

Sufism in Modern Morocco

Introduction

Morocco, a North-African country with nowadays an almost entire Muslim population, is often said to have developed a ‘particular’ type of Islam, a regional style that came to be scholarly coined as ‘Moroccan Islam’ and that was fundamentally marked by Sufism.¹ This chapter provides an overview of Moroccan Sufism, focusing mainly in modern times. The article has been divided into two parts. The first part discusses the historical development of Moroccan Sufism by: first, briefly assessing the main lines of development within Maghribi Sufism since its inception and until 1830; second, looking at how did Colonialism affect the development of Sufism and, how the first indication of a Sufi demise appeared in the beginning of the 20th century with, (a) the tragic case of the Kattaniyya, and (b), the consolidation of nationalist politics; and, third, I discuss what happened to Sufism after the country gained independence in 1956. The second part explores the main elements that define Sufism in Morocco today: 1) it argues that modern Sufism has become principally maraboutic in nature, that is to say, less important in terms of religious organizations, yet significantly relevant still in ritualistic terms, and to a certain extent beyond the world of the Orders. Part of this culture is expressed in shrines visitation and in (2) the gift economy associated with it. The chapter also provides an overview of the most important Sufi rituals (3) that exist today, including an analysis of the widespread practice of trance and a discussion of the modern adaptations of traditional practices. 4) it briefly introduces the musical

¹ Although nowadays the timelessness of ‘Moroccan Islam’ has been questioned, currently being considered a narrative mode, rather than an immutable reality, see Burke, E. (2014) *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam*. Oakland: University of California Press.

dimension of Moroccan Sufism. And, finally, (5) it discusses what some have called the ‘Sufi revival’, a certain degree of success of organized Sufi religiosities since the decade of the 1980s, by addressing the case of the Būdshishiyya. Overall, the chapter seeks to provide an overview of the most important elements that have characterized Moroccan Sufism, past and present.

Part One: The history of Moroccan Sufism

1. Moroccan Sufism until 1830

Sufism entered the Maghrib late and at a slow pace, at the end of the 10th and beginning of the 11th century, with its first manifestations occurring only under Almoravid rule (1040-1147), despite the strict anti-Sufi Malikism promoted by the rulers.² It was under the subsequent rule of the Almohads (1121-1269) that Sufis had better connections with rulers and Sufism could flourish. From these days are some of the key figures of early Maghribi Sufism, such as, Abū Madyan Shu‘aib bin al-Ḥusayn (d.1198), his disciple ibn Mashīsh al-‘Alamī (d.1227),³ and ibn Mashīsh’s disciple, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d.1258), founder of the Shādhilīyya *ṭarīqa*, first ‘native’ order to the region. Al-Shādhilī’s centrality for Moroccan Islam is evidenced in the character he impinged to the core identity of Maghribi Sufism, that is: a) emphasis on the application of sharia as fundamental requisite for spiritual cognisance (*kashf*), b) stress on exerting an effort to control carnal appetites, yet not to the point of advocating extreme ascetism or

² An example of this early forms of anti-Sufism is the *fatwā* that famously banned the works of al-Ghazzālī (d.1111) in Andalusia. On the ban, see Serrano Ruano, Delfina. (2006) “Why Did the Scholars of al-Andalus Distrust al-Ghazālī? Ibn Rushd al-Jadd's Fatwā on Awliyā'Allāh.” *Der Islam* 83 (1): 137-156.

³ His only surviving text, the *Salāt al-Mashīshīya* was translated into English by Burckhardt, T. (1978) “The Prayer of Ibn Mashish”. *Islamic Quarterly* 20 (3): 68.

celibacy, and c) performance of ritual gatherings of a sober style, with little or no music or episodes of trance.⁴ Shādhilī Sufism became particularly successful with the Jazūliyya *ṭarīqa*, that by the time of its founder's death in 1465 had around 12.000 devotees.⁵ Besides, the order became significant in that it used its wide social support to legitimise, in religious terms, the access to power of the Sa'adi princes from southern Morocco. Sharifism will become as a result, a founding principle of Moroccan Islam and of its politics, first inaugurated with the Sa'adi dynasty (1510-1659) and renovated by their successors, the 'Alawis (1659-present).

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Two of the most important groups in the Moroccan Sufi scene appeared in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Darqāwa and Tijānī ways. The Darqāwas are a branch of the Shādhiliyya founded by the followers of Abū Ḥāmid al-'Arabī al- Darqāwī (d.1823).⁶ The *ṭarīqa* was one of the most important *ṭuruq* in the country until independence, with an equally large following in the Western Algerian region of Tlemcen; during the 18th century it also expanded to the rest of North Africa and the Levant. The order had reformist influences, calling to the 'return' to the pristine morality of the time of the Prophet, although what they proposed in order to implement this 'return' was often considered unacceptable in 'ulamā' circles and by society at large: the *ṭarīqa* considered poverty a moral duty, requesting devotees to abandon material wealth and goods. Begging was part of their spiritual education. The *ṭarīqa*

⁴ Bennison, A. K. (2016). *The Almoravid and Almohad empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 273.

⁵ García-Arenal, M. (2006). *Messianism and puritanical reform: Mahdīs of the Muslim west*. Leiden: Brill, 248.

