 1895, the Regulations for the Ṭariqas (la’iḥa al-ṭuruq al-ṣūfīyya) were issued as a Khedival decree. By virtue of this decree, an administrative body was created in the form of a Sufi Council (majlis al-ṣūfī) consisting of the shaykhs of the major ṭariqas and with “the supreme shaykh over the shaykhs of the ṭariqas” as the chairperson.6) In 1905, the Internal Regulations for the Ṭariqas (al-lā’iḥa al-dākhiliyya li’l-ṭuruq al-ṣūfīyya) were issued. These regulations provided guidelines for the organization and the activities of the ṭariqas; they also elucidated the statuses of the shaykhs and khalīfās.

This reform must have had a great impact on the various aspects of the Egyptian ṭariqas. Here, we can point out that the new logic in the Sufi organization was stipulated in these regulations. For example, in the second section of the Internal Regulations, the status of the shaykh al-ṭariqa is stipulated as follows7:

Article 2 One person cannot be appointed as the shaykh of two ṭariqas.

Article 3 Each shaykh of a ṭariqa is independent of the other. Every shaykh is associated with

6) In principle, the office of “the supreme shaykh over the shaykhs of the ṭariqas” was no longer held exclusively by the shaykh al-Bakrī but would be appointed by the Khedive; in fact, the shaykh al-Bakrī held this office until 1946.

7) My primary reference for these regulations is the text translated in English in [De Jong 1978: 201-214].
his own ṭariqā. No shaykh is subordinate to another, and there must be only one shaykh in a single ṭariqā.

Article 11 The chiefs of the branches of the ṭariqas in rural districts should not be addressed as “shaykhs” of al-ṭariqā but exclusively as “nāʿibs.”

The very fact that these regulations were stipulated proves that the new logic was not fully established in the Egyptian ṭariqas at that time. However, at present, this logic has become a law that must be adhered to by all the ṭariqas.

4.2 Sufi Organization

These regulations were not only provided but thoroughly implemented under the more rationalized administration.

The formation of the ṭariqā organization had already been initiated in the process of institutionalization; the basic structure of the organization was arranged in the mid-nineteenth century and has not undergone major changes to date [Berger 1970: 68-69; De Jong 1978: 47-50].

A notable feature of the ṭariqā organization was the incorporation of two new offices—nāʿib and naqīb—into its structure; until then, members were ranked across four positions—shaykh, khalīfa, murīd, and muḥibb—according to their spiritual attainment. Nāʿib and naqīb, chosen from among khalīfas, were functions rather than spiritual grades, and they played crucial roles in the management of the organization.

Nāʿīb was a chief of a branch who, acting as the shaykh’s agent, managed affairs in his branch. Beneath the nāʿīb, were the naqĪbs, who handled more subtle matters.8) Although nāʿībs and naqĪbs were chosen by the shaykh, they had to receive their official appointment by the Sufi Council.

Shaykhs and nāʿībs were not always on good terms. For example, a memorandum issued in 1943 from the Sufi Council reveals that friction between shaykhs and nāʿībs was increasing, and the Council had received a number of petitions from both sides.9) As will be mentioned in the next section, some nāʿībs even claimed independence from their shaykhs.

With regard to the mashyakha, it was stipulated in the internal regulations (sec. 2 art. 6) that the eldest son should succeed to the office. However, the appointment of new shaykhs required approval from the Council.

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8) For example, four naqībs were assigned under each nāʿīb in Alexandria in 1946. Cf. Egyptian National Archives, Cairo, al-ʿAbidīn records (Maḥfaza al-ʿAbidīn, abbreviated hereafter as MA) 539, 12 August 1946, “List of Nāʿībs and Naqībs of the Ṭariqās in Alexandria.”

9) MA539, 24 April 1943, “A Memorandum from the Supreme Shaykh over the Shaykhs of the Ṭariqās to Shaykhs of Ṭariqās.”
Although a shaykh was in charge of both spiritual guidance and the management of the organization, several shaykhs actually entrusted the management to their deputies (wakīls). The memorandum issued in 1943 pointed out the increase of this practice and stipulated that the appointment of wakīls was permitted only in exceptional cases such as the shaykh’s illness and only with permission from the Council.\(^\text{10}\)

With regard to the activities of the tariqas, agents (wakīl al-mashyakha) of the Supreme Shaykh over the Shaykhs of the Tariqas, placed throughout the country, played crucial roles. Typically, these agents were local notables chosen from among the members of tariqas, sharifs, or custodians of the shrines.\(^\text{11}\) As the regulations stipulated conditions for their activities, it was these agents who actually directed them. For example, when the birthday of King Fāruq I was to be celebrated on February 11, 1943, the Council notified each agent on the details of arranging the celebration and directing the tariqas on the day.\(^\text{12}\)

It is concluded here that as a result of the state’s thorough intervention as illustrated above, the new logic in the Sufi organization was fully established in the Egyptian tariqas, transforming them into a single unified organization in mid-twentieth century at the latest.

