

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: OF SAINTS AND SHARIFIAN KINGS IN MOROCCO: THREE  
EXAMPLES OF THE POLITICS OF REIMAGINING HISTORY  
THROUGH REINVENTING KING/SAINT RELATIONSHIP

Fatima Ghoulaichi, Master of Arts, 2005

Thesis directed by: Dr. Orrin Wang  
The Comparative Literature Program

The relationship between sainthood and the sharifian monarchy in Morocco has attracted much attention from researchers within the area of Moroccan studies. The analysis of this relationship can offer invaluable insights into the dynamics of Moroccan history because the king and the saint are widely regarded as the two most salient actors in this history. Yet, the study of the relationship between these two figures has suffered a tendency towards downplaying its historically dynamic nature, and essentializing the cultural constructs upon which it is predicated.

In this thesis, I offer a revisionary reading of king/saint relationship through analyzing three examples from the ‘Alawite dynasty. I argue that this relationship has been highly dynamic, and has capitalized on *baraka* and sharifism as versatile cultural constructs. More significantly, the dynamics of king/saint relationship in Moroccan culture allows the strategic reinvention of history in order to meet the demands of changing historical contexts.

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By

Fatima Ghoulaiichi

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Advisory Committee:

Prof. Orrin Wang, Director

Prof. Ahmed Karimi Hakkak

Prof. William Taft Stuart

*To the memory of a great father  
and a constant source of baraka and inspiration*

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### ***Introduction:***

The relationship between the sharifian sultanate and the saintly institution in Morocco has attracted much attention from historians, anthropologists, and political scientists. Researchers have traditionally sought an explanation for the longevity of the world's oldest potent monarchy<sup>1</sup> in its relationship to a peculiarly Moroccan form of sainthood. Clifford Geertz, for example, has long read Moroccan history in terms of a static pattern of “strong man politics” and “holy man piety” whose heroes are the saint and the king. He writes:

that it was self-made warrior saints—hommes fetiches—as Bel again so aptly calls them—who forged the uncreated conscience of Morocco, indeed forged Morocco itself, is beyond much doubt.<sup>2</sup>

Geertz is referring here to the French colonial historian Alfred Bel whose *La Religion Musulmane en Berberie* (The Islamic Religion in Barbary) (1938) he regards as “the best book on the development of North-African Islam, and ... one of the finest books ever written on the area.”<sup>3</sup> Geertz includes in the category “hommes fetiches” the Moroccan king as well. He argues that “traditionally the Moroccan king has been in fact himself a *homme fetiche*, a man alive with charisma of both the hereditary and personal sort.”<sup>4</sup> According to him then, both saint and king share in charisma, a term he uses in this context as equivalent to the Moroccan concept of *baraka*. Moreover, as *hommes fetiches*, both possess, or at least work hard to possess, holy-man piety along with strong-man

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<sup>1</sup> See M. E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Islam Observed*, note p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> *Islam Observed*, 53.

politics. Thus conceived, these two figures serve to illustrate Geertz's larger point about Moroccan Islam as scriptural in theory but anthropolatrous in fact.<sup>6</sup>

The image we get from reading Geertz on Morocco is that of a uniform Moroccan history with *baraka* as the monolith. Despite the rise and fall of different dynasties, the succession of various kings and distinct historical eras, saint and king, both *hommes fetiches*, continued their uniform struggle for the making of Moroccan history. A static *baraka* that meant essentially the same thing for everyone kept The dynamics of the process in motion. Geertz recounts a coherent story of a static culture.<sup>7</sup>

In this thesis, I argue that king/saint relationship in Morocco has been highly dynamic, and has followed different patterns in different historical contexts. The historical dynamism of this relationship and the creative ways in which both saint and king deployed the symbolic capital of a highly malleable *baraka* were the main factors behind the longevity of the Moroccan monarchy as well as the historical influence of the Moroccan saint. A static *baraka* could have allowed neither king nor saint to survive centuries of political change, nor could the relationship between saint and king have remained essentially the same under the exacting demands of different historical eras.

The concepts of *baraka* and sharifism are of crucial importance to my argument in this thesis. Traditionally conceived as cultural constants in Moroccan history, I argue that what is constant about them is their symbolic weight whereas their content and operation have been highly versatile. I invoke sharifism here not only because descent

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<sup>6</sup> *Islam Observed*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Geertz's reductively coherent version of Moroccan history stands in striking contrast to his affirmation in *After the Fact* that 'there is no general story to be told, or synoptic picture to be had, only a restless making and unmaking of facts and ideas' when he contemplated his approach retrospectively. See his *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 2.

from the prophet confers *baraka* and interferes with its operation, but also because I am interested in the relationship between the king and the saint within the context of the sharifian state. The examples I consider are all from the rule of the ‘Alawites—a sharifian dynasty that has been ruling Morocco since the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup>

The historically dynamic nature of king/saint relationship and the versatility of the symbolic capital they deployed contribute to the shaping of a field of multiple power relations as well as plural models of power. The examples I examine in this thesis are ultimately meant to demonstrate that the culture of power in Morocco is rich and complex. The saint and king cannot be subsumed in the figure of the “homme fetiche” who then becomes “the axial figure” of Moroccan history.<sup>11</sup>

Before proceeding to analyze three examples of king/saint relationship, I introduce *baraka* and sharifism and outline their politics in general terms. I then examine the three examples which are drawn from different stages of the ‘Alawites’ rule. My first example comes from an early stage (late 17<sup>th</sup> century) when the rule of the ‘Alawites was being consolidated by the all-powerful Moulay Ismail. His historical encounter with Lyusi, which has been mythologized by popular imagination, serves as a classical example of the politics of *baraka* and sharifism and how these are played out by both saint and king. In this sense, this example provides a basic background against which the two other examples are read.

The second example comes from a period of crisis for the sharifian king (19<sup>th</sup> century) when external threats and internal dissent were about to bring the sharifian state to an end. In this example, I read Moulay Slimane’s letter against the saintly institution as

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth mentioning that this is the same dynasty upon which Geertz focuses his analysis in *Islam Observed, After the fact*, and elsewhere.

<sup>11</sup> Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 8.

symptomatic of his anti-Berber political policy. I analyze how historical factors, as well as the characters of both king and saint, affect the relationship between these two figures, define *baraka* and sharifism, and determine the circulation of power. My third example, from contemporary Morocco, illustrates an almost opposite pattern of king/saint relationship. The sharifian king in this example writes a letter of support for the saintly institution as part of his larger policy of promoting Sufism as an alternative to Islamism in the post-9/11 global context. The three examples illustrate the historical dynamism of saint/king relationship and the versatility of the cultural determinants of this relationship; namely, *baraka* and sharifism. They also reveal the ongoing reimagining of Moroccan history via the dynamics of saint/king relationship. Nowhere is this process of reimagining better dramatized, however, than in king Mohamed the sixth's post-9/11 religious politics where history is reinvented as an anti-terrorism strategy.

My discussion of king/saint relationship presupposes the following points: 1- the saint and sharifian king are distinct but overlapping figures; they share in *baraka* and sharifism, but they access and deploy them differently, 2- personal *baraka* is the defining feature of the saint whereas sharifism and the hereditary *baraka* it confers are distinguishing features of the sharifian king, 3- although Sufism and sainthood correspond to distinct orders of religious and social experience, I use the two terms synonymously here because the distinction between the saint and the Sufi does not affect my argument,<sup>12</sup> 4- whenever I use the term “sharifian state,” I am not referring of course

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<sup>12</sup> It is a slight and problematic distinction to make anyway.

to the Western model of state but, to use Darif's terms, to "the ultimate stage in the development of the traditional Moroccan state."<sup>13</sup>

My study of the dynamics of king/saint relationship in Morocco is in a large part a comparative study of different historical contexts, and how these contexts are reinvented retrospectively. In the story of the confrontation between Moulay Ismail and Lyusi, which I draw from Geertz, history is the product of popular imagination. It, therefore, reflects the worldview of the Moroccan popular classes among whom Geertz conducted his fieldwork in Sefrou. In Moulay Slimane's letter, on the other hand, history is filtered through the Wahhabi doctrine, and reproduced as a discourse aimed at de-legitimizing the Berber uprising against the king under the leadership of a "saint."<sup>14</sup> As for Mohamed the Sixth's letter to the international Sufi conference, it is symptomatic of a post-9/11 religious policy wherein history is spectacularly reinvented in order to fight against the spread of international terrorism into Morocco.

By stressing the creative element in the making of a dynamic Moroccan history, this thesis is, in part, a critique of Geertz's one-dimensional reading of this history. Despite his contributions to an interpretive theory of culture and an awareness of the role of representational dynamics in anthropology, Geertz has popularized an over-reductive version of Moroccan history where the *homme fetiche*, a term he borrowed from French colonial historian Alfred Bel, functions as the emblem of an essentially static culture. Moroccan history, according to Geertz, witnessed change only on the surface while the

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<sup>13</sup> Mohamed Darif, *Muassasat az-Zawaya bil-Maghreb* (The Institution of the Zawaya in Morocco), Rabat, 1992, 45

<sup>14</sup> I argue in the third section that Mhawesh, to whom I am referring here, underwent a metamorphosis during the Berber rebellion. The extent and nature of his involvement in this political campaign turned him into a military leader rather than a saint. I am therefore using the term saint with reservation here.

same patterns persisted deep in the social and political life of the country. Conversely, I argue that the apparently static patterns in fact camouflaged highly versatile dynamics.

I approach the study of king/saint relationship with the assumption that history is in a large part textual. It lends itself to a representational economy that can be best decoded through careful textual analysis. I thus examine the texts of Geertz's rendition of a popular story, Moulay Slimane's letter against *zawaya*, and Mohamed the Sixth's letter in support of Sufism as instances of the making and remaking of a cultural history. This history is imagined through a dynamic relationship between two figures who have come to be regarded as the two most salient actors in Moroccan history. My analysis of these examples draws upon history, anthropology, and rhetoric, and is informed to a large extent by the theoretical insights of New Historicism.

Finally, a brief historical account of the early dynasties that ruled Morocco, the maraboutic crisis and the rise of the sharifian state is in order since it is crucial for understanding the dynamics of king/saint relationship in the sharifian state.

In 788 A.D., Idriss Ben Abdallah al-Kamil—a descendent of the prophet Mohamed—arrived in Morocco after he had fled persecution at the hands of the Abbasid Caliph Haroun Ar-Rachid. A group of Berber tribes already fully converted to Islam by the earlier Arab arrivals welcomed him and proclaimed him king. The Moroccan royal tradition was thus launched by a sharif. Although it attained its own glory under the rule of Idriss II—the founder of the city of Fez—the Idrisside dynasty did not stay in power for long (788-1016). The age of the great Berber dynasties was soon to be launched.

The heyday of Moroccan history corresponds to the rule of the three Berber dynasties that succeeded to the throne from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries: the

Almoravids (1061-1147), the Almohads (1130-1269), and the Merinides (1244-1398) corresponding to the three major Berber tribes Sanhaja, Masmuda, and Zenata. This was the so-called Khaldunian Morocco in reference to Ibn-Khaldun, the fourteenth-century North-African philosopher of history, who was inspired by the succession of the Berber tribes to analyze the key factors that contribute to political authority. Ibn-Khaldun identified three main factors of political authority: religious allegiance and fervor, group feelings (*'asabiyya*), and a strong royal power. His analysis of the dynamics of group feelings is in fact a reading in the history of the great Berber dynasties.<sup>14</sup> According to Ibn Khaldun, the consolidation of group feelings (*'asabiyya*) contributes to the rise to a new civilization, and their subsequent diffusion into a more general civilization gives way for the rise of a new *'asabiyya* and ultimately a new civilization.

After the demise of the Merinide dynasty at the end of the fourteenth century, Marabouts appeared on the political scene to compensate for the absence of a central government.<sup>15</sup> This period spanned the entire fifteenth century and is generally referred to as the maraboutic crisis following the use of French colonial historians. The so-called maraboutic crisis finally came to an end towards the mid-sixteenth century thanks to Al-Jazuli, the most prominent Sufi of Moroccan history.<sup>16</sup> Al-Jazuli promoted a sharifian

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<sup>14</sup> Ibn-Khaldun actually served in the court of the Merinide Sultan Abou 'Inan.

<sup>15</sup> Scholars disagree in their interpretation of the maraboutic crisis. Geertz, for instance, reads in it a reflection of the strong-man dimension of the personality of the saint in his constant quest for political power. In contrast, Vincent Cornell writes:

Contrary to the assumptions of Alfred Bel and his followers, the leaders of the Jazuliyya did not see themselves as rivals for the throne but as religious guides and moral guardians, and they tended to support any claimant for power who agree with their agenda.

*Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xxxix.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Jazuli founded the most influential, and most distinctively Moroccan, Sufi order in Moroccan history. He rose to mythical status after his death. For a detailed account of this historical figure as well as his *tariqa Jazuliyya*, refer to Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

family from Southern Morocco that finally came to power in 1554 restoring the royal tradition, this time on the basis of sharifian descent from the prophet. The Saadians stayed in power for almost a century (1554-1660) before they gave way to another sharifian dynasty—the ‘Alawites—who capitalized upon their sharifian origin most effectively. The ‘Alawites have been ruling Morocco since mid-seventeenth century, they have thus stayed in power longer than any other dynasty in Moroccan history. For most researchers, the ‘Alawite dynasty is the sharifian state par excellence whereas the Saadians represented just a first step towards the foundation of the true sharifian state.