⁶ For a good introduction on the Darqāwiyya see Peyron, M. (1995). "Derkaoua, Derqaoua, Darqawa", *Encyclopédie berbère*, 15, Daphnitae – Djado. Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2279-2283.

was particularly famous for the mendicant attitude of its members, who wandered the territory dressed with the characteristic *mūraqqa* (a hooded, long, often white and of coarse wool cloak) and a green bonnet. Al-Darqāwī is known for having asked his followers to abandon the cities and settle in the countryside.⁷ Darqāwis were the protagonists of a major revolt at the turn of the century, against the rise of taxes that came up after the decrease of piracy activity at the end of the 18th century. For more than a decade (1801-1813) there were sublevated Darqāwī groups across Algeria, against the Bey of Oran, initially supported by the Moroccan authorities against the Turks.⁸ The revolts were of a scale that, together with the political moves of the Qādirīyya and the Tijānīyya are said to have set up the ground for the Turkish collapse in Algeria and the subsequent taking of control by the French in 1830.

The latest among the foundational figures of Moroccan Sufism was Abu al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tijānī (d.1815), founder of one of Africa’s largest *turuq*, the Tijānīyya.⁹ The order represents an important reforming vanguard within Western Islam, a type of reformism, it has been claimed, inspired by the Khalwatīyya and to a certain extent also by the Shādhilīyya (el-Adnani, 2007: 25),¹⁰ although these influences had been also disputed (e.g. Chih, 2002). Although born in today’s Algeria, al-Tijānī was a religious scholar in Fes for about fifteen years, before becoming notorious, but it was not until his Hajj to Mecca that he begun preaching. Upon his

⁷ Vikør, K. S. (1995). *Sufi and scholar on the desert edge: Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Sanūsī and his brotherhood*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 57.

⁸ For more details on the revolt, see Delpech (1874).

⁹ One of the foundational texts of the order, *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī wa-bulūgh al-amānī fī fayḍ Abī al-‘Abbās al-Tijānī*, contains al-Tijānī’s account on how he was granted prophetic permission to found the order (see p. 57). Its compilation is credited to ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm ibn al-‘Arabī Barādah around the years 1798-1800.

¹⁰ El-Adnani, J. (2007). *La Tijāniyya 1781-1881: les origines d'une confrérie religieuse au Maghreb*. Rabat: Marsam, 25. The book is also a comprehensive analysis of the Tijānīyya’s inception. On this order see also, Abun-Nasr, J. (1965). *The Tijāniyya: a sufi order in the modern world*. London: Oxford University Press.

return to the Maghrib in 1773 he would claim having communicated with the Prophet directly and his new teachings, as a result, to be directly inspired by his example. He begun preaching and soon afterwards gathered a sizeable and loyal following. The first account of a formal group appears in Fes in 1798.¹¹ The Tijānīyya was a breakaway in several ways from the major trends that so far had existed in Moroccan Sufism, with one of the major innovations being the principle of exclusivity, the idea that al-Tijānī's followers were forbidden from following the teachings of other orders and attending other *ṭuruq*'s gatherings. This commitment to al-Tijānī was, moreover, to last the whole disciple's life, being equally banned to abandon the Tijānīyya when willing to follow another ṭarīqa. Related to that, al-Tijānī forbid worshipping *āwliyā'*, what in praxis meant the prohibition to visit any shrine other than those of Muḥammad and his companions.¹² Later generations of Tijānis expanded the category of what were considered 'permissible visitations', to also include the shrines of Tijānī *āwliyā'*. This exclusivity did not impede the order to grow exponentially, although its magnificent development has largely occurred beyond Morocco, primarily across sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Colonial Morocco

Colonial intervention in the Maghrib brought about changes for Sufism and how and why Sufis and their *ṭuruq* have reacted to foreign influence is a complex issue. Vikør has explained that colonial scholarship developed a tendency to oversimplify Sufi

¹¹ Boum, A. and T. K. Park. (2016). *Historical dictionary of Morocco*. London: Rowman and Littlefield, 337.

¹² El-Adnani J. (2000). "Réflexions sur la naissance de la Tijaniyya. Emprunts et surenchères". In: Triaud, J.L. and Robinson, D. (eds). *La Tijaniyya. Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*. Paris: Karthala, p. 19-33.

political involvement by categorising Sufi activity as, either ‘activist’, or ‘quietist’¹³, a reductionist view, still surprisingly in vogue today. In reality, Sufi political involvement took and keeps taking many forms, from armed resistance, to silent toleration or open cooperation. Further, there has been a tendency to assume that the political position adopted by Sufis had some kind of theological foundation, a grounding unique to each of the orders; in other words, assuming that certain *ṭuruq* had been more ‘militant’ because this character was somehow impinged in their doctrine. In reality, the political involvement of the Sufis was in most cases motivated by the historical circumstances, rather than by doctrine, and the same *ṭarīqa* that had once adopted an active political profile was, at others, less involved in political matters. There are even cases in which two prominent members of the same *ṭarīqa* were one supportive of and the other against colonial intervention, whilst remaining affiliated to the same *ṭarīqa* –e.g. Ma al-‘Aynayn (one of Southern Moroccan Fadhilī leaders) fought against the French, whilst his brother, at the same time, was collaborating with them.¹⁴

Nonetheless, an image that has transcended to posterity is that of Sufi leaders as military opponents to colonial influence. This portrayal, even if not being the full picture, bears, nonetheless, some truth, and in the case of the Maghrib a good part of this fame might be owed to ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Muḥyiddīn, often shortened as ‘Abd al-Qādir (d.1883), who led one of the most important and enduring anti-colonial resistance movements in the history of the Middle East.¹⁵ Profiting from a political vacuum, a group of tribesmen led by him occupied the Algerian cities of Tlemcen and Mascara in 1830 and, in loose collaboration with the Moroccan sultan (an ambiguous relationship that would become

¹³ Vikør, K. S. (2015). “Sufism and Colonialism”. In: Ridgeon, Lloyd. ed. 2015. *The Cambridge companion to Sufism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 212-232, 213.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁵ Vikør, K. S. (2012). *The Maghreb since 1800, a Short History*. London: Hurst, 28.

far more difficult as time went on) expanded their control over significant parts of North Africa, mostly in today's Algeria, but with notable support in eastern Morocco. 'Abd al-Qādir finally surrendered to the French in 1847, after 17 years of resistance.¹⁶

Neither all Sufis were 'brothers in arms' nor they all stood against foreign intervention. 'Abd al-Qādir himself spend significant effort in fighting against a branch of the Tijānīyya, a group with a lodge in the Saharan town of 'Ayn Mādī, who had resisted recognising his authority.¹⁷ The Tijānis were not alone in standing up against anti-colonial struggles and the positions adopted by the Sufis with regards to colonial presence in the region, and to the weakened authority of the Moroccan sultan, were as diverse as the groups themselves, a plurality that was maintained, in the latest phase, during the times of the Protectorates (1912-1956), when France mostly, but also Spain in a smaller geography, had a more direct control over the territory.

