

RELIGION-MAKING AND THE COMEBACK OF SUFISM IN THE MAGHREB AFTER 9/11

GESTAR UNA RELIGIÓN: EL REGRESO DEL SUFISMO AL MAGREB DESPUÉS DEL 11-S

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Fecha de recepción: 16/10/2023.

Fecha de aceptación: 10/12/2023.

ABSTRACT

In order to engage in a remaking of Islam and create a modern, secular Islam in line with American interests and a neoliberal frame for religion as secured by the doctrine of secularism, America, after 9/11, has encouraged the Muslim-majority States to revive Sufi brotherhoods because the Sufis are perceived as religiously tolerant and flexible. In this sense, this paper attempts to throw some light on the return of Sufi discourse in the Maghreb, particularly in Morocco and Algeria, after 9/11. Sufi orders, with their focus on spirituality, tolerance, and love, are often seen as a counterforce to extremist ideologies. By supporting Sufi orders, the government of Morocco aims to adopt Sufism as an important component of Moroccan Islam.

KEYWORDS

Sufism, Maghreb, Morocco, RAND Report, extremism, tolerance, Boutchichiyya.

RESUMEN

Con el fin de propiciar una reformulación del Islam y crear un Islam moderno y secular en línea con los intereses estadounidenses así como un marco neoliberal para la religión como el propuesto por las doctrinas secularizadoras, Estados Unidos, después del 11 de septiembre, ha alentado a los

Estados de mayoría musulmana a revivir las hermandades sufíes y ello porque la religiosidad de los sufíes es percibida como tolerante y flexible. Este artículo intenta arrojar algo de luz sobre el retorno del discurso sufí en el Magreb después del 11-S, particularmente, en Marruecos y Argelia. Las órdenes sufíes, con su enfoque de la espiritualidad, la tolerancia y el amor, a menudo son vistas como una fuerza de signo contrario a las ideologías extremistas. Al apoyar las órdenes sufíes, el gobierno de Marruecos pretende adoptar el sufismo como un filón importante del islam marroquí.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Sufismo, Magreb, Marruecos, Informe RAND, extremismo, tolerancia, Boutchi-chiyya.

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. From exclusion to inclusion: RAND Report and Sufism as state policy in the Maghreb. 3. Promoting Moroccan Islam and searching for Sufism: post-9/11 securitisation of religion in Morocco. 4. Conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is worth noting that 9/11 has signalled the resurgence of Sufism into the public sphere after a long period of marginalisation in the Maghreb. It is crucial to discern that various scholars have identified an increasing public demand in the contemporary Maghreb for mysticism and spiritual education. In her article «Beyond Authoritarian Upgrading: the Re-emergence of Sufi Orders in Maghrebi Politics,» Isabelle Werenfels affirms that «Sufi orders in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia have gradually reappeared in the political arena after decades of maintaining a low profile» (2014, p. 275). Werenfels argues that the comeback of Sufism into the public sphere has received little scholarly attention and there has been little focus on the roles and interests of Sufi orders in the political process. She also claims that «cross-Maghrebi comparative perspectives on the Sufi orders' political resurfacing are absent from the literature» (p. 276). Furthermore, in his book *Sufism and Politics in Morocco, Activism and Dissent*, Abdelilah Bouasria opines that since 9/11 «the Moroccan public scene has witnessed the emergence of Islamic movements that are primarily of a spiritual nature, in that they gently invite the seekers to reconnect with their inner self rather than/in addition to the outward manifestations of religiosity» (2015, p. 1). 9/11 was, in fact, a ca-