### **I- Introducing *baraka* and sharifism:**

*Baraka* and sharifism are the most salient variables that determine the dynamics of the relationship between the sharifian king and the saint in Morocco. For those who gloss over the two terms, *baraka* is simply charisma, spiritual power or divine blessing, and sharifism is descent from the prophet Mohamed. These terms, however, are much more complex. While the symbolic capital of *baraka* and sharifism has remained potent throughout Moroccan history, the content of this capital has been highly versatile. It varied according to the social and historical realities in the context of which *baraka* and sharifism were played out, as well as the character of both saint and king. In this section, I introduce *baraka* and sharifism insofar as they affect the relationship between the saint and the sharifian king.

In an oft-quoted passage from *Islam Observed*, Geertz defines *baraka* as follows:

Literally, “Baraka” means blessing, in the sense of divine favor, but spreading out from that nuclear meaning, specifying and delimiting it, it encloses a whole range of linked ideas: material prosperity, physical

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well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion, luck, plenitude (...) In broadest terms, “baraka” is not as it has so often been represented, a parapsychical force, a kind of spiritual electricity—a view which though not entirely without basis, simplifies it beyond recognition. Like the notion of the exemplary center, it is a conception of the mode in which the divine reaches into the world. Implicit, uncriticized, and far more systematic, it too is a “doctrine” (...) More exactly, it is a mode of construing—emotionally, morally, intellectually—human experience, a cultural gloss on life. And though this is a vast and intricate problem, what this construction, this gloss, comes down to, so at least it seems to me, is the proposition (again of course wholly tacit) that the sacred appears most directly in the world as an endowment—a talent and a capacity, a special ability—of particular individuals. Rather than electricity, the best (but still not very good) analogue for baraka is personal presence, force of character, moral vividness. Marabouts have Baraka in the way men have strength, courage, dignity, skill, beauty, or intelligence. Like these, though it is not the same as these, more even of all of them put together, it is a gift which some men have in greater degree than others, and which a few, marabouts, have in superlative degree. The problem is to decide who (not only among ... the living but also among the dead) has it, how much, and how to benefit from it.<sup>1</sup>

Geertz’s definition takes note of the ubiquity of *baraka* and the variety of its manifestations in Moroccan society. More importantly, it seeks out the logic that explains this ubiquity, governs and unites these manifestations. Geertz compares *baraka* to the exemplary center and proposes that it is essentially a conception, more particularly, the Moroccan cultural conception, of the relationship between the divine and the worldly, the spiritual and the material. The notion of *baraka* as an exemplary center that models the way the divine reaches into this world, in the form of an endowment or a gift, is alluring. In fact, bringing the divine and the worldly together is a leitmotif of most manifestations of *baraka* in Moroccan society. It is, however, how and why, beyond the religious perspective, these are brought together which escapes Geertz’s analysis and which I propose to analyze in this thesis as a highly dynamic process.

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 44.

Geertz's interpretation of *baraka* is of little help in understanding much of the religio-political history of Morocco. Indeed, it proved counter-productive in Geertz's largely one-dimensional reading of Moroccan history in terms of holy-man piety and strong-man politics. According to Geertz, the Moroccan king is basically a venerated, *baraka*-endowed saint, and the saint a contestant for political power. Governing the relationship between king and saint, as well as the whole social fabric in Morocco, according to Geertz, is the politics of patronage and gift exchange. Contrary to Geertz, I read *baraka* as a historically dynamic social force instead of an inherently static cultural conception. It is a force that owes its constancy and potency to its versatility.

The versatile content and dynamic operation of Moroccan *baraka* allows it to reside in a number of agents. Many Moroccans believe not only in the parents' and the children's *baraka*, but also in the *baraka* of shared food. Yet, it is the saint, as Geertz notes, who is the prime possessor of *baraka* in Moroccan society. Indeed, *baraka* catalyzes ascent to the status of sainthood in this society. However, what differentiates the *baraka* of the saint and that of the others is not, as Geertz suggests, how much *baraka* each of them possesses. The quantitative approach is counter-productive in this context. There is no certain means for quantifying *baraka*, but there is a certain means for qualifying it through appraising its intervention in the everyday world.

Westermarck observed in his *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* that popular piety accorded greater value to saints' shrines than to mosques. This claim was true of popular piety until very recent times. The Moroccan layman, however, did not accord greater value to the saint's shrine because s/he believed that more *baraka* lied in the shrine than

in the mosque. This would have been too unorthodox a belief to be held by the saints' adepts who are very careful to identify their belief in the saints with juridical Islam.

The laymen accord more value to the saint's *baraka* because it is more practically useful for their everyday life. The *baraka* of the mosque and the other symbols of juridical Islam is rather distant from the illiterate masses who need a more accessible form of faith. The saint claims, or at least is supposed, to be able to intervene in their daily life and to act on the world through his (rarely her) "miracles"<sup>2</sup> for their sake. Juridical Islam, on the other hand, asks them to be patient and to look forward to the other world. It also talks to them on a higher intellectual level than the saint does. The *baraka* of the saint is more accessible, therefore more valuable to them despite their ultimate faith in the *baraka* of the symbols of juridical Islam.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the *baraka* of the sharifian king is distinct from that of the saint due to its function and manifestations. The king does not perform miracles, but he is responsible for the welfare of the country which he has to defend against foreign enemies and internal

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the word "miracle" with reservation here because the accurate term for the description of the uncanny act performed by the saint is *karama* (pl. *karamat*) rather than miracle (Ar. *Mu'jiza*) which refers in the Islamic tradition to the prophets' feats. *Karama*, however, is untranslatable, and it has generally gone unnoticed by anthropologists who use the word miracle indistinctly instead.

<sup>3</sup> There is a large literature on the Moroccan saint as mediator between juridical Islam and the popular Islam of the illiterate masses. A classical study of this mediating role is Ernest Gellner's *Saints of the Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). In *Moroccan Islam*, Dale Eickelman quotes one of his informants on this issue, and hence presents us with a telling example of the popular perspective:

[J]ust as the king has his ministers, God has his [marabouts]. If you need a paper from the government office, which is better? Do you go straight to the official and ask for it? You might wait a long time and never receive it. Or do you go to someone who knows you and also knows the official? Of course, you go to the friend, who presents the case to the official. Same thing with *baraka*, if you want something from God, you go to [the marabout]. He is just like us. The only difference is that he works with God [khdem m'a Allah] and has a high rank [daraja kbira] with him. If the marabout is too great [to directly approach], you go to his children.

*Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 161.

strife (Ar. *fitna*).<sup>4</sup> Most of the time, the king's *baraka* meant the display of sheer military power against recalcitrant tribes in the form of *harkat*,<sup>5</sup> as well as the suppression of individual rebels to ensure the integrity of the country.<sup>6</sup> The king's *baraka* is therefore synonymous with military success. The saint, on the other hand, lacks military power and relies mainly upon his spiritual influence. Yet, he carves out for himself a social role by converting his spiritual capital into an interventionist miraculous power. He also turns his lack of military power into an asset that allows him to take side with the people and advocate their cause before the *Makhzen*. The Moroccan saint is a mediator not only between God and the laymen, but also between the king and the people.

The sharifian king's *baraka*, however, has a spiritual aspect to it as well. The king tempers the show of force by promoting an ideology that is centered around his person as a descendent of the prophet.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the saint who, in most cases, acquires his *baraka* through apprenticeship,<sup>8</sup> the sharifian king has inherited his *baraka* genealogically. Hence, his *baraka* is distinct from that of the saint by virtue of its origin as well. The sharifian king makes use of a number of symbols and rituals to assert his religious

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<sup>4</sup> *Fitna* is a highly poignant concept in the Islamic tradition. Its semantic field is so wide and ranges from female beauty to internal political strife. Generally speaking though, it refers to all that can distract the Muslim community from pursuing its highest aims, bring about its disunity and thus weaken it. The traditional saying goes that "*fitna* is worse than killing." Preventing *fitna* is, therefore, the prime duty of a Muslim ruler. Throughout the history of the Islamic civilization, however, Islamic rulers have adopted widely differing measures to "strike the causes of *fitna*." While some have adopted excessively pacifist policies in order to avoid internal strife in the Muslim community, others have used the prevention of *fitna* as an alibi to suppress all forms of opposition.

<sup>5</sup> *Harkat* is the plural form of *harka* which refers to a military expedition organized by the sultan for punitive or fiscal purposes.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to Raymond Jamous, *Honneur et Baraka: Les Structures Sociales Traditionnelles dans le Rif* (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981), 228, and Darif, *Muassasat*, 124.

<sup>7</sup> See Darif, 45.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of the stages that the *baraka* seeker (Ar. *murid*) goes through as an apprentice to a sufi sheikh, refer to Abdellah Hammoudi, "The Reinvention of Dar al-mulk: The Moroccan Political System and its Legitimation," in Rahma Bourquia & Susan Gilson Miller (eds.), *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 129-175.

authority, consolidate faith in his sharifian *baraka*, and indirectly legitimize his temporal power.<sup>9</sup>

In popular imagination, the moral grace of the sharifian king's *baraka* is responsible for blessing the inhabitants of his dominion with good crop and health. Furthermore, the king has to answer for his title as "prince of the faithful" by promoting religiosity and overseeing that the Islamic tradition thrives in the abode of Islam. The Moroccan sultan has long considered himself the caliph of Western Islamdom.<sup>10</sup> A strong government<sup>11</sup> and a well-faring, religiously observant society are signs of the strong *baraka* of the king and the benediction of God. Mohamed Dernouni sums up the popular conception of the king's *baraka* in the following passage:

Every king is said to be a depository of *baraka* ... These beliefs have it also that the king who possesses a strong *baraka* ... is alone capable of granting his people abundant crop and progeny. Conversely, the deterioration or loss of *baraka* on the part of the prince results in trouble, uprisings, and famine linked to drought.<sup>12</sup>

*Baraka* is an inconstant power, then, in the sense that it can diminish, lose its effectiveness, or even turn into its opposite if the conditions of its operation are not maintained. The king was especially unfortunate for having a far more difficult task of

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<sup>9</sup> For ritual and symbolism as legitimizing strategies, refer to M.E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice*, and Mohamed Kably, "Legitimacy of State Power and Socioreligious variations in Medieval Morocco," in *In the Shadow of the Sultan*, 17-29, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Refer to Mohamed Kably, "Legitimacy of State Power and Socioreligious variations in Medieval Morocco," and Driss Ksikes, "Les Chorfa Menent la Danse," *Tel Quel*, No. 165, March 2005. <[http://www.telquel-online.com/165/couverture\\_165\\_1.shtml](http://www.telquel-online.com/165/couverture_165_1.shtml)>

It is worth mentioning that by the time the 'Alawite dynasty rose to power in Morocco, the latter was the only Muslim country outside the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>11</sup> *Makhzen* is the traditional name of the Moroccan central government. Moroccans still use this term occasionally nowadays.

<sup>12</sup> Mohamed Dernouni, "Croyances et representations de la naissance en milieu Marocain d'hier et d'aujourd'hui," in *Enfances Maghrebines* (Casablanca: Afrique Orient, 1987) 17. My translation.

preserving his *Baraka* than the saint had. He had to maintain the territorial integrity of a country that was object to the expansionist aspirations of both the Europeans to the North and the Ottomans to the East. He also had to keep the recalcitrant Berber tribes in control in order to avoid *fitna*, and to secure social welfare in a country that was frequently inflicted with both plague and drought.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the saint had an easier task maintaining the prosperity of his descendents, lodge and community, and curing the sick, especially the demon-possessed, within this community. Moreover, even when he is unable to maintain these favorable conditions, he can usually blame their deterioration upon the king. Epidemics, for example, were usually blamed upon the decadence of the ruler and the corruption of the society he misrules. Ironically, the *baraka* of the king turns in this situation to its opposite—*bas*.<sup>14</sup> While it would seem that the inherited *baraka* of the sharifian king in whose veins runs the blood of the prophet is more resistant, indeed infallible, it in fact proves to be more prone to deterioration. This is the case not only because of the aforementioned reasons but also because sharifism itself has spread out from its primary genealogical denotation to become a legitimizing ideology.

Paul Rabinow remarks that “genealogical manipulation is a standard practice in Morocco.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, there are still Moroccan families today who go to great lengths in order to prove, or altogether fabricate, a sharifian genealogy.<sup>16</sup> Sharifism has waxed and

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<sup>13</sup> For a brief account of how bubonic plague and drought changed the course of Moroccan history, refer to Combs-Schilling’s *Sacred Performances*, especially the chapter entitled “Historical Success and Crisis.”

<sup>14</sup> In fact, one can tenably argue that *bas* is not the opposite of *baraka*, and that it is just another aspect of it that escaped Geertz’s, and other anthropologists’, notice. In Moroccan cultural imagination, *baraka* is coincident with the moral force of virtue against evil. In this sense, it is an agency of blessing and reward as well as curse and retribution.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 52.