4.3 A Conflict over the Independence of al-Habībiyya from al-Rifā’iyya

Despite the fact that this new logic was stipulated and implemented by the state, which must have aimed at the stability and continuity of the tariqas, the divisions within the tariqas continued.

In fact, immediately following the issuance of the Internal Regulations in 1905, a number of khalīfas appealed to the Sufi Council, claiming that they should be appointed as the shaykhs of their independent tariqas.\(^\text{13}\)

In most cases, these khalīfas finally attained independence from their previous shaykhs. However, this was not always easily achieved. Serious conflicts frequently occurred between the khalīfas and their shaykhs, and the decisions made by the Sufi Council did not always satisfy both sides.

Here, I would like to analyze a case of one such conflict—the conflict over the independence of al-Ḥabībiyya from al-Rifā’iyya. This conflict arose when Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī, the nāʿib of al-Rifā’iyya, appealed to the Sufi Council, claiming that he should be appointed as the

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10) MA539, 24 April 1943, “A Memorandum from the Supreme Shaykh over the Shaykhs of the Tariqas to Shaykhs of Tariqas.”

11) On the conditions for the appointment of wakīls see the Internal Regulations for the Tariqas, section 3, article 1 & 2 [De Jong 1978: 210-211].

12) MA539, 7 February 1943, “A Notification from the Supreme Shaykh over the Shaykhs of the Tariqas to the Wakīls.”

13) For example, the following tariqas obtained their independence during this period: al-Ḥāmidīyya from al-Qāwuqajjīyya, al-Mughāzīyya from al-Sibā’iyya, and al-Shahāwiyya from al-Burhāmiyya [De Jong 1978: 175-180].
The following is the story of this conflict.

In 1905, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī requested the Sufi Council to appoint him as the *shaykh* of al-Ḥabībiyya; however, his request was immediately rejected. In the same year, he turned to the National Court of Appeal in Cairo (Miṣr al-Ahliyya), but his claim was dismissed. However, in 1911, when the chairperson of the Sufi Council was replaced, the independence of al-Ḥabībiyya was accepted. This time, however, the Ministry of Interior opposed this decision and the case was taken to the court again. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī’s claim was not accepted, and he was ordered to continue as the *nāʿib* of al-Riḍā’iyya. However, in 1925, the Ministry of Interior suddenly accepted his claim and al-Ḥabībiyya finally obtained independence. This was achieved due to a personal relationship between Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī and Muḥammad Ḥilmī ʿĪsā, who was appointed as the Minister of Interior in 1924; further, both Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī and Muḥammad Ḥilmī ʿĪsā belonged to the same political party (*Ḥizb al-Ittiḥād*).

This raises the following question: Why did Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī want to claim his independence from al-Riḍā’iyya and on what basis did he justify this claim?

It is difficult to identify his precise reason for claiming independence from al-Riḍā’iyya. However, there are some indications that already in the 1880s, al-Ḥabībiyya was virtually recognized as an independent *ṭariqa*; it was an independent *ṭariqa* of al-Riḍā’iyya, and the head of al-Ḥabībiyya—Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī—was given the title of *nāʿib*. Moreover, al-Riḍā’iyya has never permitted the existence of sub-*ṭariqas* till date (*Al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* 2001: 49). I speculate that the head of al-Ḥabībiyya had long been yearning for its official independence from al-Riḍā’iyya.

The justification of his claim can be found in his petition to the Court in 1905.

Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥādī al-Ḥabībī claimed that *ṭariqa* al-Ḥabībiyya was an independent *ṭariqa*. Its founder was his grandfather, the late Muḥammad Ahmad al-Ḥabībī, whose shrine is located on al-Sayyida Zaynab street in Cairo. He was initiated into *ṭariqa* by *shaykhs* who belonged to al-

14) For this incident, my primary reference is the trial records in MA539, which comprised 13 documents. See also [De Jong 1983: 187-188].