talyst that has pushed both individuals and communities to resort to spirituality as a form of resistance against the rise of essentialising discourses that incite violence, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Following the same line of thought, Khalid Bekkaoui and Ricardo René Larémont confirm in their article entitled «Moroccan Youth Go Sufi» that «during the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, a shift to Sufism has become prominent in Morocco and perhaps other Muslim countries» (2011, p. 32). Even in Tunisia, where the long-serving secular President Habib Bourguiba had largely dismantled traditional religious structures, Sufi orders have become popular and regained public visibility. «In 2011, they began to organise themselves to rally public and political support against attacks on Sufi shrines and also to confront the uncertainties of the transitional period following the toppling of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali» (Werenfels 2014, pp. 275-276). The use of Sufi Islam by the North African countries in attempts to challenge other interpretations of Islam and create a progressive and secularized Islam stems from the fact that African history has shown that Sufism and secular politics were closely linked (Westerlund & Rosander, 1997). What can be drawn here is that 9/11 has heralded the resurgence and revival of Sufism as an important constituent of Islamic identity in the Maghreb. This paper, therefore, sheds light on the question of religion-building and the comeback of Sufi discourse in the Maghreb in general and in Morocco in particular. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and other subsequent extremist threats, the Maghreb governments have actively sought to counter radical ideologies and prevent the spread of extremism. In doing so, they have used Sufism as a strategy to promote moderation and stability as well as an alternative to religious extremism. In Morocco, Sufi orders like the Boutchichiyya, with their emphasis on spirituality and love, can serve as a counterbalance to extremist narratives and ideologies. The government's support for the Boutchichiyya order is part of its broader strategy to combat radicalisation and promote a more moderate form of Islam.

2. FROM EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION: RAND REPORT AND SUFISM AS STATE POLICY IN THE MAGHREB

Nowadays, Sufism is thriving again in the Maghrebi countries and there are many motives behind its resurgence. The use of Sufism as a political

tool in the Maghreb region, which includes countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya, has been observed at various points in history. Sufi orders, with their spiritual and social influence, have been sought after by political leaders and groups for various purposes. However, the role of Sufism as a political tool varies across different countries and contexts within the Maghreb region. It is true that Sufi orders were almost absent from the public sphere in the Maghreb between 1950s and 1990s. They were eclipsed and silenced by the new postcolonial nationalist regimes that looked at them as forces of underdevelopment and retrogressiveness. But this situation continued till 9/11. Since 9/11, Sufism has returned to the Maghrebi political/religious sphere due to both internal and external factors. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the United States government sought to counter radicalisation and extremism within the Muslim world. As part of its efforts, the U.S. administration under President George W. Bush initiated programs and policies aimed at promoting a more moderate and peaceful form of Islam. One aspect of these initiatives involved supporting Sufism and its revival in Muslim-majority countries. The U.S. government perceived Sufism as a potential antidote to the rise of radical ideologies and violent extremism within the Muslim world. Sufism's emphasis on spirituality, love, and peace was seen as a counterbalance to the extremist narratives propagated by groups like al-Qaeda. By supporting Sufism, the U.S. aimed to promote a more moderate and peaceful interpretation of Islam that could serve as an alternative to radical ideologies. Due to external and internal factors, Sufism is used to serve as a spiritual and social counterweight to Islamism and to the perceived threat posed by Shiite Islam in an effort to establish what Maghraoui calls «*secrinité spirituelle*» (2009, p. 197). It is hailed as a symbol of resistance against Islamists, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the Maghreb began to allocate substantial funds for upgrading Sufi infrastructure.

Sufism, with its emphasis on inclusivity, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue, was seen as a means to foster social harmony and religious coexistence (Heck, 2007). The U.S. government believed that supporting Sufism could help promote a more tolerant and pluralistic understanding of Islam, which in turn could contribute to the stability and development of Muslim-majority countries. By supporting Sufism, which had historical and cultural significance in many Muslim-majority countries, the U.S. has aimed to build relationships with influential Sufi leaders and institutions. These relationships could provide avenues for coope-

ration, dialogue, and mutual understanding in the fight against extremism. As a way of illustration, a 2007 report titled «Building Moderate Muslim Networks: Key Issues, Implications, and Recommendations,» by the U.S. based RAND Corporation think tank recommended encouraging countries with strong Sufi traditions to focus on that part of their history and to include it in their school curricula. The report says that, in general, there appears to be three broad sectors within the spectrum of ideological tendencies in the Muslim world where the United States and the West can find partners in the effort to combat Islamist extremism: secularists; liberal Muslims; and moderate traditionalists, including Sufis... Because of their victimization by Salafis and Wahhabis, traditionalists and Sufis are natural allies of the West to the extent that common ground can be found with them (Rabasa *et al.*, 2007, pp. 70-73).