<sup>16</sup> For a description of the elaborate administrative process involved in obtaining an official certification of sharifian origin, as well as the privileges that accrue to families who manage to obtain such certification, see Driss Ksikes, “Les Chorfa Menent la Danse.” Traditionally, the palace itself was involved in verifying

waned with the succession of the different dynasties that ruled Morocco since 788, the year Idriss I arrived in Morocco and launched the rule of its first dynasty. The symbolic weight of sharifism, however, has accumulated throughout and reached its climax in the sixteenth century when a Sufi master promoted descent from the prophet as a political ideology in order to pull the country out of the moral uncertainties, and political turmoil of the maraboutic crisis.<sup>17</sup>

However, this symbolic capital was not the only aspect of sharifism on which the ‘Alawite kings capitalized. Moroccan political sociologist Mohamed Darif suggests that, as a post-maraboutic-crisis political ideology, sharifism solved one of the thorniest problems in Moroccan history; namely, the conflict between the Islamic/Arab and the Berber conceptions of government. The Islamic conception of government, which came to be identified by Berbers as the Arab conception, relies on the religious bond of the Islamic community, whereas the Berber conception relies upon the bond of kinship within the context of the tribe. Darif explains that

in fact, the sharifian state (...) embodies a suitable solution to the conflict between the Islamic and Berber conceptions of government. It is a solution whereby the “bond of blood” is transposed from the “people” to the person of the sultan. In simple terms, “sharifism” is the sought “synthesis.”<sup>18</sup>

The sharifian king, then, rules by virtue of his blood descent from the prophet, and his title as prince of the faithful and protector of the creed. From the Berber conception

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sharifian origin especially when the family seeking the certification claims a ‘Alawite origin. Ksikes’s article throws light also upon the symbolic weight of sharifism in contemporary Moroccan society.

<sup>17</sup> Refer to the introduction.

<sup>18</sup> Darif, *Muassast*, 49. My translation. Darif’s view here is informed by Andre Adam’s “Reflexions sur le fait berbere au Maghreb, hier et aujourd’hui,” *Mondes et Cultures*, Tome XIII, 2-5 (1982).

sharifism retained the bond of blood as a principle of government and merged it with the Islamic conception to create a distinctly Moroccan form of government.

What was left out of the Berber conception, however, was the tribe, a landmark of Berber cultural and political identity prior to the rise of the sharifian state. Throughout a significant part of its history, Morocco was divided into the so-called *bled s-siba* and *bled al-makkzen*, the former referring to the recalcitrant Berber tribes, and the latter to central government. By superseding the tribe and the Berber/Arab opposition in the name of a Muslim community ruled by a blood descendent of the prophet, the sharifian king aspired to the exclusive manipulation of power.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the tribes responded through their local saints who claimed sharifian origin and thus contested the sharifian king's authority. Claiming sharifian descent became a common practice among Moroccan saints who aspired to consolidate their personally acquired *baraka* through the additional capital of sharifism. Geertz observes in a rather sarcastic tone that

[h]e who had attained any great amount of *baraka* from his own spiritual efforts—chanting verses or licking hot pokers—tended almost always to claim to have it also, so to speak, genetically.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I am not implying here that *s-siba* ended with the rise of the sharifian state. Indeed, the sharifian king had to organize frequent *harkat* against the Atlas tribes to assert his authority over them and keep them in control. Yet, *s-siba* had a symbolic setback after the maraboutic crisis. It is worth mentioning that the concept of *s-siba* is still active in the cultural memory of Moroccans who use it frequently to refer to any state of disorder or lack of security.

*S-siba* is discussed in almost all works about Moroccan history. It is magnified in French colonial scholarship as well as the works that are inspired by this scholarship (Geertz's included), and revisioned in contemporary Moroccan scholarship. For a classical study of *s-siba* as an organized form of political dissension rather than anarchy, refer to Gellner's *Saints of the Atlas*.

<sup>20</sup> *Islam Observed*, 52.

Paradoxically enough, even Berber saints like Lyusi claimed that they were descendents of the prophet Mohamed. I will examine Lyusi's claim to sharifism in the following section.

The sharifian king's authority was also contested by urban saints, especially those belonging to prestigious sharifian families like the Idrissides. On the eve of the French protectorate, in 1908, Mohamed Benabdelkebir Kettani, an Idrisside sharif and head of the prestigious Kettani order in Fez, pushed the notables of Fez to sign a proclamation of the decadence of sultan Moulay Abdelaziz. This incident resulted in the first case of torture and death due to political opposition in modern Morocco.<sup>21</sup> The Wazzani sharif and head of the Wazzani zawiya in the North, on the other hand, sought French protection as early as late nineteenth century in an unprecedented act of defiance of the king's political authority. Not only did the French grant him their protection, but they also contemplated enthroning him.<sup>22</sup> The French were aware that the strong *baraka* reservoir of the Wazzani sharif, together with his uncontested sharifian descent, made him an ideal candidate for the Moroccan throne.<sup>23</sup>

If *baraka* then is a power, sharifism is what best legitimizes power in Moroccan society. Yet, however distinct *baraka* and sharifism might be at the theoretical level, they actually overlap. Sharifism confers *baraka*, and the possession of *baraka* warrants claims to sharifism. Neither of the two, however, not even both of them, guarantee that a certain

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<sup>21</sup> Refer to Ksikes, "Les Chorfa Menent la Danse."

<sup>22</sup> See Ksikes, "Les Chorfa."

<sup>23</sup> The Wazzani sharif Moulay Abdessalam kept cordial relationships with European powers. Ironically, he married a young British woman and thus set a precedent in his family as well as Morocco. While Islam does not ban the marriage of Muslim men from Christian women, it was outrageous that a sharif should marry a Christian woman and even allow her to retain her original faith. Generally speaking, he had a far more liberal character than the typical sharif, and he was apparently fascinated by Western culture. He capitalized, though, on his sharifian descent and his inherited *baraka*. For an account of the life of this sharif and the sphere of influence of his zawiya, refer to Emily Keene, *My Life Story* (London: Edward Arnold, 1911).

Moroccan would be either king or saint. It is how one deploys them and puts them to use in specific historical conditions that raises one to the status of either king or saint.

*Baraka* and sharifism are best read, at least for the purpose of analyzing the relationship between saint and king, as highly malleable concepts that have a constant symbolic capital in Moroccan history, but whose content and operation are highly versatile. The content and operation of *baraka* and sharifism are negotiated among king, saint, and the historical conditions which offer a range of possibilities that the saint and king must exploit.

## **II- Moulay Ismail and Lyusi: The politics of *baraka* and sharifism**

Moulay Ismail is the second king of the ‘Alawite dynasty. He reigned for fifty-five years (1672-1727) during which he unified the country and consolidated the rule of the ‘Alawites. It is often reported that during his reign a woman or a Jew could travel alone from the farthest south of the country to its farthest north without being in fear about his/her safety. While this is obviously an exaggeration, it still is a good metaphor of the unprecedented degree of order and security that Moulay Ismail’s iron fist achieved for the country. Moulay Ismail is also remembered for his imperial city—Meknes—which he filled with monuments. The most remembered detail about these monuments is the fact that Moulay Ismail was using Christian captives, among others, to build them, and that he treated these workers cruelly. If a worker slowed down or fell ill during construction, he was sealed into the wall on which he was working. So at least go the Moroccan popular memory of Moulay Ismail, as well as Western accounts of his rule. Perhaps, the huge underground prison that Moulay Ismail built in his imperial city, and that still stands as a

witness of the harshness of his rule, exacerbates these memories and contributes to his mythologization.

Sidi Lahsen Lyusi, on the other hand, is a Berber although popular imagination depicts him as a descendent of the prophet by way of Idriss II. He was born in a tribe in the Middle Atlas Mountains in 1631. He left his tribe at a young age for a lifelong pilgrimage that brought him first to Tamgrut—home of the *Tariqa Nasiriyya*. At Tamgrut, he received *baraka* from sheikh ben Nasir.<sup>1</sup> Lyusi's pilgrimage took him also to the intellectual centers of Morocco where he acquired knowledge of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).<sup>2</sup> He died in 1691, and was buried in a village that now bears his name. Pilgrims still visit his *darih* (tomb) to benefit from his *baraka*.

Abdelfattah Kilito notes that “Al-Yusi's relation to Mawlay Isma'il is essentially epistolary.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, epistolary correspondence is characteristic of the relationship between kings and those scholars and saints who resist patronization by the palace. Kilito suggests that writing establishes a temporal and spatial distance that is convenient for both parties. It allows an open exchange of blame and advice while avoiding, or at least deferring, confrontation. In the case of Lyusi and Moulay Ismail, the surviving epistles which Lyusi addressed to Moulay Ismail attest to the fact that the king actually sought the

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<sup>1</sup> When he arrived at Tamgrut, Lyusi found the sheikh seriously ill. The sheikh's disciples refused to wash his shirt because they were disgusted by its, as well as the sheikh's, appearance. Lyusi, however, did wash the shirt, and even drank the foul water thus produced. Lyusi's eyes grew aflame as a sign that he now had *baraka*. For this story, see Geertz, *Islam Observed*. For a detailed and insightful analysis of *baraka* transmission through foul body waste, refer to Vincent Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973). It has to be remembered that the *baraka* thus transmitted is personal, miraculous *baraka*.

<sup>2</sup> Knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence was not a defining feature of Sainthood in Morocco. The 'alim and saint are distinct figures. Yet, Moroccan history abounds in examples of persons who embodied the fusion of the two figures. Most of the time, these saints/'alims were urban figures.

<sup>3</sup> Abdelfattah Kilito, “Speaking to Princes: Al-Yusi and Mawlay Isma'il”, trans. Michael Cooperson, in *In the Shadow of the Sultan*, 30-46.

advice of the saint/scholar on both temporal and religious issues, while the saint/scholar provided the sought advice with much tactfulness.

In his writings, Lyusi blames those religious scholars who are corrupted by power to become subservient to kings. He sees it incumbent upon religious scholars to blame kings for their misdeeds and injustice with the ultimate aim of correcting their characters, and elevating them morally. Yet, he insists that this duty should be carried out only when there is enough assurance that advice to the king would not cause *fitna* in society.<sup>4</sup> As I previously mentioned, *fitna* is the evil that is most feared in the Islamic tradition for it is held accountable for many other social and political evils. To maximize the chance that the king would listen to the scholar's advice with an open heart, and to prevent anyone from using this advice as a pretext to rise against the king and cause civil unrest, Lyusi employs rhetorical features such as propitiatory formulas, praise of the king, prayers on his behalf, and protestations of submission and fidelity.<sup>5</sup>

There was, however, an actual confrontation between Lyusi and sultan Moulay Ismail, one in which the lines between history and legend grow completely blurred through centuries of oral reproduction. The story of the confrontation especially multiplied in the popular imagination because its two protagonists were a wonder-working saint and an immensely potent king. I recount this story from Geertz who reconstructs it from his informants' renderings. Geertz insightfully comments that what these informants "lack in historical accuracy they more than make up for in cultural penetration."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, despite some extraordinary details like the legs of Moulay Ismail's horse sinking into the ground under the effect of Lyusi's *baraka*, the popular rendering of

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to Kilito, "Speaking to Princes."

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Kilito's "speaking to princes."

<sup>6</sup> *Islam Observed*, 32.

the story of the confrontation is poignant with cultural significance. It is an especially good illustration of the dynamics of miraculous and genealogical *baraka* examined in the previous section. In this regard, it is important to note that the additions of popular imagination to the story are not mere fictionalizing exercises. They rather embody a cultural conception of the relationship between king and saint, and dramatize the politics of *baraka* and sharifism in Morocco.

Geertz reconstructs the story of the confrontation as follows:

When Lyusi (...) arrived in Meknes, Mulay Ismail received him as an honored guest, fed him and housed him, and brought him into his court as his spiritual advisor. The Sultan was at the time building a large wall around the city, and the people working on it, slaves and others were being treated cruelly. One day a man fell ill while working and was sealed into the wall where he fell. Some of the workers came secretly to Lyusi to tell him of this and to complain of their treatment generally. Lyusi said nothing to Mulay Ismail, but when his supper was brought to his chambers he proceeded to break all the dishes, one by one, and he continued to do this, night after night, until all the dishes in the palace had been destroyed. When the sultan then asked what had happened to all his dishes, the palace slaves said, "that man who is our guest breaks them when we bring his food." (...) The Sultan ordered Lyusi to be brought to him:

"*Salam 'Alaikum.*"

"*'Alaikum Salam.*"

"My Lord, we have been treating you like the guest of God, and you have been breaking all our dishes."

"Well, which is better—the pottery of Allah or the pottery of clay?" (...) and he proceeded to upbraid Mulay Ismail for his treatment of the workers who were building his wall.(...) The Sultan was unimpressed and said to Lyusi, "All I know is that I took you in, gave you hospitality [a deeply meaningful act in Morocco], and you have caused me all this trouble. You must leave my city." Lyusi left the palace and pitched his tent in the graveyard just outside the city near where the wall was being built. When the Sultan heard of this he sent a messenger to the saint to ask why, since he had been told to leave his, the sultan's city, he had not in fact done so. "Tell him," Lyusi said, "I have left your city and I have entered God's."