A case in point to illustrate how Sufis actively collaborated with the Europeans is that of Abd al- Raḥmān al- Darqāwī, who was at the same time *walī* and sharif. When the Berber leader 'Abd al-Karīm al-Khaṭṭābī (d.1963) and his followers defeated the Spanish in Northern Morocco they created, amidst momentous popularity, the Berber Republic of the Rif (1921-1926). Initially, both Berbers and French officials adopted a restrained position against one another, with the French deciding not to intervene in support of the Spanish, and the Berbers remaining equally silent about the French control that affected their southern neighbours. Soon, however, with al-Khaṭṭābī's increasing popularity, the Berbers would try to expand their territory. When Riffian

¹⁶ Ageron, C. R. (1991). *Modern Algeria: A History from 1830 to the Present*. London: Hurst, 5-12.

¹⁷ A full account of this episode is to be found in Abu-Nasr, *The Tijanniya*, 62-8.

troops appeared in the Ouergha river, a buffer zone between the (then former) Spanish and the French-controlled areas, Abd al-Raḥmān al-Darqāwī, an influential Darqāwa Sufi leader of the kin group of the Beni Zeghoual requested the help of the French to deter their advances. Since then, al-Darqāwī forcefully tried to preserve French interests in the area, orchestrating a big campaign to try to deter Berber leaders that progressively defected to join the files of the Berber fighters of al-Khaṭṭābī.¹⁸

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Overall, even if there were diverse reactions to the presence of foreign intervention in the region, many Sufi groups had the opportunity to thrive during the colonial period. French authorities considered them key in the social configuration of Moroccan society, and for that reason, generally tried to politically neutralise them, by granting them favours. Their religious practices, large scale pilgrimages included, were tolerated and the pre-colonial practice of the *tanfīda*, by which the Sufis could benefit from substantial donations, was to be preserved,¹⁹ a favouritism that placed Sufi groups in a privileged, if often quietened position. In fact, even if it is somehow difficult to measure, it seems quite clear that in Morocco, as elsewhere in North and West Africa, Sufism experienced a flourishing during the colonial period. During that time, the *turuq*, with their often less bureaucratized and informal structures, were to become important loci of religious daily life across the country, “*they became centres for the faith of many ordinary Muslims to a greater degree than the mosques, which were more*

¹⁸ The complete historical episode is well explained by Gershovich, M. (2000). *French military rule in Morocco: colonialism and its consequences*. London: Frank Cass, 122-166.

¹⁹ Gilson Miller, S. (2013). *A history of modern Morocco*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 99.

atomised sites for religious ritual than community structures".²⁰ During the years of the Protectorates (1912-1956) however, the former largely privileged status from which many Sufi groups had previously benefitted, came to be openly questioned, by two important political developments: a) the rise and consolidation of the Kattānīyya *ṭarīqa*, an order that was to play a major political role in the early 20th century (and its tragic ending), and, b) the growth of the nationalist movement which included a strong Salafi-modernist criticism of certain Sufi practices and doctrines.

a) The Kattānīyya

Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī (d.1909) was a member of a family of religious scholars from Fes who had established a lodge in 1853. Influenced by the Darqāwīyya, the Kattānīyya became known for attracting devotees from the less privileged sectors of society, although it also counted with disciples from other backgrounds. When al-Kattānī became headmaster of the *ṭarīqa* in 1895, he began to preach for a reformist, and openly anti-colonial agenda. He was also famous for promoting ‘exhorted’ ritual practices that put him at odds with part of the Fes religious establishment - although he was also backed by a number of tribal leaders and prominent ‘ulamā’. Once realising that Sultan ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d.1943) was not willing to support his project for major social reform, he defected to his brother ‘Abd al-Ḥafīdh (d.1937), leading together the Ḥafīdhīyya, a movement that in the years 1907-1908 aimed at replacing ‘Abd al-‘Azīz by his brother to eventually overthrow foreign

²⁰ Vikør, *Sufism*, 231-2. Morocco saw the re-emergence of Sufism from the decade of the 1980s. The renewed vitality of Sufism we are witnessing today, is also partly due to the same feature. The Sufis, then and now, are more informal and adaptable, meet often in private homes and propagate by using informal networks of family, friendship, and neighbourhood.

powers. They achieved their aim of deposing the former sultan, but the alliance between the new sultan and the *walī* would soon change course, when in 1909 ‘Abd al-Ḥafīdh now in power, changed his mind, and decided to become closer to the French, launching a campaign to crackdown his critics, including those in the contesting Sufi orders.²¹