The report highlights the potential role of Sufi institutions and leaders in countering radical narratives and promoting a more moderate interpretation of Islam. It argues that Sufi traditions and practices, which emphasise spirituality, tolerance, and love, could serve as a counterbalance to extremist ideologies. The example of neoliberal U.S. pundits arguing for a remaking of Islam may serve as an example to illustrate the often unabashedly political nature of such religion-making, revealing itself in very Foucauldian ways as an act of governmentality aimed at creating liberal-secular subjects. In a 2003 report published by the RAND Corporation, the Islamic world is depicted as in a severe crisis of identity, posing a major threat to the rest of the World. Islam needed to be brought in line with Western and American interests. It states bluntly, «Pay more attention to Sufi Islam» (Bernard 2003, p. 63). Hence, it seems that the ultimate goal of the so-called war on terror was religion-building in the sense of creating a 'soft' Islam by reviving Sufi brotherhoods. This refers to the fact that American religion-builders are less concerned with keeping religion out of politics than with regulating its political manifestations. In this light, the Maghrebi countries were encouraged to revive and promote Sufism in order to shrink the rising influence of Islamic radical movements.

It is noteworthy to mention that Sufism, which is a mystical and contemplative dimension of Islam, has a long history in the Maghreb and has traditionally been an integral part of the religious and cultural fabric of the country. Sufis emphasise spiritual experiences, inner purification, and a direct connection with God. They often engage in practices such

as chanting, meditation, and dancing as a means of attaining spiritual enlightenment. To promote a moderate and official interpretation of Islam, the Maghribi governments have taken a number of steps to promote Sufism as an attempt to counter extremist ideologies. According to Werenfels, «the renewed visibility of Sufi orders in the public eye and political arena appears primarily to have been the outcome of a single development –the emergence of Islamist mass movements in the 1980s and later of jihadi groups, both of which challenged the religious and political power of Maghrebi ruling elites» (2014, p. 277). In order to weaken their Islamist and leftist opponents, the Maghrebi political systems have funded and employed Sufi brotherhoods as political structures. It has become common for the Maghrebi leaders and politicians to visit Sufi shrines and their spiritual leaders, especially in times of crisis or during an electoral campaign. Historically speaking, Sufi orders often have thrived in times of crises such as famine, diseases, drought and wars. Put differently, people join Sufi orders in search for guidance, spirituality and rooted identity in times of turmoil and uncertainty. For instance, Sufism in Algeria does have an official state policy. The Algerian government's approach to Sufism has been more focused on regulating religious activities and ensuring that Islamic practices adhere to a particular interpretation of Sunni Islam. It is significant to point out that the return of Sufism in the Maghreb has contributed to the diversification of the public sphere in the sense that «the Islamists enjoy no religious monopoly in the public sphere. There are other movements, such as the Sufis and the Salafists. This diversification is the consequence of thirty years of «re-Islamization.» Religion's centrality in everyday life, coupled with the individualization of religiosity, has given birth to a variety of religious movements (Roy, 2012, p. 11). That is to say, Sufi orders, funded by the governments, have become visible and prominent in the Maghrebi public sphere.