Hearing this, the Sultan was enraged and came riding out himself on his horse to the graveyard where he found the saint praying. Interrupting him, a sacrilege in itself, he called out to him, "Why have you not left my city as I ordered?" And Lyusi replied, "I went out of your city and am in the city of God, the Great and the Holy." Now wild with fury, the Sultan

advanced to attack the saint and kill him. But Lyusi took his lance and drew a line on the ground, and when the sultan rode across it the legs of his horse began to sink slowly into the earth. Frightened, Muly Ismail began to plead to God, and he said to Lyusi, "God has reformed me! God has reformed me! I am sorry! Give me pardon!" The saint then said, "I don't ask for wealth or office, I only ask that you give me a royal decree acknowledging the fact that I am a sheriff, and that I am a descendent of the Prophet and entitled to the appropriate honors, privileges, and respect." The Sultan did this.<sup>8</sup>

In this story, we come across a powerful and unyielding Moulay Ismail. He is extremely cruel in his treatment of workers and slaves. He is, nonetheless, clearly interested in securing Lyusi's friendship and support. He hosts him as a special guest and even brings him into his court as a spiritual advisor. However, once Lyusi expresses his discontent with the sultan's treatment of his workers, Moulay Ismail displays an unyielding and impatient character. Not only does he refuse to listen to Lyusi but he goes as far as ordering him out of the imperial city. Later on, when Lyusi pitches his tent just outside the city and thus reveals his own unyielding resistance to the sultan's will, Moulay Ismail impatiently and blasphemously interrupts his prayer and addresses him without the due form of greeting. Before an obstinate Lyusi, he resorts to sheer force and advances in person to attack the saint. This proves to be a losing move that betrays a lack of acumen on the part of Moulay Ismail who ends up by yielding to the saint's miraculous *baraka*.

Lyusi, on the other hand, displays so much acumen, intelligence, patience, firmness, and self-confidence. He also deploys infallible tact in dealing with Moulay Ismail. He does not start by blaming or upbraiding him openly. He rather devises the course of his action in such a way that he would indirectly lead the sultan to recognize his

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<sup>8</sup> *Islam Observed*, 33-35. An important feature of Geertz's English rendition of the story is that he preserves the spirit of Moroccan Arabic by reproducing Moroccan idiomatic expressions, such as "the guest of God," in his text.

own injustice. The force of his logic and metaphor, nevertheless, fails to overwhelm a stubborn Moulay Ismail. Finally, and in the face of the open display of force on the part of the Sultan, the saint falls back upon the miraculous workings of his *baraka*. The legs of Moulay Ismail's horse start sinking into the earth, and we are left with the impression that had he not realized the grossness of his behavior and apologized in due time, the horse would have continued sinking down until Moulay Ismail himself is buried in earth.

The story illustrates the traditional distribution of *baraka* in Morocco. The king's *baraka* manifests itself primarily through the use of force whereas the saint's is displayed through the performance of miracles. This distribution, however, is not rigid. The two manifestations of *baraka* overlap. Popular imagination, for example, endows the saint with a lance that appears mysteriously in the final scene. The saint now possesses a weapon that he can use to defend himself against the sultan's assault. Symbolically, however, the lance turns out to be a tool in the hands of personal *baraka*. Lyusi uses it to perform a miracle rather than to display physical power. With the lance, he draws a line on the ground dividing his and the sultan's domains. The sultan's horse starts sinking only when it has crossed the line and trespassed the saint's domain which corresponds in the story to the domain of the divine (God's city). Significantly, only a miracle could overwhelm Moulay Ismail's pride and impatience. He finally repents and addresses himself to God and Lyusi at almost the same time. He pleads to God and asks Lyusi for pardon while repeating, "God has reformed me." It is clearly implied in Moulay Ismail's reaction that he has come to consider Lyusi as an instrument of God's will.<sup>9</sup> God has reformed him through Lyusi whose personal *baraka* becomes an instrument for the

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<sup>9</sup> It is significant that in Moroccan Arabic a typical addition to the expression "God has reformed me" in such a context is "on your hand."

intervention of the divine in the temporal world in order to set it right. Ever fascinated with the extraordinary interventions of saints to set things right in this world, popular imagination understandably grants final victory to Lyusi.

Popular imagination aside, the typical Moroccan saint is a socially committed figure. He is so much preoccupied with the welfare of the people that he often finds himself advocating their cause before the king with whom he consequently had frequent confrontations.<sup>10</sup> In the present story, Lyusi's behavior reproduces this pattern, and so do his letters to Moulay Ismail that I mentioned earlier.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the king tries to both legitimize and temper his show of power through enlisting the support of the saint. Before the onset of the conflict, the story informs us that Moulay Ismail was holding Lyusi in high esteem and had even appointed him as his spiritual advisor.

Darif argues that in order to secure an exclusive monopoly of power, the king had to subdue or at least contain two potential sources of rivalry: 1- the saint as a representative of popular Islam, and 2- the *'alim* as a representative of juridical Islam.<sup>12</sup> In this case, Lyusi stands for both popular and juridical Islam. He was a saint who swayed popular faith and imagination; a fact to which the present story attests, and a *'alim* as his letters to Moulay Ismail verify. Most of these letters are written in response to requests on the part of Moulay Ismail for *fatawa*<sup>13</sup> about religious as well as temporal

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to remember in this context that in one historical instance, the social commitment of the Moroccan saint went beyond advocating the cause of the people before the king. In the absence of central government and in the midst of the political and social turmoil that the country experienced in the fifteenth century, Al-Jazuli saw it as his duty to promote a sharifian dynasty that would unify the country and put an end to the crisis. In this example, the saint chose the political ruler.

<sup>11</sup> Refer to Kilito's "Speaking to Princes" for an analysis of these letters.

<sup>12</sup> *Muassasat*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> *Fatawa* is the plural form of *fatwa* referring to a formal legal opinion given by a Muslim religious scholar.

matters. These letters abound in quotations from the Qur'an and *sunna*,<sup>14</sup> as well as stories from the heyday of Islamic civilization. Therefore, by enlisting the support of Lyusi, Moulay Ismail is in fact subduing potential rivalry from both saints and *'alims*.

Enlisting the support of the saint, however, did not have as its only aim the suppression of potential political rivalry. Indeed, the majority of saints were unable to compete with the sultan for the throne. Not all saints were as powerful figures as Lyusi was, nor did their influence often reach beyond their local communities. In fact, the majority of saints did not actually dream of holding power beyond their communities. They did, nonetheless, compete favorably with the king in holding sway of popular imagination. The moral authority of the miracle-performing saint stands for a more effective form of power at the micro-level of society than does the political power of the king. Enlisting the support of the saint is, therefore, the king's key into both popular imagination and the micro-relations of power.

Moreover, if we accept Darif's tenable thesis that the sharifian state represents a synthesis of the Berber and Islamic visions of government,<sup>16</sup> bringing the saint into the royal court would have another vital political role to play in the sharifian state. Since the local rural saint stands for the popular Islam of the Berber tribe, identifying him with the royal court, and hence with the sharifian state, deprives the tribe of a vital mechanism of survival. The saint would now pay allegiance to the state rather than the tribe. Consequently, he would serve the interests of the state rather than the those of the tribe

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<sup>14</sup> *Sunna* refers to the sayings and deeds of the prophet Mohamed.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to p. 14.

which would thus lose the cornerstone of its political/religious legitimacy.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the sharifian king aims to reduce the authority of the tribe dramatically, and thus prevent what was a nightmare to earlier kings—the dissidence of Berber tribes (*s-siba*).

The king's interest in aligning the miracle-working *baraka* of the saint with the royal palace<sup>18</sup> parallels the saint's own desire to be associated with the sharifian descent of the king. At the end of the story, when Lyusi has overpowered Moulay Ismail, he surprisingly asks the latter for no less than a royal decree to attest to his, Lyusi's, sharifian descent. Clearly, we are dealing here with a cultural context wherein sharifian descent is more valuable than wealth and office. Lyusi is quick to divulge the secret of his surprising request; he wants to be entitled to “the appropriate honors, privileges, and respect” due to sharifs in Moroccan society. He is therefore seeking to consolidate his miraculous power with the prestige that accrues from the fact of being a sharif in Moroccan society. Yet, sharifian origin does not only confirm prestige (symbolic and material), it also legitimizes power. In the case of the saint, sharifian descent legitimizes miraculous *baraka* and justifies it in the eyes of the popular masses. It explains to them

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<sup>17</sup> The identification between the rural saint and the tribe is a complex issue which has solicited much deliberation on the part of academics who studied Berber society. There tends to be an agreement, however, upon two main roles of rural saints: 1- an organizational role by acting as referees for the tribe, 2- a legitimizing role by identifying the forms of rural worship with juridical Islam, hence forestalling any threat to the existence of the tribe on religious grounds. For a classical study of the role of rural saints see Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). As for Darif's contribution on this issue on which I am drawing here, it is best summed up in the following passage from his *Muassasat* where he defines the *zawiya* (religious lodge) as

an organizational tool which is begotten by a tribal entity. Its objective is the defense of this tribal entity against disintegration through providing the conditions that are necessary for the continuity of this entity on the material level first, then on the level of political/religious legitimacy, by associating it with juridical Islam.

p. 78, my translation.

<sup>18</sup> In Morocco, the royal palace is not only an institution. It is a highly developed, self-sufficient society referred to as “*dar al-mulk*” (the house of monarchy). Refer to Abdellah Hammoudi, “The Reinvention of Dar al-mulk: The Moroccan Political System and Its Legitimation,” in *In the Shadow of the Sultan*, 129-175.

the reason why the saint is able to perform such extraordinary feats; it is the prophet's blood that runs in the saint's veins which is responsible for the benevolent, extraordinary interventions of the saint in the world. Significantly, personal miraculous *baraka* in this case becomes just a manifestation of hereditary *baraka* whereas it was miraculous *baraka* that the saint has acquired on his own which originally allowed the saint to claim sharifian origin. Ironically, the sultan who is a testified descendent of the prophet is under the mercy of the saint's *baraka*.<sup>19</sup> The Sultan's *baraka* has a domain of operation of its own though. It legitimizes his rule of the Muslim community, and endows him with the power necessary to defend Muslim territory against foreign assault, as well internal disorder. During Moulay Ismail's rule, Morocco was especially strong and secure.

The story clearly dramatizes the politics of hereditary and personal *baraka* in Morocco. According to Geertz, it is also

a folktale commentary on the delicate relationship between strong-man politics and holy-man piety, the continuously sought but only sporadically effected effort to fuse the force of the warrior and the virtue of the saint, which ... is the leitmotiv of Moroccan history.<sup>20</sup>

Analyzing the relationship between the king and the saint in terms of the oppositions "holy-man piety vs. strong-man politics" and "the saint's virtue vs. the warrior's force" is counterproductive for understanding the historical relationship between the sharifian king and the saint. It is true that Geertz argues that these oppositions are fused in the persons of king and saint, yet presupposing them initially creates analytical problems as

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<sup>19</sup>This pattern of interaction between saint and king is recurrent in popular legends. For other stories of saint/king confrontations, see Raymond Jamous, "Le Saint et le Possede," *Gradhiva: Revue D'Histoire et D'Archives de l'Anthropologie*, No. 17(1995): 62-83. The stories recounted by Jamous in this article, however, hardly have any historical reference.

<sup>20</sup> *Islam Observed*, 33.

well as historical inaccuracies. Moreover, these oppositions indirectly cast the Moroccan saint and king in the universal image of the king as the strong warrior and the saint as the virtuous holy man. As a result, Geertz's conception of the conflict between the two figures glosses over the peculiar nature of both the holiness of the saint and the force of the sharifian king in Morocco. At the origin of Geertz's reading of the relationship between saint and king, as well as his general interpretation of Moroccan history, is his view of *baraka* as a uniform, monolithic category that epitomizes a historically constant cultural conception of the world. He contends that

baraka clung to the sultan, and to certain members of his staff, the Maxzen, as it clung to certain descendants of saints and certain chiefs of brotherhoods. Despite their enormous differences in status, power, and function, and despite the fact that they were all in more or less open opposition to one another, they were, from the religious point of view, all the same sort of figures. Popular saint worship, sufist doctrine (both Spanish and Middle Eastern), and the sherifian principle all flowed together, like a swelling stream, into a single precut spiritual channel: maraboutism.<sup>21</sup>

Historically, the religious point of view was only one factor, among many, behind shaping the relationship between the figures Geertz mentions in this excerpt.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the religious factor derived its saliency from its legitimizing function. Otherwise, it was no less negotiable than other factors. As for the argument that the members of the saintly and monarchic institutions were essentially the same figures by virtue of their possession

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<sup>21</sup> *Islam Observed*, 55-56.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that the *makhzen* was not invested with *baraka* as Geertz claims.

of the same *baraka*, it is hardly tenable. The differences in status and function did actually make a difference. These figures do not possess the same type of *baraka*, nor do they deploy it similarly. What these figures had in common is their possession of a symbolic capital which has accrued to them through different means and which they deploy in different ways to accumulate more social and political power. How they deploy this symbolic capital depends upon their personal resources as well as upon the possibilities offered by historical, political, and social factors. Moroccan history did not unfold through the constant conflict between the virtue of the saint and the force of the king, each trying to take over the role of the other. The politics of saint/king interaction was much more complex.<sup>23</sup> In the following sections, I examine two examples wherein different historical contexts shaped king/saint relationship in opposite directions—military confrontation during the reign of Sultan Moulay Slimane (1792-1822), and strategic, mainly discursive, alliance in the post-9/11 historical context.

### **III- Sultan Moulay Slimane Against the Sainly Institution:**

Moulay Slimane came to the throne in 1792 when Morocco was experiencing various economic and political difficulties because of drought and plague.<sup>1</sup> His policy of extreme protectionism did nothing but aggravate the economic setback of the country. He banned maritime trade with European countries, which stifled the economy and led to much discontent and political tension in Moroccan society. An excessive form of prudence was the driving force behind Moulay Slimane's policy. Yet, this prudence was counter-productive since it weakened the country, and thus made it even more open to the

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<sup>23</sup> And so is the dynamics of history, one is tempted to remind Geertz.