Seeing the wide support that al-Kattānī was gathering and fearing him launching a jihad against him, ‘Abd al-Ḥafīdh initiated a harsh campaign to liquidate the Kattānīyya: he ordered all Kattānī lodges to be closed down and threatened to burn every village where al-Kattānī had supporters if he did not turn himself over. Al-Kattānī was eventually captured and publicly tortured to death in the cruellest manner, his corpse disappeared to avoid the possibility for tombs’ visiting and veneration.²² So important was the effect the al-Kattānī episode had for deterring Sufis from political involvement that six decades will have to pass for a voice emerging from within Sufi circles, ‘Abdassalām Yassīn (d.2012), to raise again to enunciate himself politically, and again will cost him dearly, to spend the majority of his adult life in prison and/or under house arrest.

b) Sufism and Nationalism

The lowering of the political profile of the Sufis came together with their diminishing social influence, something for what the rise of Moroccan nationalism, was in great part responsible for. Until then, when parts of the public entered in conflict with central powers, tribal leaders and/or Sufi shaykhs had played a major role as political and cultural mediators, as we have previously discussed. This function, although will still

²¹ The most comprehensive study on Al-Kattānī and his Order is Bazzaz, S. (2002). “Heresy and politics in nineteenth-century Morocco”. *The Arab Studies Journal* 10 (2): 67-86.

²² Gilson Miller, *A history*, 68.

subsist in some cases, became largely anecdotal by the time Morocco became an independent state in 1956, partly due to the consolidation of nationalist politics.²³ It all started in the final years of the 1920s, when there appeared the first circles of Arab urban Moroccan intellectuals who had been educated abroad and brought back home new ways of thinking about society and religion. Calling themselves ‘Salafis’, they aimed at developing a program of social modernisation that would include a reformed reintroduction of sharia, revitalising the use of Arabic, and modernising by ‘purifying’ religion of what they considered to be its heretical expressions.²⁴ As it happened elsewhere, they were critical of many of the practices typical of Sufism - its exalted rituals and fixation with *baraka*-gifted individuals, in particular.²⁵

In the Moroccan case, groups that practiced the less contained forms of ritual were to suffer the worst criticisms. For example, the devotional practices of the Hamadsha and the ‘Issawa, which sometimes included sword-swallowing and snake handling, as well as the reaching of trance states were actively opposed by the nationalists.²⁶ However, these Salafi-modernist critics cannot be merely seen as ‘anti-Sufi’, because, as elsewhere, they were equally critical and heavily influenced by (even sometimes heirs themselves) of a religious background with significant Sufi content. Thus, rather than a simplified picture of Salafi versus Sufi, we may better understand these voices not as their clear-cut religious opponents, but rather as participants in a debate on the role

²³ Zisenwine, D. (2010). *The emergence of nationalist politics in Morocco the rise of the Independence Party and the struggle against colonialism after World War II*. London: Tauris, 87.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁵ See for example, Spadola, E. (2008). “The scandal of ecstasy: communication, Sufi rites, and social reform in 1930s Morocco”. *Contemporary Islam* (2) 2: 119-138.

²⁶ Spadola, E. (2014). *The calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and mass mediation in urban Morocco*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 28-46.

religion (and what type of religion) should have in the new country, a myriad of views in which ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ forms of religion were trying to define their space.

Proof of the Sufi influence in the early nationalist movement, even if perhaps anecdotal, is that the name chosen by its earliest organization was *the zāwiya*, in clear reference to Sufism. Perhaps of much more significance is the fact that the movement also developed Sufi-like mannerisms in its structure and developed a highly hierarchical organisation inspired in the master-disciple relationship typical of the *ṭuruq*. Some have argued that such Sufi influences were needed if the nationalists were to stand in competition with the bigger and far better-established organisations that were the Sufi Orders at that time, with groups such as the Qādirīyya and the Tijanīyya.²⁷

Nonetheless, this influence, which helped the earlier nationalists in their success, has largely surpassed them. In fact, the master-disciple relationship has served as a model to develop a paradigm of authority that pervades today Moroccan society at all levels. Thus, we see forms of this Sufi-inspired relation, that juxtaposes absolute submission to absolute authority, in instances as diverse as the monarchy, labour unions, political parties, or in local government.²⁸ What is also clear is that the modernisation of Morocco was challenging for the structures that had sustained Sufism up to then; the Salafi nationalist forms of ‘modernisation’ I have presented, will end up being quite detrimental to the prospering of the *ṭuruq*, even though, aspects of Sufism were to permeate, ironically perhaps, many facets of the society of the newly independent Morocco. It can be viewed as a paradox of history that whilst Sufi ideas and principles

²⁷ Wyrzten, J. (2016). *Making morocco - colonial intervention and the politics of identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 150.

²⁸ Hammoudi, A. (1997). *Master and disciple: the cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

appeared as a cultural foundation of the modern Morocco, its orders experienced at the same time, a decline, possibly of unprecedented scale.

3. *Sufism after 1956*

The role the monarchy acquired as sole sovereign leader of the religious field in the building of the modern Moroccan state meant that the rest of religious actors that had traditionally played some sort of political role had to adopt a much more marginal position. In the building of an independent country, the sharifian character attached to the monarchy was used to promote and legitimise bureaucratising processes on all religious fields;²⁹ these diverse forms of co-optation normally combined giving Sufi orders the possibility to preserve certain privileges prevailing in these groups, with the condition of getting support to the king and adopt a politically quietist attitude. In the case of Sufism, the state would continue to allow most of the rituals, including large-scale gatherings and their associated lucrative collection of economic donations. Those Sufi leaders that had become landowners over vast portions of rural land, will be able to preserve their titles as ‘qāḍī’, and thus, maintain their properties intact. In some rural areas, the Sufis would keep acting as mediators on behalf of the local government, or will be used by the state in order to give legitimacy to the political agendas of the central power.