It is commonly acknowledged that Sufism returned gradually in Algeria in the early 1990s and with ferocity after 9/11. In 1991, «the National Association of the Zawyas was created with the blessing of the state and in 2005, state radio and television stations were created just for Sufism with the hope that they would help move people away from radical Islamism and toward a religious practice that focuses on contemplation –rather than violence– dhikr (invocation), social action, and the betterment of oneself and society by peaceful means» (Layachi, 2013, p. 15). Along similar lines, Francois Burgat contends that Sufi orders or

Zawayas were outside history in Algeria and erased from national history because of their alleged collaboration with the colonial authorities. In the early 1990s, however, a number of Algerian analysts pretend that Sufism would save the country from the growing threat of the FIS. For Burgat, the Algerian government revived Sufi orders because of the Sufis' belief that the Islamists are regularly described as foreign, excluding themselves from a political system based on Sunni principles, which is itself a continuation of Ottoman influence. The fact that Sufi brotherhoods would often ignore national boundaries is often conveniently forgotten, so that a good, endogenous Sufism is promoted, as opposed to an imported Islamism (2003, 66).

Like Morocco, Algeria officially follows the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is one of the four major schools of Sunni Islam. The government has established the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments to oversee religious matters and to promote a liberal and official interpretation of Islam. The ministry has historically regulated religious activities and mosques to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies. Some of the prominent Sufi orders in Algeria include the Tijaniyya, Rahmaniyya, and Qadiriyya. These orders have their own networks, structures, and followers, and they have played a significant role in the religious and social life of the country. In short, it is crucial to point out that the government's relationship with Sufi orders in Algeria has been somewhat complex. On one hand, the government recognises the historical and cultural significance of Sufism and its role in the religious landscape. Sufi leaders have occasionally been involved in official events and have been consulted on religious matters. On the other hand, the government has also sought to regulate and control religious activities, including Sufi practices, to maintain a centralised and controlled religious sphere.

Like Algeria, the relationship between the Moroccan government and Sufi orders are complex and multifaceted, influenced by various political, social, and religious factors. The specific nature and extent of the government's support for the Boutchichiyya or any other Sufi order may vary over time based on changing circumstances and priorities. Morocco is a predominantly Muslim country, and various Sufi orders have a historical presence and influence within the country. In Morocco, the Sufis' relationship with the Salafists and the Alawi Sultan was marked at times by strategic cooperation and at times by mutual rejection. The

relationship between the kings and Sufis had been marked by long periods of constant conflict and temporary junctures of strategic cooperation. In an article entitled «Islam re-observed: sanctity, Salafism, and Islamism,» Lahouari Addi underscores that «the king is a saint because he is sharif, related to the Prophet, but he is not the only one with the status of sainthood. Some of his subjects can acquire personal charisma themselves. In the competition between these two principles (the institutional and the popular) lies the secret of the tensions that mark the history of Morocco» (2009, p. 337). To make the point very clear, the fact that the Sufis, sharing the sharifian lineages with the Moroccan Sultan, had a strong presence in the public sphere in colonial Morocco pushed the Sultan to ally with the Salafists in order to stem the tide of the Sufis. Moreover, Sufism has been the object of severe attacks by Salafism, and grassroots Islamism. The reasons for these attacks are numerous, including the worshiping of saints and shrines, and passivity in the face of societal and political problems.

During the colonial era in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, «Islamic reformism spearheaded a consistent, and in each case amazingly successful, campaign against the Sufi brotherhoods. It was essentially a two-pronged attack: the brotherhoods were accused of introducing blameworthy innovations (*bid'a*) into Islam and also of co-operating with the imperial power» (Brown, 1964, p. 60). The Salafists criticised the Sufis as heathens and traitors in that they were complicit with colonialism. On the other hand, the Sufis accused the Salafists of being a group of morally corrupt communists, non-Muslims, and atheists. But, I believe the real conflict between the Sufis and the Salafi nationalists was not religious but purely political in which the latter wanted to marginalise and eradicate the former, due to their deep influence in society, from the political sphere. Despite their differences, Salafism coexisted with some Sufi orders. In the case of Morocco, Salafi reformism did not entirely reject some aspects of Sufism and many Salafi leaders had some schooling in one *Zawiya* or another. In the words of John P. Halstead, the «basic incompatibility of the *Zawiyas* with the religious and political aims of the nationalists did not prevent the two from cooperating temporarily during the furor over the Berber *dahir*» (1969, p. 123). During European colonialism, Sufism and Salafism, however, were often perceived as oxymoron.