<sup>1</sup> See Driss Ksikes and Youssef Ait Akdim, "L'Histoire Occultee du Maroc," *Tel Quel*, No. 152 (2005). <[http://www.telquel-online.com/152/couverture\\_152\\_1.shtml](http://www.telquel-online.com/152/couverture_152_1.shtml)>

European expansionist threats instead of shielding it against these threats. Furthermore, it triggered the much-feared *fitna* inside the country.

The greatest internal threat that Moulay Slimane faced was the rebellion of Berber tribes from the Atlas Mountains under the leadership of Abou-Bakr Mhawesh. The latter was a Berber who claimed sharifian descent. He was the head of the *zawiya* of Ait Ali Mhawesh by the time Moulay Slimane was enthroned.<sup>2</sup> The confrontation between the two parties was triggered by Moulay Slimane's anti-Berber policy,<sup>3</sup> the economic crisis incurred, or at least aggravated, by his protectionism, as well as the desire of the Berber tribes to take over a weak, impoverished makhzen.

Ultimately, Mhawesh's became a political movement championing the cause of a Berber rebellion against the *makhzen*, rather than a religious order. While this historical event seems to undermine my earlier critique of Geertz's reading of Moroccan history, it in fact corroborates it. Geertz's thesis is predicated upon the notion of strong-man politics and holy-man piety. Moroccan history, according to him, was made up by two figures—the saint and the king—who fought to possess both charisma and military power. From the outset, Mhawesh seems to illustrate Geertz's marabout perfectly. However, Mhawesh actually surrendered his role of saint when he acquired so much military power, and became the competitor of the king for the throne. As I noted earlier, the king and saint are essentially distinct figures although they share in *baraka* and sharifism.<sup>5</sup> Mhawesh could not aspire to play both roles. As he was approaching the final military victory that would

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<sup>2</sup> For biographical details about Abu-Bakr Mhawesh, refer to Darif, *Muassasat*, 96. For details about his *zawiya*, Refer to the same source, pp. 109-111.

<sup>3</sup> See Darif, *Muassasat*, 98, and the 2000 Berber manifesto posted at <[http://amazighworld.net/human\\_rights/morocco/manifesto2000fr.php](http://amazighworld.net/human_rights/morocco/manifesto2000fr.php)> The manifesto claims that Moulay Slimane ultimately changed his views about the Berbers which he formed through the false accounts transmitted to him by those who “knot and unknot” (in reference to decision-makers) in the city of Fez.

<sup>5</sup> For the elaboration of this point, see M.E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice*.

have enthroned him,<sup>6</sup> he was growing distant from his saintliness, and his saintly institution—the *zawiya*—from its primary historical role.<sup>7</sup> Discussing the same example, Darif insightfully comments, “the *zawiya* in this case denied itself... by going back to the pre-*zawiya* era.”<sup>8</sup> He is referring here to the Khaldunian Morocco of the great Berber dynasties, when political authority relied upon group feelings (*‘asabiyya*), correspondent in this case with the Berber tribe.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of trespassing the fine line between saint and king aside, Mhawesh and the other saints who bore arms and set out on military expeditions against the makhzen were not representative of the typical Moroccan saint. Primarily, the latter was a socially rather than politically committed figure. Moreover, when dwelling upon saints in Morocco, we have to remember that the majority of saints in the country were functioning at the popular level and could not aspire to amass enough power to allow them to bear arms against the makhzen.

Only a few saints could ever achieve the political and military power that Mhawesh possessed during the rule of Moulay Slimane. He succeeded in rallying more and more Berber tribes around him, and managed to enlist the support of even those tribes that were traditionally allied with the makhzen. As a result, he overpowered Moulay Slimane militarily. Moulay Slimane’s troubles reached their peak in the battle of Zayan (1818) where he was incarcerated and his son killed. Eventually, Moulay Slimane abdicated in 1822.<sup>12</sup> His abdication seems to have been necessary in order to save the

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<sup>6</sup> He never achieved that final decisive victory however, although he managed to rally more Berber tribes, and to extend the rebellion till it reached the walls of Meknes in 1819.

<sup>7</sup> For the elaboration of the role of *zawiya* in the tribe, see Darif.

<sup>8</sup> *Muassasat*, 99. My translation.

<sup>9</sup> Refer to the introduction.

<sup>12</sup> According to the Berber Manifesto (see note 4 in this section), he abdicated because the political intelligentsia of Fez turned against him when he changed his anti-Berber policy and advocated

institution of the sharifian state from an eminent disintegration incurred by the failure of his general political policy, as well as his religious policy.

Moulay Slimane was a *faqih*,<sup>13</sup> and according to some,<sup>14</sup> the most cultured of ‘Alawite kings. Before coming to the throne, he spent his time in Tafilalt<sup>15</sup> studying theology.<sup>16</sup> He embraced the Wahhabi doctrine which he initially encountered through pilgrims returning from Mecca. Moulay Slimane seems to have been predisposed to embrace the teachings of Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1791) since he opposed all sorts of innovation (*bid‘a*)<sup>17</sup> that accrued to the religion of Islam after the time of the prophet Mohamed and the rightly guided Caliphs,<sup>18</sup> and advocated strict and exhaustive application of the *shari‘a*.<sup>19</sup> As a monarch though, he officially professed his wahhabi affiliation. In 1811, he sent a delegation of judges and ‘alims to the Saudi leader with a letter of reassurance that reads: “This letter aims at dissipating any suspicion on your part that we are opposed to your ideas.”<sup>20</sup>

The most consequential application of Wahhabi teachings on the part of Moulay Slimane, however, was his opposition to saint veneration. This opposition is best

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reconciliation with Berbers. When Moulay Slimane had the opportunity to communicate with Berbers directly, without the mediation of Fassi decision-makers, there was, the manifesto claims, a dramatic change in his anti-Berber policy. He spoke to the people of Fez exhorting them to reconcile with Berbers, whom he characterized favorably this time, if they wanted peace for their country. The view generally held by historians, however, is that he abdicated in order to save the sharifian state from disintegration. See Darif, 125.

<sup>13</sup> The *faqih* is a legist, someone learned in Islamic law.

<sup>14</sup> See the Berber Manifesto. In the same vein, Driss Ksikes and Youssef Aït Akdim argue in their “L’Histoire Occultee du Maroc” that Moulay Slimane was more of a *faqih* than a king.

<sup>15</sup> Tafilalt is the home of the ‘Alawites in southern Morocco .

<sup>16</sup> Driss Ksikes and Youssef Aït Akdim, “L’Histoire Occultee du Maroc.”

<sup>17</sup> *Bid‘a* (pl. *bida‘*) is a poignant term in the Islamic juridical tradition. It refers to an innovation or deviation from the tradition of the prophet and his companions. *Bida‘* are generally condemned by legists. It is noteworthy though that the concept of deviation from the true Islamic tradition has often been deployed for political purposes.

<sup>18</sup> These are Abu-Bakr, ‘Omar, ‘Othman, and ‘Ali; he prophet’s companions who became caliphs after his death.

<sup>19</sup> *Shari‘a* refers to Islamic law.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Driss Ksikes and Youssef Aït Akdim, “L’Histoire Occultee du Maroc.” My translation.

expressed in his letter against *zawaya* and *mawasim*. Whether Moulay Slimane opposed *mawasim* and *zawaya* out of true faithfulness to Wahhabi doctrine, or out of political intrigue against Berber tribes is of little import here since Wahhabi doctrine served his political interest in both cases.<sup>21</sup> In what follows, I analyze the content of this letter and its political import.<sup>22</sup>

Moulay Slimane invokes surrendering to God, following the *sunna* of his prophet Mohamed and the ways of his companions, as well as obeying the Islamic ruler (*ulu al-amr*) as principles of the Islamic *shari'a*. These principles are stressed throughout the letter, but they are given more saliency in the formulaic introduction which paves the way towards Moulay Slimane's unprecedented advice to the people of Morocco. Parallel to his claim for obedience on the part of his people, Moulay Slimane stresses his own responsibility for their moral uprightness through advising and spiritually guiding them. This responsibility, he claims, makes it incumbent upon him to upbraid them for following the path of Satan and corrupting their religion with gruesome *bida'*. Not only are these deviations from the *shari'a* harmful morally and intellectually, but they also push people to spend money mindlessly in *mawasim* instead of giving it in alms to the needy. Moulay Slimane makes it clear that spending money in saints' festivals is illegal, and so is saint worship.

Moulay Slimane argues through historical examples from the early era of Islam, and through invoking the authority of the Qur'an and *sunna*. Indeed, the letter abounds in Quranic verses and sayings of the prophet. Employing a series of rhetorical questions that

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<sup>21</sup> It did so in the sense that it provided him with a good religious basis for building up his strong criticism of the proponents of the saintly institution. I am aware, however, that practically this opposition caused a backlash and incurred animosity from Berbers.

<sup>22</sup> I analyze this letter as it is reproduced by Darif in his *Muassasat*, pp. 146-149.

are meant to disarm any counterargument, the sultan asks the people whether Mohamed organized any festival to commemorate the death of his uncle Hamza as a martyr, and whether he decorated the tombs of his companions, etc ... Since these practices have no basis in the early days of Islam which constitute the golden era when the rightful ones lived, then, the sultan argues, they must be corrupt additions by the less faithful successors. The Wahhabi influence is evident in this argument.

Moulay Slimane warns the people against contending that these practices are the legacy of their ancestors and that they should therefore follow in their footsteps, since this is the same argument that the Qur'an attributes to the unfaithful. The Sultan is implying here that those who venerate saints verge on disbelief. He characterizes their practices as un-Islamic. Singing, dancing, clapping hands, raising flags, and the intermingling of men, women, and children for *dhikr*<sup>23</sup> are all condemned by Moulay Slimane as vile deviations from the tradition of Mohamed. The only form of *dhikr* that is sanctioned by the *shari'a* is that practiced by Mohamed and his companions and that does not involve the raising of voices and flags, nor gatherings. All other forms are distortions of God's laws and should not be tolerated. In fact, Moulay Slimane goes as far as asserting that those who possess authority in Muslim society should not allow proponents of *zawaya* and *turuq* (sg. *tariqa*) into mosques. Otherwise, they would be accomplices and so would the Sultan be if he does nothing to reform this state and prevent Moroccan society from sinking in *bida'* and sins. Deviating from the true path of Islam as delineated in the Qur'an and *sunna*, Moulay Slimane affirms, would court the anger of God against Moroccan society. As a result, Morocco would be struck by drought, famine, illness, and

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<sup>23</sup> *Dhikr* generally refers to the repetition of certain words and phrases in praise of God. In Sufi rituals, it refers to the rhythmic chanting of God's divine names and phrases of praise (also *sama'*) so as to bring about a state of meditation or ecstasy (*al-hal*).

territorial disintegration. “Impoliteness towards God opens the door to calamities, and closes the path to welfare,”<sup>24</sup> The sultan asserts.

Towards the end of the letter, Moulay Slimane cites a long *hadith*<sup>25</sup> that foresees the differences between Muslims after the prophet’s death, exhorts Muslims to follow the path of Mohamed and the rightfully-guided caliphs, and to obey their governor even if he were a black slave. The *hadith* also warns them against *bida’*. Finally, the sultan asks his people to bear witness to the fact that he has advised, warned, and guided. He closes on a strong tone informing them that he who still attends *mawassim*, or creates any other sort of *bida’* will bring about his own, as well as his people’s, destruction.

The Wahhabi influence is evident in the letter. In fact, Wahhabi doctrine is predicated upon the purification of Islam from the *bida’* that accrued to it after the death of the prophet and his companions. Wahhabis regard Sufism and saint veneration as chief *bida’* against which true Muslims should fight. Whether Moulay Slimane wrote his letter against *zawaya* and *mawasim* out of faith to Wahhabism or not is of little import to my argument in this paper, although there is an agreement among historians that he was actually a Wahhabi. In examining this letter, I am interested in another example of the dynamics of king-saint relationship. In this example, Wahhabism served Moulay Slimane as the ideological basis upon which he founded his anti-saint policy. This policy was Moulay Slimane’s response to the incursion of the Berber tribe under the leadership of a *zawiya*.

Traditionally, the *zawiya* and the tribe are allies. The *zawiya* mediates between the popular Islam of the tribe which is informed by the *’urf* (customary law) and the high

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<sup>24</sup> From the letter, my translation.

<sup>25</sup> A *hadith* is a saying of the prophet.

tradition of juridical Islam. In this sense, the *zawiya* invests the tribe with religious legitimacy. On the economic level, the *zawiya* organizes yearly festivals (*mawasim*) that are attended by hundreds of pilgrims. It thus provides the tribe with a major economic resource. On the political level, the *zawiya* mediates between the tribe and the *makhzen*, and has traditionally succeeded in forestalling many confrontations between the two parties.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of the *zawiya* of Ait Ali Mhawesh during the rule of Moulay Slimane, the *zawiya* and the tribe became military allies as well. Abu-Bakr Mhawesh led the Atlas Berber tribes in their revolt against Moulay Slimane. Gradually, his became a political movement against the *makhzen* rather than a *zawiya*. Therefore, by attacking the saintly institution, Moulay Slimane was in fact attacking the recalcitrant Berber tribe.