²⁹ The religious field, as a result, was originally divided into two main elites, one, made of Sufi personalities, and the second, of a religious class that would become religious officials and work for the state. Over the years, and specially from the decade of the 1970s onwards, two other types of religious actors will appear, challenging the monarchy-legitimizing religious monopoly, the Islamists, of Sufi and non-Sufi orientation, as well as the more radical minorities of jihadi orientation. Altogether, but specially the first and second, have brought back to the public the debate on the role Islam should play within the state, vis-à-vis that of the King. See, Daadaoui, M. (2011). *Moroccan monarchy and the Islamist challenge maintaining Makhzen power*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sufi orders - and similar forms of Sufi organisation that are, strictly speaking, not *turuq*, e.g. “*maraboutic descent groups*”³⁰ or ‘trance groups’ (*tawa‘if*) like the Gnawa - thus, although significantly affected, survived, and comparatively suffered less than in other parts of the Muslim world with the creation of the nation-state. As far as they did not promote any political agenda other than straightforward support for the king, most Sufi groups remained tolerated. It was however, in terms of religious affiliation that the *turuq* world has suffered the most. This decline in social adherence, less and less people interested in becoming devotees of specific masters, would have a direct effect in the diminishing social salience these groups have, particularly since the second half of the 20th century, a vitality that contrasts with the one they enjoyed in the previous period. This trend would begin to show (if timid) signs of reversal from the 1970s and 1980s onwards, becoming more noticeable by the turn of the 21st century.

Part two: Moroccan Sufism Today

1. Maraboutism, a culture of āwliyā’

The diminishing in religious affiliation did not mean however the disappearance of Sufism as such; what it meant is that Sufism has survived through its more popular and folkloristic forms, especially in the form of rituals, through what we may call a ‘maraboutic culture’. By maraboutic culture I refer here to the type of ritual manifestation that having a Sufi root may not be necessarily and distinctively associated with the discipleship or organisation of a particular Sufi order. A maraboutic culture is a less sectarian form of religious culture, widely popular, in which the masses

³⁰ Eickelman, D. F. (1976). *Moroccan Islam: tradition and society in a pilgrimage center*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 62.

participate in Sufi-inspired ritual activities, regardless of the religious group or actor that initiates it or apropos of which the praxis is performed. Being a disciple of a *walī* becomes less relevant. However, in a context in which religious affiliation to Sufi orders is remarkably low, is nevertheless surprising the vitality that the ritual universe associated to these *āwliyā'* have. Thus, whereas an overwhelming majority of Moroccans are definitely not members of any Sufi order, and many do not even know anyone who is a devotee of one, they do know the names of *āwliyā'*, where the lodges and tombs are located and where and when do Sufi processions take place. Unaware of the more formal aspects of Sufi culture, many Moroccans do participate of religious activities promoted or undertaken by the Sufis. Most of these religious praxes can be seen as pertaining to three domains, a) that associated with the visit to Sufi shrines (*ziyāra*), individually or collective, b) the celebration of a saint's anniversary (*mawsīm*) in the form of religious festivals, and, c) those activities that relate to issues of healing (*shifā'*).

Awliyā', despite the declining influence of the groups they are part of, are still revered for the *baraka* they hold, and have, as individuals, a special societal status for which people consider them, morally exemplary, extraordinarily wise, but above all, holders of extramundane abilities. This culture has existed in parallel to the world of the *ṭuruq* since the arrival of Sufism to the region. In fact, some scholars suggest that maraboutism is an Islamisation of a practice that predates Sufism “*the Islamization [sic.] of the prevalent tradition of hagiolatry, or saint-worship [that existed in the region prior to the arrival of Islam]*”.³¹ Whatever its origin, the practice is well

³¹ Mojuetan, B.A. (2013). “Abu Madian, al-Shadhili, and the Spread of Sufism in the Maghrib”. In: Shillington, Kevin. (ed). *Encyclopedia of African History*. London: Routledge, 7-8, 8.

documented for both modern and pre-modern times, so widespread that can be seen as a culture of its own, one that has often been credited as defining religion in the country: “*Islam in Morocco*” asserted once Philipp Khuri Hitti “*is characterised by saint-worship to a greater degree than perhaps in any other country*”.³² Some of these *āwliyā*’ are singled out, and venerated in their own right, not belonging to any major Sufi family; others, are part of reputed Sufi *silsilāt* (saintly lineages), meaning they receive and pass the *sirr* (secret) that grants them *baraka*, from one generation to the next, once they pass away. Genealogy traces their saintly connection back to the founders of major Sufi Orders (e.g. al-Shādhilī, al-Jīlānī) or to the Prophet Muḥammad himself.

In all cases, people believe that *āwliyā*’ retain their *baraka* after they die, with their tombs becoming centres of lesser pilgrimage (*ziyāra*). These visitations have often the purpose of the devotee asking the *walī* for Godly intercession to interfere on mundane issues (e.g. getting a job, a favourable trial resolution, attractive buying prices for agricultural produce) or with curative purposes.³³ In fact, some of these centres of pilgrimage have become so famous that those buried in them have received the status of ‘patron-saints’ of cities: Fes has Mawlāy Idrīs, Tétouan, Sīdī ‘Alī al-Mandharī, Marrakesh has the Seven *āwliyā*’ (*saba‘a al-rijālī*), and Meknes, Sīdī Muḥammad Bin ‘Issa, and so forth. In the same way, many quartiers, small towns, villages, tribes, corporations and families equally have their own; even professions, the tomb of Sīdī ‘Alī Bin Ḥarāzīm in Fes is visited by school teachers; Sīdī Bil ‘Abbās (whose mausoleum is in Marrakesh) is the patron of commerce; Sweet vendors see in the

³² Hitti, P. K. [1968] (2002). *History of the Arabs: from the earliest times to the present*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 437.

