nized his "patrie spirituelle" (Nasr 1977[2536/1397]: 8).

The main result of his Iranian sojourn was the monumental, four-volume essay "En Islam iranien" (besides a breathtaking number of other writings), which had as its mission to document Shiite spirituality from its canon. His account was marked by the negation of Shiism's social historicity, which derived in part from his revulsion against sociology and antihistoricism. But what is more important as an explanation for its success in Iran, his views matched the essentialism in mystical, Iranian visions of the self, which were influenced by Neoplatonism as much as Corbin was (cf. Trimingham 1971: 134; Ahmadi and Ahmadi 1998).[5]

These mystical notions and sentiments – exterior to Western preoccupations, concentrated in Sufism but radiating beyond mystical poetry, from Iranian prose texts and permeating Iranian society at large (cf. Ahmadi and Ahmadi 1998: 107) – made up the primary Iranian context for the transnational configuration of Corbin and his circle. In their scientific, cultural, and religious enterprises, (Iranian) Shiism became defined as Islam's strongest transhistorical and esoteric tradition.

During fieldwork in Iran in the late 1990s, I noted this ideational structure in the context of Sufism. Many who either propagate or denounce Sufism, I observed, equate Sufism with its origins. One pervasive tradition attributes the origins of Iranian Sufism to national resistance against "the Arab assault" (*hamle-ye ʿarab*),[6] while an inverse account has Sufism from the outset as a stronghold of alien power in Iran – whether this be Arab, Turkish, Mongol, Afghan, or British.

Origins could be alluded to in contexts such as the Arab invasion, but they were not often thought to occupy a sociohistorical locus constrained by temporal and spatial dimensions. They were rather seen as manifestations of an essence, and "Iran," "Shiism," and "Sufism" were conceived as preordained qualities rather than as decipherable units, manifest to the surface of their appearance (cf. Ahmadi and Ahmadi 1998: 121–123). Many Sufis would resist historical contextualisation of spiritual experience, which has been variously described as a transcendence of time; reaching the place where time is no longer; or as the point in consciousness where one drowns in the state of the "now" that shatters past and future by absorbing all. For Corbin, the phenomenology of Iranian consciousness would open the doors of metahistory; the "realm of spiritual events" (Jambet 1983: 266).

Objective geography is contested by Sufis who head for "nowhere place" *(na-koja-abad)*, whereas Corbin subdued objective spatiality in references to "emblematic cities" or "spiritual horizons."[7] Where Corbin invoked Sohravardi's beloved symbol of *na-koja-abad* (see, especially, 1971b), it reflected not "the Orient's absence" (Said 1991: 184), but the sensitivity of a "Westerner" to an "Eastern" concept, that is: representation, loyal to dominant presentations of self.

As much as Sufis have resisted secular, historical chronology, they often abhor sociological categories. Although consciousness of violent persecution pervades Shiite Sufi reflections on self – and Sufi-jurist tension has been a recurrent feature of modern Iranian history – this awareness has not often led to explicit, elaborate objectivations that would identify and circumscribe social positions, actors, and factors involved in the conflict. The enemies of Sufism have rather been understood, primarily, as a geographically and historically indistinct, universal psychological type of "spiritually lesser endowed creatures." Corbin observed: "La mission des 'orafâ [...] opère une désocialisation" (1971a: 185).

A second Iranian context for this late twentieth-century configuration was a state interest in Sufism, which was beneficial to the definition of national identity and as a counterweight to political Islam. Moreover, while his oeuvre amply demonstrates that Corbin's "particular vision of 'Iranian Islam' corresponded nicely to the cultural policies of the Pahlavi regime" (Algar 1980: 90; cf. Mahdi 1990: 92 f.), the state interest in Sufism attained more intimate features also.

5 According to Stauth, "there existed a historically present vernacular, a ceremonial [...] of the internal experiences. In the case of Iran a disposition of such techniques evolved through Shiism and Islamic mysticism" (1991: 34). Plotinus' (Neoplatonist) emanation doctrine involves "descent" and "procession," analogous to Shiite Sufi *nozul* and *soʿud*. Like Iranian Sufis, Plotinus "located" emanation outside time and space in a mystical "nowhere" (de Gandillac 1952: 19). In 1941–42 a Sufi leader of the Soltanʿalishahi-Neʿmatollahi order wrote a laudation on Plotinus (Falsafa-ye Flutin. Ra'is-e Aflatuniyan-e Akhir).

6 Driving back home after a Sufi congregation in Tehran, in May 1996, the Sufi Mohammad spoke to me in a secretive voice: "Now I will tell you something. Pay attention." He then sadly proclaimed: "The Arabs came by the sword, subjecting neighboring peoples and violating their ways of life." Only the Iranians had retained their language and culture. "But we saw the virtue of the Message, and we saved it from them."

7 See, for instance, his autobiographical remarks in 1981b, 1981a, 1981d, and 1981c.