Moulay Slimane deployed Wahhabism in order to exclude the *zawiya* and thus the tribe from the *shari'a*. The *zawiya* is part of the saintly institution that has, according to him, corrupted Islam with many innovations (*bida'*) drawn from tribal *'urf*. In this way, he establishes a dichotomy between the *zawiya*, tribe, and *'urf* on the one hand, and *makhzen*, Islamic community, and *shari'a* on the other. The implication is that while the *makhzen* tries to implement *shari'a* by force, the tribe, through the help of the *zawiya*, sticks to the *'urf*, corrupts Islam, and wants *s-siba* to prevail. From the *makhzen*'s point of view, *s-siba* is a form of anarchy that threatens the country with *fitna* and violates a major principle of the *shari'a*; namely, obedience of the Islamic ruler who is in the case of the

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<sup>24</sup> The *zawiya* of Wazzan, for example, forestalled many such confrontations in the north. For an account of the political role of this *zawiya*, see the long excerpt from G. Drague's *Esquisse d'Histoire Religieuse du Maroc* (1951) in Darif, 112-116.

sharifian king the “Prince of the Faithful.”<sup>25</sup> In this way, Moulay Slimane de-legitimizes the *zawiya*, the tribe and their allied resistance to the *makhzen* at the same time as he legitimizes the latter’s struggle against them.

The *zawiya* has always insisted to wear the guise of juridical Islam so as to gain religious legitimacy both for itself and for the tribe. The guise and the religious legitimacy it grants, guarantee the survival of both *zawiya* and tribe not only through the resources brought in by *mawasim*, but also (for the *zawiya*) through the privileges that the *makhzen* granted.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, by excluding the *zawiya* from the *shari‘a*, Moulay Slimane is not only stripping *zawiya* and tribe of religious legitimacy, and their resources of *mawasim*, but he is also depriving the *zawiya* from the privileges which have become an acquired right of the *zawiya* by tradition. Moulay Slimane’s letter seeks to undermine both the discursive and material conditions for the existence of the *zawiya* and by extension the Berber tribe.

Not able to vanquish Mhawesh in battle, Moulay Slimane resorted to what he is best at—*fiqh*. In his letter, Moulay Slimane speaks with the authority of the *faqih*, in fact the Wahhabi Faqih, and displays his knowledge of Islamic history and the *shari‘a*. His discursive authority here is bolstered by the fact the he is a sharif whereas Mhawesh, his opponent whom he indirectly addresses here, is not (despite his claim to the contrary). It is true that sharifism is not invoked in the letter, yet it is present in the person of the speaker—Moulay Slimane—who stands for the institution of the sharifian state from

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<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of the tribe, however, *s-siba* is a way of resisting the encroachment of the *makhzen*, protecting its *‘urf*, and thus its cultural identity.

<sup>26</sup> Officially, the *zawiya* received special privileges from the *makhzen* (e.g. exemption from taxation, landownership, etc...) in recognition of the sharifian origin of its patron saint and his descendents, their *baraka*, as well as their special religious status. In reality, however, these privileges were in return for the services it rendered.

which he cannot tear himself away, not that there is any reason to believe that he wanted to. Being a descendent of the prophet places one in a better position to speak against deviation from the true path of the prophet. One in this case can embody the *shari'a*.

Another discursive function of Moulay Slimane's letter against *zawaya* and *mawasim* is to justify the economic difficulties and political unrest that struck the country during his rule. Moulay Slimane is a believer in *baraka*. In this letter, he talks about the decrease in the *baraka* of crops referring to the insufficiency of these crops. In another letter, he refers to a certain *'alim* with the word *baraka*.<sup>27</sup> Yet, it is clear that the *baraka* in which he believes is not that of the saint. His notion of *baraka* corresponds rather with true Islamic faith and exact application of the *shari'a*. *Baraka* turns into *bas* when society deviates from the true path and gives in to illegitimate *bida'*. Moulay Slimane describes in his letter what befalls a society that gives in to Satan, worships saints, and wastes money in illegitimate, mindless ways. Such a society is cursed, just like the Moroccan society at the time, with drought, famine, epidemics, and foreign conquest. In this way, Moulay Slimane lays the blame upon the saintly institution and forestalls the popular argument that the country suffered from the lack of the *baraka* of its king.

Although Moulay Slimane's letter was not effective in undermining the legitimacy of the saintly institution whose influence remained intact, opponents of this institution appropriated it on many historical occasions. In 1935, for example, the conservative leaders of the nationalist movement published it in a small booklet that was widely distributed.<sup>28</sup> In the context of colonialism, there was no room for a *zawiya* that is

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<sup>27</sup> See his letter to 'Ali Ben Ahmed Al-Wazzani in Darif, p. 145.

<sup>28</sup> Darif, 153.

allied with the tribe. The model was now that of a unified Islamic nation, and the protagonists were the Sultan and the faqih/nationalist leader.<sup>29</sup>

In the following section, I examine king/saint relationship in contemporary Morocco. In the present historical context, Moulay Slimane's letter sunk to oblivion as the sharifian king's political interest obliged him to seek alliance with the saint as a cultural model.

#### **IV- King Mohamed VI and Sufism after 9/11:**

On May 16, 2003, twelve suicide bombers hit Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca—the economic capital of Morocco, killing thirty-three civilians and wounding more than a hundred people. The bombers were all young Moroccan men believed to be members of an Islamist fundamentalist group called *Salafia Jihadia*. In a country where people had never experienced the threat of terrorism before, the psychological effect of the attacks was devastating. The country that had escaped the reach of violence from neighboring Algeria for years, had now entered the cycle of international terror. Many Moroccans could not believe that the attacks were carried out by fellow Moroccans. When it was officially declared that the perpetrators were all Moroccan, Moroccans and Western observers finally conceded that Moroccan Islam<sup>1</sup> had dramatically changed. For Western academics, it was no longer the Islam of saint

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<sup>29</sup> As a matter of fact, those were the ideals that were promoted by the nationalist movement, but in reality, the saint remained influential throughout the colonial period.

<sup>1</sup> The term "Moroccan Islam" was used by Geertz in his *Islam Observed*. Later on, Dale Eickelman used it in the title of his book *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976). In the context of this paper, I use the term in order to imply the peculiar nature of Islam in Morocco. I do not mean, however, to essentialize its difference from Islam in other countries.

worship. For Moroccan citizens, it was no longer the moderate Islam upon which they have long prided themselves.

The then novice king (only four years in office) Mohamed VI took it upon himself to ameliorate the image of Moroccan Islam. Not only did he implement a new religious policy,<sup>2</sup> but he also generated a consistent discourse, in his speeches and letters, wherein he invoked Sufism<sup>3</sup> as the alternative to terror-inciting Islamism. Mohamed VI's promotion of Sufism was coterminous with an international call for the revival of Sufism after 9/11.<sup>4</sup> In this section, I analyze his letter to the inaugural meeting of the international Sidi Shikr Sufi convention held in Marrakech in September 2004 under the aegis of his majesty. I read this letter as a modern-time example of the dynamism of king/saint relationship in its response to different historical contexts.

In this letter, just like elsewhere in the royal discourse after the attacks, the king clearly aims to restore the image of Morocco in the international community as an open, tolerant society. The attacks targeted the symbols of foreign presence in the country (a Jewish community center, a five-star hotel, and restaurants owned by foreigners), and it is now the king's duty to prove the "bigotry" and "fanaticism"<sup>5</sup> that led to the attacks as the exception not the norm in Moroccan society. What is at stake in this context is not only the image of Morocco, but also, and more importantly perhaps, tourism—a vital

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<sup>2</sup> This religious policy consists mainly of restructuring the Higher Council of Ulema, reviving the old religious schools, and reforming the Islamic Education curriculum. Refer to his April 30, 2004 address to the Higher Council of Ulema posted on the Maghreb Arab Press website.

<sup>3</sup> Mohamed VI uses the term Sufism synonymously with sainthood.

<sup>4</sup> See "The Search for Sufism," *Top Secret*, Narr. Yusri Fouda, Aljazeera Channel, 1 April 2004. <[http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/top\\_secret/articles/2004/4/4-5-1.htm](http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/top_secret/articles/2004/4/4-5-1.htm)>

<sup>5</sup> These are Mohamed VI's words which he used to describe the Islamist thought of the perpetrators in his first address to the people of Morocco after the attacks. See his May 29, 2003 speech posted on the MAP website.

economic sector for a third-world country, which has suffered a fatal blow after the attacks.

Mohamed VI valorizes the mystic Sufi as an exemplary figure, and opposes him to the politically engaged Islamist whom he indirectly<sup>6</sup> denigrates as the Sufi's antithesis—an epitome of bigotry, fanaticism, and grudge. He implicitly blames the attacks upon the waning of the Sufi spirit in Moroccan society, and encourages the participants in the conference to revive this spirit as a counter-measure against extremism and intolerance.

From the perspective of Mohamed VI in this letter, the promotion of Sufism on the part of Moroccans would be a return to the norm. Indeed, he defines Moroccan history and society in terms of Sufism. In a moralistic piece of history, he informs the participants in the conference that

the people of this good land were aware, since their embracing of Islam, that the essence of faith is the purification of the soul from selfishness, grudge, and bigotry (...) and the exercise of self-control and supervision of daily behavior, for the attainment of the kind of spiritual perfection that is termed Sufism.<sup>7</sup>

The dominant figure in Moroccan history, then, is the Sufi not the Islamist, and the dominant values are those taught by Sufi-practice not extremism.

Throughout the letter, the king extols the values promoted by Sufism in general—purification of the soul, spiritual elevation, self-control, tolerance, etc... He devotes,

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<sup>6</sup> The denigration of the islamist is implicit here only because the letter is addressed to a Sufi convention; hence the opposition between the Sufi and the islamist remains a subtext. Otherwise, Mohamed VI has been very explicit in his condemnation of islamism, and has described the perpetrators of the attacks in very strong words in his first address to the people of Morocco after the attacks (May 29, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> My translation. The letter was read at the conference by a consultant of the king.

however, a long paragraph to explicating a special feature of Moroccan Sufism; namely, the educational and social commitment of the Moroccan Sufi. Throughout Moroccan history, the latter has been active in teaching the Qur'an, finding *madaris*<sup>8</sup> and libraries, serving as a referee, mediating tribal and ethnic differences, etc... However, the king singles out three roles as worthy of special praise. These are: 1- the support and assistance of the *'imama*<sup>9</sup> in carrying out its duties, 2- the purification of souls from power-thirst, selfishness, and tyranny, and 3- the upbringing of (Sufi) leaders whose universal aspirations did not clash with their nationalistic<sup>10</sup> feelings.

Mohamed VI reconstructs the history of Moroccan sainthood selectively. He accurately notes the peculiarity of the Moroccan saint as a socially committed figure. He, nevertheless, selects only one pattern of the historical relationship between the Moroccan saint and king for inclusion in his letter. Obviously, the pattern that he selects is the one that best suits his needs in this historical context. Depicting the saint as a traditional supporter of the sharifian monarchy would promote the image of Moroccan society as a peaceful one in which the icons of temporal and spiritual power are allied in their joined effort to serve the Muslim community. On the other hand, asserting the traditional support of the saint for the king legitimizes the authority of the latter. What is left out of the story told here is that the relationship between saint and king was oftentimes tense. The pattern of support and alliance, therefore, existed along with other patterns that do not lend themselves to easy generalizations. So many factors contributed to the shaping of saint/king relationship in different historical periods, making it complex and highly

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<sup>8</sup> *Madaris* (sg. *madrassa*) are religious schools.

<sup>9</sup> *'Imama* refers to the religious leadership of the Muslim community, in this case the monarchy.

<sup>10</sup> "Nationalistic" here refers to the feeling of belonging to a homeland, of being Moroccan. It does not carry the notion of the modern nation-state.

dynamic, just like 9/11 and the May attacks contributed to Mohamed VI's effortful promotion of Sufism and valorization of the saint.

In striking contrast to the move of his ancestor Moulay Slimane who placed saints and *zawaya* outside the framework of *shari'a*,<sup>11</sup> Mohamed VI aligns them with the high tradition of juridical Islam. Ironically, while the saintly institution, from the perspective of Moulay Slimane, promotes *bida'* and corrupts Muslim society, according to Mohamed VI, it fights *bida'*, extremism, and corruption, and promotes pacifism and high morals instead. Indeed, Mohamed VI goes as far as stating that the values and ways of mystics and saints<sup>12</sup> are derived from the Qur'an and *sunna*, therefore they should not be looked upon as a frozen, outdated tradition. He depicts the kind of perfection achieved by saints as the model which everyone should strive to emulate.

Mohamed VI is clearly aware that the saintly tradition creates more of a cultural heritage than a lived reality while politically active islamism is taking over. It is the activist islamist who now poses a threat to the monarchy. The saint has ceased to pose any real political threat since king Hassan II<sup>13</sup> domesticated him. A word on Hassan the Second's policy towards the saintly institution is in order here. During his rule, Hassan II started by centralizing the administration of all the major mausoleums of the country. Then, at a later stage, he relegated the administration of each to a delegation of select

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<sup>11</sup> Refer to the previous section.

