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Powerful Beliefs: the role religion in constructing political legitimacy in Morocco

Introduction:

Enter any store, step into any cafe, or turn on any state-sponsored television channel in Morocco and chances are one will be greeted by the visage of Morocco's young monarch, King Muhammed VI. In some of these photos, the King will cut a dapper figure in an impeccably tailored western suit and clean-shaven face. In others, he will be sporting a serious five o'clock shadow and dressed in a traditional white djellaba, yellow slippers, and a red fez. Superficial as it may seem, in this case the clothes really do say a great deal about the man, and on a more fundamental level, the nature Morocco's political system.

"The King, "Amir Al-Muminin"(Commander of the Faithful), shall be the Supreme Representative of the Nation and the Symbol of the unity thereof. He shall be the guarantor of the perpetuation and the continuity of the State¹." These two sentences mark the beginning of Article 19 in Morocco's 1996 Constitution and serve as the introduction to sixteen articles outlining the place of the monarchy in Morocco's political system. This important article, with its dual declaration of the monarch as both King and Commander of the Faithful, makes the clear point that legitimacy in the Moroccan context contains both religious and political dimensions even in this 21st century.

This paper seeks to explore the deep link between religious and political legitimacy within the Moroccan monarchy. In order to do so, it will examine three

¹ "Morocco: The Constitution," *Arab Law Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (2002), 306.

moments of contested political legitimacy that involve Morocco's 'Alawi dynasty. In analyzing each of these moments, a boundary-focused approach to religion will be employed to examine how the relationship between the religious and political spheres in Morocco was constructed or renegotiated in each of these moments. This approach will bring forward a clear picture of how and why religious resources were deployed to play a deciding role in the outcome of each of these political situations.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to demonstrate that religious and political legitimacy have, and continue to be, intimately linked within the Moroccan context. A full understanding of any of the three moments presented in this paper is impossible without taking the religious dynamics involved into account. Furthermore, the fact that Morocco's religious and political spheres have been consistently overlapping and contingent upon one another has important implications for the way that scholars and policy makers must look at the current political situation of Morocco, especially in this time of challenge and change.

Literature Review

Laicism is the useful term that Elizabeth Shakman Hurd uses to describe the first, and dominant, way of looking at religion and the secular in international relations².

Laicism is the form of secularism that constitutes one of the founding principles of modern political thought, and its roots can be traced right back to the debates surrounding

² ² Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2008), 29. The second chapter of Elizabeth Shakman Hurd's *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* provides a discussion of the role secularism plays in international politics and a comprehensive overview of the dominant strains of secularism employed within the international relations community. It provides a strong critique of the dominant ways of conceptualizing the relationship between religion and the secular in international relations, and as such, is a valuable piece to ground my literature review in.

the Treaty of Westphalia and creation of the modern state system³. As such, it is closely tied to the notion of the international system as one consisting of secular, sovereign states as primary actors. Laicism is also, accordingly, the dominant paradigm underpinning the works of most international relations theorists from realist, rationalist, and Marxist perspectives⁴.

Laicism is characterized by a desire to completely remove religion from the public sphere, and thus political life in general. It strictly demarcates what is considered to belong to the realm of the secular and what is considered to belong to the realm of religion. Through this process of separation, the secular has come to be associated with public authority, common sense, rational argument, and virtues such as justice and tolerance⁵. Religion, on the other hand, is then classified as everything the secular is not, namely exclusive, volatile, and dangerous when brought into public or political life⁶. Because religion is perceived as working against rationality and progress in the laicist model, it is often excluded from any meaningful discussion of international politics⁷. As such, when the subject of religion is taken up by scholars of international relations, it is generally considered to be a cover for more basic material, structural, or psychological interests⁸.

Although laicism has been the dominant paradigm used for understanding religion within the context of international relations, closer examination demonstrates the serious conceptual flaws inherent in this framework. First, laicism contains an inherent bias

³ Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, 30.

⁴ Ibid, 32.

⁵ Ibid, 37.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 35-36.