It is of particular importance to point out here that the Alawi Sultan used Salafism to counter and reduce the influence of Sufism. Accordingly, the Sufi orders were demonised, attacked and eventually marginalised by both the Salafists and the Alawi Sultan in Morocco during and after colonialism. Another equally blunt way of saying this is that Sufism was exiled from the public sphere not only in Morocco, but also in the other Maghrebi countries. That is, the Sufi orders were absent from the public sphere in the postcolonial Morocco and this situation continued until the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States of America. It is worth noting that 9/11 has signalled the resurgence of Sufism into the public sphere after a long period of marginalisation in the Maghreb in general and in Morocco in particular. When Sufism was a powerful force before and during colonialism, the Moroccan Sultan and his government (Makhzen) made use of Salafism as a bulwark against Sufism, but today, ironically, they have been promoting Sufism as an alternative to Jihadist Salafism and Islamism since 9/11 (Al-Ashraf, 2010).

3. PROMOTING MOROCCAN ISLAM AND SEARCHING FOR SUFISM: POST-9/11 SECURITISATION OF RELIGION IN MOROCCO

The events of 9/11 had a significant impact on the global perception and understanding of Islam, leading to increased scrutiny and negative stereotypes associated with the religion. In the aftermath of these events, many Muslim communities, including those in Morocco, faced challenges in combating extremism and promoting a more nuanced understanding of their faith. Following 9/11, there was a growing recognition among Moroccan Muslims of the need to counter extremist ideologies and promote a more peaceful and moderate understanding of Islam. Sufism, with its focus on spirituality and tolerance, has become increasingly relevant in this context. Serving as an alternative to religious extremism, Sufism has become so popular in Morocco by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, that it is praised and espoused by all, including the king himself. It is very crucial to note that 16 May 2003 jihadist suicide attacks in Casablanca compelled the monarchy to ostentatiously reactivate Sufism as a key component of Moroccan Islam. This means that the shift to Sufism was prompted by the global terrorism and rise of radical movements (Feuer, 2015). In other words, «the shift to Sufism came with the spectacular spread of the Qadiriyya Boutchichiyya during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The active recruitment to Sufism away from secular-leftist ideolo-

gies or Wahhabism/Salafism can be construed as a return to the roots of Moroccan Islam. This strategy fits well with the intention of the Moroccan State to promote a more moderate and peaceful version of Islam» (Bekkaoui et al., 2011, p. 57). As a matter of fact, since 9/11, the Moroccan government has been promoting Sufism because when people want to adhere to Islam, they follow ideologies that lead them to extremism and rejection of others. Moroccan religious institutions, such as the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, have made efforts to promote Sufism and its teachings. They organised events, conferences, and gatherings that highlighted the peaceful and inclusive aspects of Sufi traditions. These initiatives have aimed to counter radical ideologies and present Sufism as an alternative path that emphasises love, compassion, and coexistence. Due to the fact that Sufism is a peaceful and forgiving way that calls for dialogue and love of others (Habboush, 2009), Sufi brotherhoods or tariqas have played a crucial role in reviving Sufism's popularity after 9/11. These brotherhoods are spiritual orders led by a spiritual master or sheikh and provide a framework for individuals to practice Sufism collectively. They often engage in various forms of spiritual practices, including music, poetry, and rituals.