<sup>12</sup> In this particular statement, Mohamed VI uses the terms *Zuhhad* and *Salihin*. *Zuhhad* refers to mystics whereas *salihin* formally refers to one specific type of saints. I will not elaborate upon the characteristics of this type of saints since it does not affect my argument here. Moreover, in popular usage, the word *salih* has come to refer to all sorts of saints.

<sup>13</sup> King Hassan II is the father of the present king. He deployed his intelligence, special diplomatic skills, and unbounded monopoly of power to rule the country for 38 years, from 1961 until his death in 1999. He survived two coups, suppressed opposition from both army and islamists, and employed the Moroccan cultural heritage effectively in order to substantiate his authority. For an account of the rule of king Hassan II, see Stephen O. Hughes, *Morocco Under King Hassan* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2001).

descendents of its patron saint.<sup>14</sup> These delegations were affiliated with the Ministry of Interior. As for the secretary general of the Idrissides, Morocco's most prestigious sharifs by virtue of their descent from Idriss I, he was put under the direct supervision of the minister of Interior. Furthermore, one of the king's official advisors, Moulay Ahmed 'Alawite, himself an 'Alawite sharif, took on the role of supervising and attending the big *mawasim*.<sup>15</sup>

Besides inheriting a politically domesticated saint from his father, Mohamed VI came to power in a historical moment when the saint had lost his ability of miraculous intervention in the world, although he still resonated in Moroccan culture. Moroccans are now skeptical about the ability of blood descent to confer *baraka*. The secularists among them reject *baraka* as mere superstition and primitive spirituality, and the islamists deny the ability to intervene in the world to all but prophets. Moreover, both are aware that sharifism has been a tool of monopolizing power and legitimizing it. Apart from these two parties, there are of course those who value the saintly tradition not out of faith in it, but out of faithfulness to a main component of Moroccan cultural heritage. For these, *baraka* is now correspondent with moral force, and sharifian descent no more than a culturally-conditioned social distinction. A fourth fraction of Moroccan society consists of the elderly illiterate whose numbers are dwindling but who still constitute the majority

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<sup>14</sup> These descendents are supposed to have inherited their ancestor's *baraka*. Moreover, since The patron saints of the great mausoleums are all sharifs, their descendents are sharifs (Moroccan Ar. *shorfa*) as well. These delegations are called *niqabat shorfa*.

<sup>15</sup> For the information regarding Hassan the Second's policy towards the saintly institution, see Driss Ksikes, "Les Chorfa Menent la Danse." It is interesting that besides the many similarities between king Hassan II and his ancestor Sultan Moulay Ismail, the two seem to also share in common similar policies towards the saints. Sultan Moulay Ismail attempted to domesticate the *zawaya* by requiring them to have their central lodge in the city of Fez. For Moulay Ismail's policy towards *zawaya*, refer to Darif, 131-134.

of the modern saints' adepts.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, those to whom privileges have previously accrued thanks to sharifian descent still enjoy those privileges.

As the influence of the saint waned, the allure of the islamist gained ground. By the time Mohamed VI was enthroned, it was religious parties and groups rather than religious brotherhoods which were attracting the youth, the downtrodden, and the dispossessed. After 9/11, the islamist groups became even more active. Ultimately, terror-proof Morocco was brought into the cycle of international terrorism by its own citizens, a group of youths from the poor masses.

The return to sainthood seemed a good alternative to the kind of Islam that propelled the attacks. Mohamed VI portrays the saint as an exemplary figure. He extols "the white hands of mystics upon Islamic civilization."<sup>17</sup> The grand narrative of the king's discourse opposes the pacifying, purging influence of the Sufi to the disquieting, "criminal" impact the politically motivated islamist. Significantly enough, when reconstructing the history of the Moroccan saint, Mohamed VI mentions the latter's social and educational commitment and ignores the political potential of the saintly institution. Moreover, he aligns the saints directly with juridical Islam in order to thwart the islamists' contention that sainthood is a form of heterodoxy.

Both as a Wahhabi faqih and as a king at war with Berber tribes, Moulay Slimane could not but oppose sainthood and place it outside the framework of *shari'a*. Mohamed VI, however, could not recommend something better than Sufism for his terror-stricken society. Sufism offered the spiritual solace that is needed in time of hardship without

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<sup>16</sup> I do by no means intend my delineation of the scene in Moroccan society with regard to people's attitude towards the saintly institution to be rigid and definite. As a matter of fact, there are many Moroccans who do not fall in any of the four categories I have delineated here. My aim is rather to sketch the general scene against which Mohamed VI launched his pro-Sufism policy.

<sup>17</sup> From the Sidi Shikr letter. My translation.

threatening of the ‘excesses’ of Islamism. Yet, the Sufi model he presented had to be delineated in such a way that it would reconstruct from the history of Moroccan Sufism only what would serve the needs of the present political situation.

To sum up, Mohamed the VI valorized the saint as an exemplary figure in his post-the-Casablanca-attacks discourse as part of his general policy of promoting Sufism that targeted both domestic and international audiences. On the international level, his policy was intended to restore the image of Moroccan society as an open, tolerant one that is practicing a moderate form of Islam. Furthermore, his policy converged with an international move towards reviving the culture of Sufism. On the domestic level, his move was meant to provide the Moroccan people with a spiritual model to look up to in a time of deep disorientation, and to strengthen their faith in their culture as well as governing institution. In the absence of any substantial threat from a domesticated saintly institution, Mohamed VI tries to revive a centuries-old tradition and activate the symbolic capital of the saint in order to prevail upon the newly acquired influence of the islamists. The image he invokes is that of a supportive saint who “deepened the love of Mohamed’s family (*ahl al-bayt*) in people’s hearts.”<sup>18</sup> Now that the saint had substantially lost his influence and was forced to resign to cultural archives, the sharifian king appropriates his symbolic capital, and affirms his overall authority over the religious domain as “Prince of the Faithful.”<sup>19</sup> If the saint is to return, he has to do so in the manner that best suits the needs of a modern sharifian state surviving the post 9/11 turmoil.

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<sup>18</sup> From the letter. My translation. Of course, what is meant by the prophet’s family is the ‘Alawites.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, he opens the letter by stating that “the title Prince of the Faithful makes [him] responsible for the supervision of the religious domain in all its manifestations and dimensions.” My translation.

### ***Conclusion:***

As I was analyzing my third example from contemporary Morocco, Mohamed VI was celebrating the circumcision of his son, the crown prince, Moulay Al-Hassan at the shrine of Idriss II in Fez, in compliance with the Moroccan royal tradition.<sup>1</sup> Compliance with the royal tradition as far as the public celebration of the circumcision of the crown prince in the mausoleum of Moulay Idriss II stands in sharp contrast to Mohamed VI's many departures from the royal tradition.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it converges with his general policy of promoting the Moroccan saintly heritage. A few days after the celebration of the circumcision at the Moulay Idriss Mausoleum, the king moved to the nearby city of Meknes to celebrate the birthday of the prophet at another great mausoleum; that of Sheikh Al-Kamel.

Clearly, Mohamed VI is capitalizing on a rich tradition of king/saint relationship in order to consolidate his religious and political authority, and promote a pacifist moderate form of Islam as the true Moroccan Islam. Because the tradition upon which Mohamed VI is drawing is so old, complex, and varied, he can reinterpret it and select from it at will, especially when the other party in this tradition has become little more than a cultural icon. And so he does. He equates sainthood in Morocco with Sufism, and selects from its history only what would serve the most urgent need of the present historical context: to ward off the threat of the islamist. Significantly, it is now the islamist who indirectly shapes the relationship between saint and sharifian king. In the face of a common threat, king and saint improvise an alliance and turn to history to

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<sup>1</sup> See the official website of Maghreb Arab Press <<http://www.map.co.ma/mapara/cir-ara/index.htm>>

<sup>2</sup> The most salient departure from this tradition is the public celebration of his wedding to a young Moroccan girl. Mohamed VI is the first Moroccan king to publicly celebrate his wedding, and to allow his wife to appear in public.

legitimize it. Yet, it is now the king who is in full control of the relationship since all the major saintly lineages and lodges have been placed under the custody of the central government.

Moulay Slimane who, in his time and given his Wahhabi affiliation, would have considered the very idea of celebrating the prophet's birthday a *bid'a*, would have been further mortified by the prospect of a descendent of his celebrating it in a saint's mausoleum. But the times are different, and different historical contexts call for different political and religious policies. No matter how enduring the Moroccan kings' policies towards the saintly institution might have seemed to Geertz and others, in fact these policies have varied in response to different historical contexts. And so did the saints' attitudes towards the monarchy as well. This ability to adapt and to respond differently to different historical contexts is what allowed both the sharifian king and the saint to survive their conflicts with one another as well as the exacting demands of history.

What might seem static about king/saint relationship, and the cultural constructs upon which this relationship rests, resembles in fact the celebration of the circumcision of the crown prince at Moulay Idriss Mausoleum. When Mohamed VI was riding a decorated horse with his son, and heading towards the mausoleum in the old medina of Fez, it seemed as though history was repeating itself. The narrow alleys of the medina witnessed the same spectacle over and over again throughout its history which goes back to the ninth century. Yet, the spectacle was in fact different.<sup>3</sup> The security was

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<sup>3</sup> The festivities that accompanied the circumcision of the crown prince, and the profuse discourse generated about these festivities, recall Mona Ozouf's remark that "a society which expatiates upon festivals has no longer but impoverished versions of it in private merrymaking, and degraded ones in a neo-folklore entrusted with maintaining a false collective memory." See her *La Fete Revolutionnaire: 1789-1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 17. Ozouf made this remark in the context of her reinterpretation of the role of festivals in the French revolution. The festivities accompanying the circumcision of Moulay Al-Hassan are instances of neither private merrymaking nor a degraded neo-folklore. Yet, like Ozouf's festivals, they

incomparably tighter than any time before, and the official discourse of the palace, despite its infallible formulaic style, was addressed mainly to the islamists this time and displayed a noticeable obsession with reifying tradition.

Similarly, despite the spectacular and enduring presence of *baraka* and sharifism in Moroccan society, these are in fact open cultural constructs that have no stable content of their own, although they have always retained a very special symbolic weight in the Moroccan imaginaire. The saint and the sharifian king are aware of the versatility of these constructs and exploit this versatility to a maximum in their relationship with one another. *Baraka* and sharifism are reified and invested with a particular ideological meaning each time they are brought to play. Their symbolic capital alone is not enough to determine their operation. In other words, the agents in a specific historical context usually decide upon the way sharifism and *baraka* are to be deployed in order to serve their interests best. In the context of the confrontation between Moulay Ismail and Lyusi in the seventeenth century, *baraka* could still be articulated as a physical miracle, and sharifism was a matter of bargaining between saint and king. In contemporary Morocco, *baraka* can no longer be translated into miracles, nor can sharifism be a matter of bargaining.<sup>3</sup> They are now reifications of a cultural tradition whose survival is equated with the continuity of the Moroccan nation. It is the king who now decides upon their content and operation in the absence of a strong saint who can compete with him for defining such cultural constructs.<sup>4</sup>

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are intended to foster a collective memory, in this case, one that guarantees the continuity of a (reimagined) past in which saint and king are allied against the islamist.

<sup>3</sup> I mean at the official level, for it might still be so at the popular level.

<sup>4</sup> I am making this point in the context of saint/king relationship. Otherwise, I am aware that the laymen formulate their own versions of *baraka* and sharifism which they employ in their daily social life. However, my concern here is with the official discourse and the macro- rather than micro-relations of power.

These resilient cultural constructs contribute further to the making of a rich and complex cultural tradition that inspires multiple courses of action in response to changing historical contexts. After the Casablanca attacks, Mohamed VI fell back safely upon this tradition. It allowed him to rally his people around a cultural ideal which he carved out of a solid but flexible heritage to suit both the need of the people in a time to hardship, as well as his own needs as the representative of the sharifian monarchy. As a result, he survived a fatal crisis that struck as early as his fourth year in office. Despite the surge of Sufism after 9/11, other Arab and Muslim countries do not have such a distinctively and peculiarly strong tradition of Sainthood as Morocco does. Consequently, no other Arab or Muslim leader would have had the luxury of falling back upon this tradition as successfully as Mohamed VI did.

In view of the fact that the saint and the king stand for the two most salient figures in Moroccan history, the relationship between them represents a major field of power in Moroccan society. Accordingly, the historically dynamic nature of this relationship, the different patterns it followed, and the versatility of the cultural constructs upon which it rested, attest to the existence of a rich culture of power in Moroccan society. Complex in its allowance for multiple and versatile relations of power, and plural in its predication upon different models of power, this culture offers many possibilities of coalition and opposition that are not yet exhausted.

This complex dynamics of power circulation in Morocco is especially worthy of notice by Western academics whose eyes have grown used to seeing mostly the invariably constant in Islamic societies. Consequently, no room is left for inventiveness and creativity in their representation of Islamic history and culture. In the post-9/11

context, however, it is the duty of Muslims also to highlight the creative element in their cultures and histories, and liberate themselves from the myth of a static Islamic history so that they can communicate with the Other more forcefully and effectively.

**Appendix:**  
**1- Moulay Slimane's letter against *mawassim* and *zawaya*<sup>24</sup>**

Praise to God whom we worship through submission and obedience, he who ordered us to defend *sunna* and *jama'a*,<sup>25</sup> and to preserve the faith of his gracious prophet and compassionate elect from loss until the day of judgment, he who meant him as exemplar for us. I thank him beyond the ability of language to convey gratitude, and I beseech his help with humility and submission. Peace and prayer be upon our lord Mohamed whom God has distinguished with intercession on behalf of those who follow his guidance to the best of their abilities.