⁸ Ibid, 32.

towards the Western world. When examining the foundational moments of this framework is very easy to see how contingent the development of a laicist understanding of religion is upon the particular social and political context of early modern Europe. The Treaty of Westphalia, which was signed in 1648 and put an end to the decades of conflict that had plagued Western Europe throughout the Thirty Years' War, can be considered the beginning of laicist thought in the European context. This agreement took the seat of temporal authority out of the hands of religious institutions and placed it, instead, in the hands of the princes who ruled over their own sovereign territory. This new arrangement of power naturally had serious implications for the place of religion in European politics, namely that the secularization of the political sphere meant that religion was placed firmly in the realm of private belief and practice⁹.

The laicist idea that religion should be separated completely from the public sphere creates a system whereby all religious traditions and practices are lumped together and then thrown out of the realm of public and political life. When this strict demarcation is created between what is considered to be religious and secular, laicism is clearly limiting the space in which people can discuss and debate the definition and regulation of religion¹⁰. Furthermore, it also creates an inherent hierarchy whereby the secular is given preference over the religious. This concept does not fit well at all with societies or governments in places where religion continues to play a much more active part in public life. A laicist understanding of these societies would read the increased presence of religion in public life as dangerous and antithetical to the establishment of good systems of governance.

⁹ Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, 33- 35.

¹⁰ Ibid, 35- 36.

Thus, looking at the international system through a laicist framework does not allow a full understanding of how non-Western societies and cultures may negotiate the relationship between religious and political life for themselves. If this relationship consists of anything less than a strict separation of religious and political life, negative value judgment is placed against the system by laicist scholars of international relations.

Although laicism has remained the dominant framework for conceptualizing relations between religion and political life in international relations since the early modern period, there is one other strand of secularism that has taken hold in certain parts of the Western world, and which exercises a degree of influence in international relations scholarship. Hurd terms this type of secularism, Judeo-Christian secularism¹¹. In this model, members of a political community agree on a political order, in part, based on the tenets of a shared religious identity or tradition. As such, the Judeo-Christian model accepts the role that the specific Judeo-Christian tradition has played in the development of Western secularism. In essence, it sees the legal, moral, and institutional legacy of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition as setting down the foundations for the development of Western conceptions of democracy and secularism¹².

In recent decades, the field of international relations has seen the end of the Cold War and a marked increase in conflict involving ethnic and nationalist sentiments, as well as religion. This 'global resurgence of religion' has proved puzzling for many scholars of international relations who, because of their laicist understanding of religion, had discounted religion as serving any important function in international politics. Several

¹¹ Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, 38.

¹² Ibid, 38- 39.

key scholars, most prominent among them Samuel P. Huntington, turned to a Judeo-Christian secularist model when offering analysis and prediction for this new global order.

In his seminal article, "The Clash of Civilizations?" Huntington's thesis is that the primary site of conflict in the post-Cold War world will be between civilizations; civilizations that Huntington sees as being bound together largely by participation in a specific religious tradition. When describing the dividing line between the Western civilization (defined primarily by its shared tradition of Catholic or Protestant Christianity), and the Slavic-Orthodox and Islamic civilizations that lie to the east of it, Huntington explicitly links the economic and political situations of each group to a history described almost entirely in terms of their particular religious beliefs¹³. According to Huntington the people who share a common history of Western Christianity are "generally economically better off than peoples to the east; and they may now look forward to...the consolidation of democratic political systems¹⁴." The people to the east and south of this bloc, however, are "generally less advanced economically; they seem much less likely to develop stable democratic political systems¹⁵."

Huntington then goes on to describe the seemingly perpetual conflict between the Western and Islamic civilizations that has existed since the time of the Crusades¹⁶. When characterizing the current situation between the Western and Islamic civilizations, Huntington claims that the primary beneficiaries of nascent democratic openings in the Middle East have been Islamist movements, which he does not look upon in a favorable

¹³ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993), 30.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 30- 31.

¹⁶ Ibid, 31- 32.

light. He states, "In the Arab world...Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces¹⁷." In this way, Huntington links non-Western religious tradition with an inability to properly develop or understand the ideals of a liberal democracy.

Judeo-Christian secularism, while it does provide a place for religion in the political sphere, does not help us to understand non-Western relationships between the religious and secularism any better than the laicist model does. By explicitly linking the development of secularism and liberal democracy to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, the Judeo-Christian model effectively closes off any path through which non-Western societies and cultures can develop their own ideas about secularism and democratic governance. This brand of secularism places the Western historical and religious tradition in a position above that of other cultures and religious traditions.