³³ These are all real examples I have encountered conducting fieldwork in the country over the years.

aforementioned Mawlāy Idrīs, their own patron, and even gamblers (with Meknes' Sīdī Qadīr Bin Malik) and burglars (with Tiznit's Sīdī Bujbara) having their own protecting *āwliyā*'.³⁴

The marabouts, patrons or not, death and alive, receive a flow of visitors throughout the year; it could be shocking to the uninformed to find out how relatively easy is to visit those living masters, regardless of the religious credentials of the interested - lodges are quite open to receive and even host visitors gratis. It may well be part of a strategy to try to garner more disciples, but it is also a historically well-documented practice, one of honouring the principle of hospitality (*diyāfa*), central to the Sufi cosmogony of *ihsān* (benefaction, excellence in faith, especially in the treatment of others).

2. A Gift Economy

Nevertheless, a good number of these visits bring with them (non-explicitly requested) donations. These contributions are central to the surviving of contemporary Sufism. Shrine complexes receive visitors throughout the year, and specially have a major influx of guests at special dates. On these occasions, places such as Madagh, near Berkane, or Beni Rachid, close to Meknes can receive tens of thousands of visitors. The economy of gifts is key to understand their wealth, both in symbolic and economic terms. Donations, both in cash and gifts, are important aspects of these pilgrimages, and are figurative ways of sealing the relationship between *walī* and devout: the former

³⁴ A detailed list of patron-saints is provided by Westermarck, E. [1926] (2014). *Ritual and belief in Morocco*. Oxford: Routledge, 182.

transmits Godly's *baraka* to the visitor (who often believes it senses its effect in the form of major life improvements) and in return, gives something of a considered lesser (i.e. material) value, to the *walī*, as a token of appreciation, an exchange described in Sufi groups across the territory.³⁵ Sometimes people see a connection between the donation's value and the importance of the request, with larger sums placed for more relevant affairs, but there is normally no stipulated pricing. Similarly, donations are generally speaking not mandatory, but are a common element of the encounter between lay people and *baraka* holders - and, when deceased, the guardians of their tombs.

The Sufi gift economy has enormously diversified over the last two decades, not only enriching the leaders of certain orders and groups but favouring the professionalization of certain Sufi 'practices' undertaken by average citizens. From musicians and performers, to healers, herbalists and fortune tellers, many are those that nowadays make a daily living out of a *baraka*-sourced income. Although these activities have existed for long have only recently, become professionalised and stable sources of income; something these professionals partially relate to tourism and to the money brought back home by the ever-growing influx of Moroccans living abroad.³⁶ In ritual terms, one can also perceive that the participation in the ritual universe of Moroccan Sufism is by no means circumscribed to the adherents of Sufi *ṭuruq* or of cognate religious organisations. In fact, it is common for 'lay' people not to merely assist to these gatherings but to get a fully participatory role on them.

³⁵ See for example, Dominguez Diaz, M. (2015). *Women in Sufism: female religiosities in a transnational order*. London: Routledge, 90-92; Eickelman, *Moroccan*, 176 and 201; Kapchan, D. A. (2007). *Traveling spirit masters: Moroccan Gnawa trance and music in the global marketplace*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 141-144.

³⁶ Kapchan, *Traveling*, 146.

3. Rituals

One of the most significant religious practices of Sufism worldwide, and also in Morocco, involves expressing devotion to God, by reciting passages of the Quran, a practice of recitation understood to be a remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah. The practice is being promoted in a variety of Quranic verses (e.g. 13:28, 18:24 and 33:41) and it is performed by chanting whilst following a series of prescribed bodily movements, a combination aimed at the devotee's reaching a state of closeness with God achieved through annihilation (*fanā'*) of the self (*nafs*). *Dhikr* gatherings can occur in many different contexts and circumstances. Most *ṭuruq* either forbid, or reserve for the most advanced and senior disciples the possibility of performing this practice in solitary; for the vast majority of Sufis *dhikr* is a group ritual. Since it is the core of the universe of Sufi ritual and must be performed collectively, it is a key meaning-giver to the actual existence of Sufi orders. To a certain extent orders exist, at least in theory, to hold these sessions and to teach people how to perform them in prescribed, 'normativised' ways - each *ṭarīqa* having their own distinctive style. The specific set of litanies and order of prayers, chants and body movements are unique to each *ṭarīqa*, a uniqueness often referred as the *wird* (i.e. the Arabic term for religious specificity) of the Order - a sort of marker of its individual character.

Dhikr sessions receive different names depending on their particular features (e.g. length, occasion, time of the day), and the order that performs it. For example, sessions generally called *līlā*, are obviously held at night and 'specialise' in the musical aspect, *wazīfa* (meaning, obligation) refers often to a weekly session organised by a local branch of a *ṭarīqa*, a session called *ṣadaqa* (the Arabic for offering, donation) is

performed by members of the Hamadsha, and the *jidhba* is mainly about reaching trance and is held by the Gnawa. Among the diverse range of names, *ḥadra* (meaning talk, referring to the communication with God the ritual aims to establish) is the generic name given by most to *dhikr*-involving Sufi rituals. They can be performed in different locales, at the humble homes of Sufi devotees, in lodges across the country, but also in open, public spaces. The ceremony involves the recitation of Quranic verses, and the rhythmic chanting of litanies, but it may also include other forms of devotional singing such as the *taḥdīra* (typical of the Sous region) or the *qaṣīda* (a style based in the musicalized recitation of Arabic poetry that has become very popular across the country). The length of the session and size of the congregation may vary, from a couple of hours to all night long and with groups of four being a minimum required to up to several hundred members. These gatherings are ultimately organised for expressing devotion to God, to the Prophet and to specific *āwliyā'*.