Oh, people! May God open your hearts to the acceptance of advice, and reform through his providence your lives, and employ both the commander and the commanded among you in what he approves of! God has entrusted us with overseeing your affairs, and obligated you to obey us. He especially warned us against losing you to what is forbidden by the Qur'an, *sunna*, and the consensus of the Islamic 'umma, "*O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination.*"<sup>26</sup> We, therefore, regret your inadvertence and insensibility, and we are concerned that Satan has dominated over you with *bida'*. You shall listen to the word of God, awaken from your ignorance, purify your faith from the defilement of

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<sup>24</sup> This letter was meant as a sermon to be delivered by Imams in mosques during the Friday prayer. Abu Al-Qassim Azzayani, a political figure, traveler and historian who lived during the reign of Moulay Slimane, first recorded it in his *Attorjamana Al-Kubra fi Akhbari Al-Ma'mouri Barran wa Bahran* without mentioning the year it was written.

<sup>25</sup> *Jama'a* literally means a group, but what is most probably meant here is the consensus of religious authorities upon a legal issue, which is one of the four *usul* (sources) of Islamic law.

<sup>26</sup> An-Nisa', 59. All Qur'anic verses appear in the text in italics. The translated verses are adopted from King Fahd Complex's 1999 (1419 A.H.) edition of the noble Qur'an that contains an English translation of its meanings and a commentary.

*bida'*, and dedicate to the worship of Allah both your secret and overt thoughts. You must know that God, out of his graciousness, has made the path of *sunna* clear for you to follow, and censored passions so that you be in control of them, and obligated you to observe the precepts of Islam in order to test you. You should, then, listen to his words on that and obey, and recognize his favors and contemplate them. You must abandon the *bida'* of *mawassim* about which you are being misled by the people of whims and passions. By commending *bida'*, those people who call themselves *fuqara'* are dispossessing you of your money and religion and introducing to the faith of Allah what makes hell their due, “Say (O Mohammad) ‘Shall We tell you the greatest losers in respect of (their) deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds.’”<sup>27</sup> All that is an ignominious heresy that betrays a base character. It is a practice which violates *shari'a*, a devilish form of fraud and deception that Satan graces in the eyes of his followers, so that they have appointed specific times of the year to spend money in behalf of Satan. The feeble-minded, the ignorant, and the deceitful, led by heretics of the like of Aissawa and Jilala, now anticipate the times of their pleasure and distraction when crowds swarm for satanic practices. All that is illicit, and spending money on it is strictly forbidden by *shari'a*.

Oh, Muslims! I ask you in the name of Allah: Did Mohamed, peace and prayers be upon him, set up a *mawssim* for Hamza—his uncle and the lord of martyrs? Did Abu Bakr set up one for Mohamed, peace and prayers be upon him? Did Omar set up one for Abu Bakr? Were mosques turned into sanctuaries or were the tombs of the prophet’s glorious companions adorned in the early days of Islam? I warn you against contending that you should follow the example of your fathers for that is the claim of infidels, “*They*

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<sup>27</sup> Al-Kahf, 103-104.

say: *'we found our fathers following a certain way and religion and we guide ourselves by their footsteps.'*<sup>28</sup> Oh, what you are promised! God has denied infidels this claim and rebuked them in his holy Qur'an. The sensible is the one who follows the lead of only the rightly-guided among his predecessors, and by necessity later-times Muslims cannot be more righteous than the worthy early Muslims, *"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion."*<sup>29</sup>

God cannot be approached through singing and dancing in Islam, and the only form of *dhikr* sanctioned by God and recommended by *shari'a* is the one practiced by the prophet and that calls for no crowding or raising of voices. This is the *sunna* of the worthy predecessors, and the path of the righteous ones among their successors. He who says otherwise is not to be listened to, and he who follows another path is not to be followed, *"And whoever contradicts and opposes the messenger (Mohamed) after the right path has been shown clearly to him, and follows other than the believers' way, We shall keep him in the path he has chosen, and burn him in Hell—what an evil destination!"*<sup>30</sup> *"This is my way; I invite unto Allah with sure knowledge, I and whosoever follows me."*<sup>31</sup>

Oh, servants of God! How can you still practice these *bida'*? Do you deem yourselves secure against his divine retribution? Do you want to deceive and confuse your fellow Muslims? Or is it out of arrogance before he who controls your fates, and renunciation of the rulings of he who is your ultimate resort?

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<sup>28</sup> Az-Zukhruf, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Ma'ida, 3.

<sup>30</sup> An-Nisa', 115.

<sup>31</sup> Yusuf, 108.

Repent and pray, contemplate and reform this situation; for God has punished whole communities because they ignored the abominable acts of some their members and did not bother to reform them. Wrongdoer, accomplice, and adulator are all doomed for their deceit. How could Satan tempt you when you have the word of God between your hands? How could he lead you astray when the *sunna* of the prophet is calling upon you to follow the right path? Return to God in repentance, oh people! “*And turn in repentance and in obedience with true faith to your Lord and submit to Him before the torment comes upon you, (and) then you will not be helped.*”<sup>32</sup> And he who wants to approach God through charity should spend his money on those mentioned in the Qur’an, like the needy and the sick, “*As-Sadaqat [alms] are only for the poor, and those employed to collect (the funds), and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam), and to free the captives, and for those in debt, and for Allah’s Cause, and for the wayfarer; a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise.*”<sup>33</sup> You cannot approach God through *bida’* and sins, you should rather adopt the ways of the pious and the rightly-guided—night prayers, the recitation of the Qur’an, pilgrimage, jihad, judicious advice, trustworthiness, fast, adopting the manners and morals of the Qur’an, and avoiding the sites of sins, “*And verily, this is My Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His Path. This He has ordained for you that you may become Al-Muttaqun (the pious).*”<sup>34</sup> The rightful path of the Qur’an and *sunna* is very far from the path followed by those who meet to raise flags and spend nights together in the presence of women and youths. By so doing, they violate the rules of *shari’a* and introduce *bida’* and vile innovations to the religion, “*Is he, then,*

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<sup>32</sup> Az-Zumar, 54.

<sup>33</sup> At-Taubah, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Al-An’am, 153.

*to whom the evil of his deeds is made fair-seeming, so that he considers it as good (equal to one who is rightly-guided)?”<sup>35</sup>*

It is, therefore, incumbent upon those whom God has endowed with power and authority among you to prevent these sects from attending mosques. All those who believe in God and the Day of Judgment are forbidden to attend the meetings of these sects or to assist them in their deceitful practices. I warn you against *bida‘* for they weaken religion. Moreover, ignoring the spread of vile practices causes rules to wither. It is well-known in the tradition that when *bida‘* gain ground among a people, they are struck with God’s wrath, and surrounded with evils from all sides, calamities afflict their lands, their waters dry, their enemies prevail, epidemics spread, their cattle die, and the *baraka* of their crops decreases. Irreverence towards God opens the door to calamities.

(...)

Bear witness, oh Muslims, that we have warned and guided you! Any one who still attends *mawassim* or introduces a *bid‘a* to the *shari‘a* of Mohamed will court trouble and destruction for both his community and himself, and will lose both this world and the Hereafter, “*He loses both this world and the Hereafter. That is the evident loss,*”<sup>36</sup> “*And let those who oppose the Messenger’s commandment beware, lest some fitnah should befall them or a painful torment be inflicted on them.*”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Fatir, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Hajj, 11.

<sup>37</sup> An-Nur, 63.

## 2- King Mohamed the Sixth's letter to the Sidi Shikr International Sufi Conference (2004)

Praise be to Allah and peace and blessings be upon our lord, the Messenger of Allah, his kin and kith. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We insisted to sponsor this first meeting of the International Sidi Shikr Sufi Conference out of our sense of duty as Prince of the Faithful and overseer of the religious affairs in our kingdom in all their dimensions and manifestations. It is a pleasure to address you today and to welcome you to a country that is associated in your memory with an important Sufi heritage whose pivots are well known in the rest of the Islamic world.

The people of this good land were aware, since their embracing of Islam, that the essence of faith is the purification of the soul from selfishness, grudge, and bigotry (...) and the exercise of self-control and supervision of daily behavior, for the attainment of the kind of spiritual perfection that is termed Sufism. Throughout the centuries, many Sufi *turuq* were founded in Morocco by pious, sensible, high-minded, exemplary sheikhs. Those *turuq* became spiritual and religious schools that served Islam by consolidating its highest values, strengthening its foundations, and adapting it to different times and places. They educated people through different rural and urban *zawaya* many of which still exist today. Our predecessors the kings, God bless their souls, used to address the sheikhs of these *zawaya* in letters as *murabitin* out of reverence for the Holy Qur'an and the sharifian *sunna*. One of the meanings of *murabata* is retirement for worship with the ultimate aim of refining the human soul, and that is the best form of *jihad*.

(...)

The contemplation of the history of Sufism in Morocco reveals that Moroccan Sufis, from all social classes, just like their counterparts elsewhere, possessed refined characters and displayed much erudition in the study of the Qur'an. Yet, Moroccan Sufis are distinct thanks to their social and educational commitment. They taught the Qur'an and established an approach that talks to the heart and strengthens its faith in the all-encompassing mercy of God. They fostered the people's love for Mohamed's kin, founded schools and libraries, reconciled enemies, popularized the values of reciprocity, solidarity, and cooperation. They also weaved webs of communication between different tribes, and thus abolished ethnic and tribal discrimination. Moreover, they helped to abolish many manifestations of social seclusion by urging people to compete for charitable causes, and renounce the material for the spiritual. Since it is impossible to cover here all aspects of their social and educational involvement, we would like to highlight three aspects of this involvement that are worthy of special notice: 1- the support and assistance of the *Imama* in carrying out its duties, 2- the purification of souls from power-thirst, selfishness, and tyranny, and 3- the upbringing of (Sufi) leaders whose universal aspirations did not clash with their nationalistic feelings.

Distinguished ladies and gentleman,

We are in dire need today for reviving the values of tolerance, solidarity, and altruism. Muslims especially need to revive their noble values of co-existing and cooperating with the Other. When we invoke the great mystics and *salih*s and reminisce about their white hands upon Islamic civilization, we long to drinking from the pure sources of their values and exalted qualities. After all, what is inspired by the Qur'an and *sunna* cannot be looked upon as a rigid, frozen heritage, or an outdated tradition.

Educational effort that is aimed at refining the individual is the ideal in all times and places; for God endowed human beings and qualified them to seek perfection in themselves, their communities, and their environment.

(...)

Certainly, your Sufi heritage qualifies you to return to the religious, social, and educational fields in a way that rises above any political exploitation thanks to the true values of Sufism that couple piety, upright behavior and truthful disinterested social work. Societies today are fostering tolerance and many of the other values of the Sufi culture. You should preserve these values and emblemize communication and cooperation among yourselves in order to foreground the spirit of your meeting in a country that has remained a pivot of religious tolerance. This country is determined to go on the path of moderation, to remain faithful at all times to its cultural foundations, to constantly observe the values of openness and reciprocity, and to profess the necessity of cooperation between individuals, communities, cultures, and civilizations.

May God unify your *turuq* in Sufism upon the Right Path, and free you from all worldly attachments, a freedom that enables the exalted deeds which soothe hearts, cause communities to thrive, and benefit the Islamic *'umma*.

Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuh.

## Glossary:

*'alim*: (pl. 'ulama') literally, "a person of knowledge," a Muslim religious scholar.

*bas*: affliction of any sort (illness, drought, epidemics, etc...).

*bid'a*: innovation in the Islamic religion that has no source in the Qur'an or *sunna*.

*dhikr*: generally refers to the repetition of certain words and phrases in praise of God. In Sufi rituals, it refers to the rhythmic chanting of God's divine names and phrases of praise (also *sama'*) so as to bring about a state of meditation or ecstasy (al-hal).

*hadith*: the sayings of the prophet Mohamed.

*harka*: a military expedition organized by the sultan for punitive or fiscal purposes.

*faqih*: a legist, someone learned in Islamic law.

*fatwa*: a formal legal opinion given by a Muslim religious scholar.

*fitna*: sedition, internal strife, anarchy, political or social disorder, female beauty. In general, all that can distract the Muslim community from pursuing its highest aims, bring about its disunity and thus weaken it.

*fugara'*: (sg. *faqir*) literally, the poor ones. In the saintly tradition, it refers to the adepts of a saintly order regardless of their financial status.

*'imama*: the religious leadership of the Muslim community, in the case of Morocco, the sharifian monarchy.

*madrassa*: a religious school.

*makhzen*: the Moroccan central government.

*marabout*: a French rendition of the Arabic term *murabit*. Originally, it referred to a rural holy man, but it is now used as a generic name for the North-African saint.

*shari'a*: Islamic law.

*sharif*: a descendent of the prophet Mohamed.

*sheikh*: literally, the elder, the chief. In the Sufi tradition, the master of a Sufi order.

*s-siba*: an organized form of political dissension practiced by the Atlas Berber tribes in order to maintain their autonomy with regard to the *makhzen*.

*sunna*: the sayings and deeds of the prophet Mohamed, the collective body of prophetic traditions.

*'urf*: customary law.

*zawiya*: (pl. *zawaya*) religious lodge, the lodge of a religious brotherhood.

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