15) National Courts were established in 1883 to exclusively treat the cases that involved Egyptians; its codes were based on those of the Mixed Courts established in 1875 [Hoyle 1991: 186].

16) This was proven in five documentary evidences submitted to the courts by the *shaykh* al-Riḍā’iyya. Cf. MA539, 21 Rabī’ al-Awwal 1300, 1304, 10 Rabī’ al-Ākhar 1305, 19 Rajab 1305, n.d.
Ahmadiyya, al-Shadhiliyya, al-Khalwatiyya, al-Naqshbandiyya, and al-Rifa‘iyya. He taught all these tariqas to his disciples until his death. He (Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Habibi) continued (his claim) that this tariqa had its specific form of prayers and rituals (salaat, ahzab, and awerad). Muhammad Ahmad al-Habibi had appointed the late Muhammad al-Habibi, his (the claimant’s) father, as the successor of this tariqa.17)

In sum, his claim was based on the fact that his grandfather, the founder of al-Habibiyya, had received several tariqas other than al-Rifa‘iyya, which Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Habibi had taken over from his father (Muhammad al-Habibi) and also on the fact that its prayers and rituals were different from those of al-Rifa‘iyya.

This claim appears to be reasonable in view of the new logic in the Sufi organization: The base of an organization is its teaching. Since al-Habibiyya differs from al-Rifa‘iyya in its teachings—prayers, rituals, and genealogy—it should also differ from al-Rifa‘iyya in its organization.

If this is the case, then why was the claim repeatedly rejected by the authority?

The answer lies in the logic itself. The grounds on which he claimed independence were commonalities shared by all tariqas in Egypt. It has been a common practice to initiate one person into several tariqas, and it is not difficult to find a prominent shaykh who would have introduced new rituals and composed his original prayer manuals in a tariqa. Thus, his claim, if accepted, could also lead to the division of other tariqas in Egypt.

In fact, in his report on the incident in 1905, the Supreme Shaykh over the Shaykhs of the Tariqas expressed his fear that if he had accepted the independence of al-Habibiyya, it would have served as a precedent for other ambitious khalifas in justifying their demand for independence, and this would have triggered the division of other tariqas in Egypt.18) The same fear was shared by the Ministry of Interior. In 1911, when the new chairperson of the Sufi Council accepted al-Habibiyya’s independence, the Ministry was strongly opposed to his decision.

Eventually, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Habibi obtained his independence through a personal connection with the then Minister of Interior; this implies that the Sufi Council could not solve the problem.

The conflict over the independence of al-Habibiyya presents an interesting case; his claim, which was grounded in the new logic of the Sufi organization, led to an unfavorable situation for the state. Ironically, the new logic in the Sufi organization, which was introduced and established through

17) MA539, 24 February 1906, “The Conclusion of the Trial at the National Courts of Appeal in Cairo.”
18) MA539, 30 January 1907, “Report from the Supreme Shaykh over the Shaykhs of the Tariqas to the Palace.”
the institutionalization initiated by the state, itself served as the grounds for the divisions within the \textit{tariqas} in the twentieth century.

5. Conclusion

The case of al-Habibiyah was merely one of many such conflicts. Therefore, I do not believe it is possible to specify all the factors responsible for the increase in the divisions within the \textit{tariqas} during this period.

However, at least one factor can be pointed out: the new logic in the Sufi organization that was introduced in the nineteenth century provided grounds for justifying the claims of those \textit{khalifas} who wanted to be \textit{shaykhs} of their own \textit{tariqas}. In other words, the state’s very endeavor to “modernize” the \textit{tariqa} organization and stabilize it within the Egyptian society served on the contrary to create instability.

This irony can be explained in part by reviewing the evolution of the organizational aspect of the \textit{tariqa} as illustrated in this paper. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a \textit{tariqa} was not an organization but a teaching, it could be maintained as long as a single person succeeded to its teaching. However, with the introduction of the new logic in the Sufi organization by its institutionalization, a \textit{tariqa} no longer could be maintained without its organization; now the continuity of its teachings could be achieved only by the continuity of its organization. At this stage, the weakness of the Sufi organization\textsuperscript{19} came to be the critical feature that could endanger the stability or, in the worst case scenario, very the existence of the \textit{tariqa} itself.

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