People may gather for a ritual after Friday prayers, or at the *zāwiya* after a reading session of Sufi literature. They are also performed on major religious occasions, for example, during the celebrations of the *Mawlid an-Nabawī*, apropos of the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad, or during a *mawsīm*, times to commemorate the birthday of a living or dead *walī*. They are similarly a fundamental part of more mundane ceremonies, such funerals or weddings. Although there are counted exceptions, most *dhikr* gatherings are gender segregated, a requirement that includes the head of the group –which means that a woman leads an all-female *dhikr* gathering, unlike what happens in other Islamic practices, such as prayer. When an exception occurs is normally one or very few women who take part in a mostly male gathering, being men

the ones in charge of the music and the women (possibly old ones) the ones that more commonly reach ecstasy.

Trance (*hāl*, meaning state) is an important element of these rituals, and although the vast majority of attendees do not reach ecstasy it is quite common, that someone does. Sufi ritual sessions that involve trance episodes are nothing obscure or unusual in Morocco, they happen all the time and everywhere, to the extent that Kapchan speaks of a ‘culture of trance’ that “*permeates Moroccan society at many levels*”.³⁷ They are not the exclusive monopoly of the *ṭuruq* either, they are common in weddings and birth celebrations, and are performed by healers, fuqahā’, guardians of Sufi shrines, among the lay population, devotees of organised orders, or by *ṭawa’if* like the Gnawa - formations where the sort of initiation and knowledge required is different from that of Sufi orders. They are as common and diverse as their critics, who comprise ‘ulamā’, reformist preachers, Sufis themselves, modernists and the common public; although diverse, all these critics see them as anachronistic proofs of superstition that impede social development and advancement.³⁸ Trance is commonly considered the result of a process of spirit possession and/or expulsion from the body, thus a healing episode, used for a wide array of curative purposes, from infertility, to madness or cancer, or with no goal at all; yet, since it is this idea of spirit (*jinn*) possession that is so widely criticised, a large number of ‘sober’ orders who practice them, argue that the ecstasy

³⁷ Kapchan, *Traveling*, 25.

³⁸ Spadola, E. (2013). “Our Master’s Call: Mass Media and ‘the People’ in Morocco’s 1975 Green March”. In: Slyomovics, Susan, and Sherine Hafez. (eds). *Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa: into the new millennium*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 21.

they reach is not caused by possession; a kind of ‘defence’ mechanism that is by no means new.³⁹

4. *Sufi Music*

The world of Sufi ritual is mainly a musical one. Voice is in many occasions the only instrument used, though sometimes, chants are accompanied by a *ghiṭā*, the Berber *tabja*, or a *nīra* (two types of Moroccan flute) or a *sinṭīr*, also known as *kimbrī*, a type of guitar. Very often though, singing is only accompanied by percussion (*duzān*).⁴⁰ Very often these differences do not stem from the circumstances of the event but on the performing style of each group, which is unique to each organisation. Further, although the religious component is preserved in many cases and strictly religious gatherings still occur in large numbers, some of these performances have been in the last decades, made profane. By exclusively keeping the musical component of the event and eliminating the more ritualised aspects, some performers today, are simply musicians holding concerts consisting on a Sufi repertoire.

Nowadays, if something is worldwide famous about Moroccan Sufism is its well-attended and highly lucrative music festivals: Fes’ World Festival of Sacred Music and Essaouira’s Gnawa World Music Festival. Also, part of this process of ‘profanization’ has been the ‘staging’ of Sufi rituals (or rather a de-sacralised version of it) for a non-

³⁹ See, for example, Brunel, R. (1926). *Essai sur la confrérie religieuse des ‘Aïssâoûa au Maroc*. Paris: P. Geuthner; Rouget, G. (1985). *Music and trance: a theory of the relations between music and possession*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 264.

⁴⁰ For a rich ethnographic description of *ḥadra*, see Helminski, C. A. (2003). *Women of Sufism: a hidden treasure*. Boston: Shambhala, 229-231.

religious public. Thus, professional performers are hired for a theatricalised version of a *hadra* in events, hotels and nightclubs, something very popular among the Moroccan middle and upper classes unfamiliar with Sufism, as well as in tourist settings.⁴¹

5. *The Sufi Revival*

We have previously noted that when Morocco became independent, Sufi orders saw diminished the social, and at a times political, significance they had previously had. Most *turuq* continued to exist but became less socially relevant whilst quietist in political terms. In the mid 1970s, however, an event would make seem that things were going to change again, when a devotee of a Qādirīyya branch called the Būdshishīyya, ‘Abdassalām Yassīn, would publish an open letter against the former king Hassan II, with a highly critical tone that remind the type of reproach al-Kattānī employed in his criticism of the monarchy at the beginning of the 20th century, and that costed him his life. The letter, which Zeghal perceives as having “*deseccrated the king’s realm*”⁴² costed Yassīn three years of interment in a mental hospital and over three decades of house arrest.

The Būdshishīyya was initially supportive of this open involvement in politics, reason why there were made illegal between 1969 and 1971.⁴³ Its going back to a legal status was due to a commitment to return to a politically quietist position. As a consequence,

⁴¹ Kapchan, *Traveling*, 146.

⁴² Zeghal, M. (2009). “Politics of Idolatry; On the Politics of Sainthood: Resistance and Mimicry in Postcolonial Morocco”. *Critical Inquiry* 35 (3): 587-598, 594.

⁴³ Dominguez Diaz, *Women*, 24; Elahmadi, M. (2006). *La monarchie et l’islam*. Rabat: Ittissalat Salon, 19.