More importantly, Moroccan youth are increasingly drawn to Sufism because of its tolerance, its fluid interpretation of the Qur'an, its rejection of fanaticism and its embrace of modernity. In a survey entitled «Survey on Moroccan Youth: Perception and Participation in Sufi Orders/Evaluation and Interpretation», Bekkaoui, Larémont and Rddad acknowledge that «youth Sufi culture is a new phenomenon in Morocco» (2011, p. 63). It is claimed that Sufism saves youth from religious fundamentalism because they associate it with peace and religious tolerance. The return of Sufism in Morocco is manifested through the organisation of the famous Fes spiritual festival as well as through special TV and radio programs. This Sufi/spiritual awakening is also embodied by the organisation of a number of international conferences and a large corpus of academic publications. So, since 9/11, there has been an amazing interest to explore Sufism in Morocco. It is of paramount significance to note that Sufism, as a scholarly subject, did not attract an academic attention before 9/11. In the words of Bekkaoui, Larémont and Rddad, «Sufism as a religious practice within Moroccan society remains, however, understudied. To our knowledge, no research has been carried out to shed light on Sufism as a strategic choice of the government and on its influence on youth's faith and religious practices» (2011, p. 48). At

stake here is that «Sufism is now experiencing a significant revival in the Moroccan public sphere as part of a religiosity that encourages interfaith dialogue, universalism, tolerance, love, peace, harmony through a language that is effectively depoliticized» (Maghraoui 2009: 206). It is important to note that the return of Sufism in Morocco after 9/11 does not necessarily imply that Sufism had disappeared or declined before that time. Sufism has always had a presence in Morocco, and its popularity has fluctuated over the centuries. However, the global events and increased focus on Islam in the post-9/11 era have contributed to a renewed interest in Sufism and its teachings as a means of countering extremism and promoting a more inclusive understanding of Islam in Morocco and beyond.

Sufi brotherhoods in Morocco, such as the Boutchichiyya, have continued their activities and attracted renewed interest from both Moroccan Muslims and international visitors seeking spiritual guidance and an alternative to extremist ideologies. The Sufi brotherhoods' emphasis on peace, love, and spirituality resonate with many individuals who are searching for a more balanced and authentic expression of Islam. What can be inferred here is that with the promotion of Sufism, some might suggest that those who follow Sufism will have little concern for politics, thus possibly reducing the political threat to the State. For example, in a 2008 speech that Mohammed VI gave to the Sidi Chiker National Gathering of Sufi Partisans, he seemed to advocate the message of Sufism refraining from politics by saying:

Although mysticism is mostly about communion and spiritual refinement, it also impacts society in several ways; for example, through acts of solidarity, mutual assistance, by wanting good things for others, through forgiveness and tolerance, and by addressing the minds and the hearts to cleanse them. It is important to stress, in this respect, that Sufi [zawiyas] should seek to remain true to the concept of purity upon which they are based. They should forgo earthly pursuits. Sufi disciples should steer away from acts and attitudes which do not become them, give up any quest for worldly rewards and, instead, seek higher, loftier goals» (qtd. in Muedini, 2012, p. 219).

It is crystal clear that the political system in Morocco promotes Sufi orders that «seek higher, loftier goals» and give up «any quest for worldly rewards». Read in this fashion, Sufism is employed by the State to main-

tain the status quo. In an article entitled «The Promotion of Sufism in the Politics of Algeria and Morocco,» Fait Muedini underlines that «Sufism has therefore been used as a critical tool by the Moroccan government because the leadership seems to want individuals to practice a religion that does not emphasize becoming involved in the political system, and their belief seems to suggest that Sufism falls under this structure of not emphasizing political action» (p. 219). One of the main Sufi orders that the king of Morocco, Mohammed VI, has worked with has been the Boutchichiyya order.

To provide a moderate alternative to militant Islam, the Moroccan state «espoused Sufism as a major constituent of Moroccan identity and mobilized the religious institutions and media to reinforce it in order to counterbalance the threatening fundamentalist versions of political Islam, especially after the terrorist attacks on Casablanca in 2003» (Bekkaoui & Larémont 2011, p. 48). Since 9/11, the Moroccan state has found an interest in using Sufism in its domestic religious policies because of what it sees as Sufism's «flexibility, clearly in comparison here with the rigidity of radical forms of religious interpretations» (Maghraoui 2009, p. 206). Sufism therefore has become a powerful political factor in the post- 9/11 Morocco. In particular, after the 2003 Casablanca attacks, «the Government of Morocco modified its definition of Moroccan Islam to include specifically Sufism, which in its estimate would provide a moderate alternative to militant Islam (Bekkaoui & Larémont 2011, p. 31). In an interview with Al Jazeera, Mohamed Zarif says that «before 2002, we used to say that Morocco's Islamic identity was made up of two components: the Ash'ari creed and the Maliki Islamic doctrine. But since 2002, a third component has been added to our Islamic identity, that is, Sunni Sufism of the Aljunaid al-Salik order. Thus, Sufism has become an integral part of the religious identity» (qtd. in Muedini 2012, p. 217). What is striking here is that Sufism has been adopted as an identity marker, enriching the pluralism and richness of Moroccan religious identity.

Likewise, in order to regulate the religious sphere and protect Moroccan Islamic identity from external religious forces that promote religious fundamentalism, Ahmed Toufiq, a historian and minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, asserts in his article titled «The 'Commandership of the Faithful' Institution in Morocco: Pertinent Points for the debate on the Caliphate (the Khilāfah)» that the Commandership of the

Faithful Institution seeks «to preserve the religious identity of Morocco» (2022, p. 187). Stated in different terms, Moroccan religious identity is preserved «thanks to the keen supervision of the Commandership of the Faithful» (p. 184). More significantly, «the Commandership of the Faithful in Morocco strives to strengthen immunity against the kinds of threats engendered by ignorance, impersonating, and extremism, in an atmosphere in which the world suffers from confusing slogans and from conflicts of interest» (pp. 192-93). Furthermore, «the ulama and the imams are appointed to assist the Commandership of the Faithful in protecting religion and faith» (p. 190). In her article entitled «The Moroccan Monarchy's Political Agenda for Reviving Sufi Orders», Intissar Fakir affirms that Morocco's regime has revived Sufism, in part as a diplomatic tool for convincing Western and African governments alike that the country can be a counterweight to extremist religious expressions. She says that «an important part of Morocco's religious reforms to recentralize and tighten official oversight over the religious sphere-and perhaps more so religious discourse-was finding a clear religious and more active political function for Sufism following years of stagnation» (2021, p. 127). She also avers that the king seeks to empower key *zawaya* and consolidate or reestablish the monarchy's ties with Sufi orders and Sufism more broadly. Some of the *zawaya* and Sufi orders that have benefited most from this revival are forging or rebuilding patronage networks that support, promote, and increase the legitimacy of the monarchy's religious and political authority (p. 122).

In discussing the use of Sufism in Morocco before and after 9/11, Mohammad Zarif explains that «the significance of Sufism is determined by the nature of religious activists. This means that before the September 11 attacks in 2001, Sufism had a limited role to play... But after September 11, the state became aware of the danger of the Salafi movement and started to make use of Sufism to create the desired balance.» In terms of his support for Sufism, the king, Mohammed VI, has specifically «brought together local Sufi leaders [in Morocco] and offered millions of dollars in aid to use as a bulwark against radical fundamentalism» (qtd. in Muedini, p. 217). In practical terms, Morocco offers the most visible example of a Sufi order's mobilisation for a regime cause. In other words, the Moroccan State has sought to promote a more moderate and peaceful version of Islam through the revitalisation of Sufi orders, namely the Qadiriyya Boutchichiyya and Tijaniyya. The Boutchichiyya Sufi order has a long history in Morocco and has maintained a

significant presence within the country. Its founder, Sidi Hamza al-Qadiri Boutchichi, is highly revered by his followers. The government's espousal for the Boutchichiyya order stems from a recognition of its historical and cultural importance within Moroccan society.