Yassīn was expelled from the order, founding thereafter one of the still today most relevant Islamist organisations in the country, the ‘Adl wal Īhsān (Justice and benefaction) movement. The group which under the rule of Hassan II was banned and prosecuted and is currently still illegal but largely tolerated, is not a Sufi order, yet, despite of obeying to more modern rules of membership and organisation, is still a highly charismatic group fashioned in a *ṭarīqa*-style; it articulates around the figure of its revered leader, today deceased, and is heavily infused with Sufi doctrine and terminology – the term *īhsān* itself, that refers to the attitude of moral uprightness that shall be predicated by the Sufi, is central to the lexicon of Moroccan Sufism.

The decade of the 1980s was an important one for Morocco; it signified a shift in the attitude of the monarch with regards to dissent, opening an (although still highly controlled) space where moderate expressions of opposition were permitted. Soon, a rich and diverse civil society mushroomed, one that included groups of all sorts: Islamist, feminist, pro-human rights, Berberist, and professionally-based.⁴⁴ Sufi orders were also present in the emergence and diversification of civil society. The Būdshishīyya, in particular, the group from which Yassīn originally came from, was key in the revival of the Sufi field. Under the leadership of Hamza Būdshish (d.2017), the order initiated a grand proselytising campaign, by significantly relaxing the requirements the *ṭarīqa* would make on devotees to accept them as disciples of the leader. Under the new instruction, anyone could be a Būdshish *faqir/a*, regardless of origin, gender or age; furthermore, prior knowledge of religion and an exclusive dedication to the order were neither required nor encouraged. Initiation (*ba‘ya*)⁴⁵ more

⁴⁴ Gilson Miller, *A history*, 187.

⁴⁵ *Ba‘ya* is the term generally used to designate commitment to a religious leader, but in religious organizations the term is often used to refer to the ritual act by which individuals seal that commitment, thus its equation with the act of ritual initiation, one common in Sufi groups.

precisely meaning commitment to a religious leader) was turned into a simple ritual that was supervised by lesser Būdshish authorities. According to this new approach, often referred as a *tabarrukīyya*⁴⁶ (in this context, meaning ‘educational’) shift –which indicates the proselytising character (*da‘wa*) of the endeavour – Hamza Būdshish did not have to personally instruct disciples, not even to initiate them.⁴⁷

Soon the *ṭarīqa* began to gain followers across the country, with women and the youth feeling especially attracted to an order that became, for Sufi standards, close to the modern concept of a mass religious organisation, and possibly the most diverse Morocco has ever had - although numbers should be read with caution. Although discipleship is not stable and estimates are always difficult to calculate, it is possible that the group has no more than half a million followers - which for Sufi standards is remarkable, but not so impressive when compared to other forms of religious organization, both in Islam, and beyond.⁴⁸ Another big difference with other modern religious organizations is on the type of structure Sufi orders develop.

Typically, the gatherings of the Būdshishīyya are much more guarded than those of mass religious groups. Whereas Pentecostal churches, for example, can concentrate up to 30-40.000 members in one single event, the Būdshishīyya, like most other Sufi groups in Morocco, has no capacity for regularly mobilizing such crowds. Conversely, they typically display a network of loosely connected and quite small groups, that hold

⁴⁶ *Tabarruk* is a term commonly used to refer to the act of blessing. In this order, the master’s blessing of his disciples became to be perceived as a form of acquisition of spiritual knowledge, reason why they equate the term *tabarruk* with education.

⁴⁷ Dominguez Diaz, *Women*, 25-26.

⁴⁸ This sort of assertions shall, nevertheless be taken with caution, specially, if one compares them with other highly proselytizing Islamic groups, such as the Tablīghī Jamā‘at; (estimated adherence of around 80 million followers) or Christian ‘mega-churches’.

weekly sessions of ritual performance. Part of their success is that they often stay away from the public scrutiny of mosques and do not rely in ‘grand infrastructures’, meeting at homes, ateliers, shops, university rooms, or any other private place without a clear religious character or purpose. The group grows through networks of acquaintances. Relying on so little makes the growth of the organisation easier, something that has also been helpful for its international spread, with a good following among the Moroccan diaspora, but also with groups of convert and re-affiliated Muslims.

The order manages to preserve its diversity amidst its remarkable growth by maintaining an organisation consisting of very small groups (between 6 and 15) each of them of quite alike members, who only commingle with other devotees in very special occasions (e.g. annual *mawsīm*).⁴⁹ Although the *ṭarīqa* maintains, in political terms its mainly quietist character, has after 9/11 and the terrorist attack in Casablanca in 2003, adopted a more open pro-monarchic position. Although the order’s leadership has in only rare occasions taken a public stance in backing the current king, the fact that the aforementioned minister of *ḥubūs* and religious affairs Aḥmad Toūfīq is a member of the *ṭarīqa*, gives much more visibility to the order’s connection to the *makhzan*. Arguably, Muhammad VI hopes to be able to use the *ṭarīqa*’s capacity of mobilising significant amounts of population on his benefit, to widen the popular support for his institution. In the name of the fight against terrorism, seems to aim at equally controlling expressions of political Islam less fond of him.⁵⁰ Beyond the Būdshishīyya, other Sufi groups of international appeal are equally gaining momentum in the country; the Tijānīyya, for example, has seen a plethora of new groups emerging across the

⁴⁹ Dominguez Diaz, *Women*, 41.

⁵⁰ Cavatorta, F. and E. Dalmaso. (2013). “Democracy, Civil Liberties and the Role of Religion after the Arab Awakening: Constitutional Reforms in Tunisia and Morocco”. *Mediterranean Politics* 18 (2): 225-241.

territory, some made up of Moroccans, others, connected to the ever-growing sub-Saharan diaspora that lives temporarily in the country waiting to find the right moment to migrate to Europe. Overall, we may, after all be experiencing yet another revival of Sufism, something that demonstrates, once again, the ever-lasting capacity of Sufism to adapt to new conditions and eventually continue to thrive in new ways.

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