The Boutchichiyya and Tijaniyya tariqas have purely political objectives in Morocco; this is why the State promotes them through special festivals with the purpose of shrinking the influence of militant Islam. In this regard, Khalid Bekkaoui, Ricardo René Larémont and Sadik Rddad accentuate that

the revival of Sufism provides an alternative to Islamist extremism. The Moroccan state finds in the more tolerant and less politically committed tariqas of Boutchichiyya and Tijaniyya ready institutions and versions of Islam that can be a useful counterbalance to the Salafiyya-Jihadiyya groups, the more militant and oppositional al-Adl waal-Ihssan, and other less attractive, and perhaps, obsolete Sufi orders (2011, p. 63).

First appeared in the twentieth century in the village of Madagh, near the city of Berkane, the Boutchichiyya is without doubt the strongest Moroccan Sufi order. It has led to the revival of the political importance of Sufism in Morocco. Supported by the State, the Boutchichiyya organises its annual festival which attracts thousands of disciples and academicians. Being aware of the danger of radical Islamism, in 2002, the government appointed Ahmed Taoufik, a member of the Boutchichiyya order, as the minister in charge of Islamic Affairs and Endowments. This move seemed to reflect both the acknowledgment of Sufism as a national heritage and the will to move official Islam away from doctrinal stiffness and toward some moderation (Prusan-Jørgensen. 2010). What is at stake is that the Boutchichi order has led to the revival of the political importance of Sufism in Morocco.

Interestingly enough, in June 2011, the Boutchichiyya, together with a number of civil society associations, got hundreds of thousands of people to march in Casablanca in support of a referendum on the amended constitution pushed by the king. Mobilisation of the Boutchichiyya in this case needs to be seen in the broader context of the so-called Arab Spring, as it was essentially directed against the 20 February Movement, which emerged in 2011 and included Islamists, Salafists and secularists fundamentally opposed to the monarchy in its existing form. In brief, since 9/11, Moroccan Sufism, epitomised by the Boutchichiyya, has refused to become the passive object

in the Moroccan public sphere, and constituted itself as the modern Other of the hegemonic Islamic fundamentalism. The Boutchichiyya order emphasises peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and spiritual development. Its teachings and practices align with a moderate interpretation of Islam, which promotes stability and social cohesion. The Moroccan government sees the Boutchichiyya tariqa as a means of fostering a peaceful and harmonious religious environment in the country. The State's use of Sufi orders has paid off and proven its effectiveness in the short term, but will this approach withstand the security challenges and religious extremism in the long term?

4. CONCLUSION

In light of what has been discussed above, it is obvious that after a long period of marginalisation and absence from the public sphere due to its co-optation and cooperation with the European empires, Sufism has become very popular in the Maghreb in the post-9/11 context. This means that 9/11 has heralded the return of Sufism as a political factor in some Muslim-majority countries, particularly in Morocco. The shift to Sufism in the Maghreb has become prominent and explicitly promoted as a state policy. Indeed, Sufism has regained saliency in Maghrebi politics due to an international change that has raised the awareness of policymakers concerning the role that Sufism can play as a counterweight to radical Islam. Seen as a key source of moderation and tolerance, Sufism can be used to counter Islamist organisations that are politically challenging to the government. Sufism is seen as an alternative to the versions of Islam currently competing for power. It is used to counter and challenge radical interpretations of Islam, for the Sufis distance themselves from the fundamentalists, whose vision of Islam is a strict and utopian emulation of the Prophet Mohamed and his companions, by placing great emphasis on the community's adaptation to the concerns and priorities of modern times. The Sufis neither condemn unveiled women nor censure modern means of entertainment. For them, the difference between virtue and vice is determined on the basis of intent, not appearances (Ghambou, 2009). Beyond these possible reasons, the attraction toward Sufism is also often personal whereby people find in it solace, guidance, and spiritual support in dealing with changing and challenging social and economic conditions. In short, globalisation creates within individuals a sense of insecurity, emptiness and bleakness, and hence they resort to Sufism, searching for rooted identity and psychological relief.

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