Furthermore, Huntington and other scholars working within the Judeo-Christian framework actively perpetuate an orientalist framework in their treatment of non-Western societies. By linking issues of democratic governance to the cultural and religious tradition of Western Christianity, these scholars are actively othering non-Western societies. In this framework, Western achievements in the political and cultural realm are lauded, while the apparent stagnation and backwardness of the non-Western, non-Christian societies are viewed as merely a fulfillment of these societies' natural tendencies¹⁸. The only solution in this case is to "civilize" these non-Western societies through an exportation of Western-style democracy and understandings of secularism¹⁹.

¹⁷ Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" 32.

¹⁸ Mustapha Kamal Pasha, "Civilizations, Postorientalism, and Islam," in *Civilizational Identity: The Production and Reproduction of "Civilizations" in International Relations*, eds. Martin Hall and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 67- 69.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Samuel Huntington provides us with an excellent example of this phenomenon when he makes claims about the unlikelihood that Orthodox or Islamic societies will progress beyond systems of government characterized by authoritarian rule. He even remains pessimistic about the likelihood of Western ideas about democracy being transplanted into other religiously-defined civilizations, because the only people to take advantage of democratic openings are anti-Western religious extremists.

Additionally, the political philosophy of Samuel Huntington and others like him view culture and all of its components as monolithic, bounded entities. In Huntington's discussion of the Western civilization and the Islamic civilization, he only focuses his analysis on the interaction between the two blocs. He never mentions any serious internal discussion within either civilization. He also fails to discuss how the boundaries between or within the two civilizations have changed over time. This approach does not allow for any exploration of the debate and discussion constantly taking place within a civilization itself.

For example, when looking at Islamic scholarship in the 20th century, it becomes clear that religious leaders and political thinkers have been engaged in wide and varied discussions over what it means to be Muslim or live in a Muslim society in the modern age. Many of these discussions were sparked by interaction with Western colonial regimes, and the resulting debates have clear implications for relations between the Western and Islamic civilizations. An Islamic civilization characterized by the interpretation of Islam given by Sayyid Qutb would look vastly different than, and have a

vastly different relationship to, Western civilization than one following the philosophy of Yusuf Qaradawi or Abdelkarim Soroush²⁰.

Neither laicism nor Judeo Christian secularism provide a useful framework for examining the place of religion within Moroccan political life. Morocco has not followed the same path towards secularism and statehood that Western Europe has. As a result, it is unproductive to examine the relationship between the religious and the political in Morocco with the same lens used to examine these issues in a Western context. Because traditional analytical frameworks within the international community, namely realism and liberalism, adopt a laicist understanding of religion, they would discount the role that religious resources could play in situations of contested political legitimacy and would instead seek an explanation based on the more "real" material or structural interests at play.

This approach, however, would not be able to offer a complete understanding of the dynamics at play in many of Morocco's struggles over the issue of political legitimacy. When one looks at the political history in Morocco, there is an incredible overlap between religious and political actors from the Sultan down to the local saint cum tribal leader. Thus, issues of religion are included in their decisions just as often, and frequently in a more influential capacity, than issues involving material resources. Furthermore, there are instances within Morocco's political history of actors making decisions that absolutely go against their material interests and prevent their expansion of

²⁰ Sayyid Qutb's radical *salafi* ideology rejects all Western political inventions, whereas the more moderate Egyptian scholar Yusuf Qaradawi sees Islam and democracy as compatible. The Iranian scholar Abdelkarim Soroush sees the human understanding of Islam as flexible and feels that the tenets of Islam can be reinterpreted to support plurality and democracy.

power. When examining these instances, the whole picture only emerges when one takes seriously the religious dynamics at play in the given situation.

This situation is particularly illustrative in the first moment this paper will examine. This moment follows the struggle over succession between the Sa'adian dynasty, the Dila *zawiya*, and eventually the 'Alawi family. In this case, a Sufi institution challenges the authority of the ruling Sultan, whose dynasty drew legitimacy from the claim that they were descendents of the Prophet Muhammed. In the end, it is the Sultan's religious rather than material resources that prevent the Sufi Dila *zawiya* from seizing control

Understanding culture, and by extension religion, as a monolithic, unchanging entity, as do proponents of the Judeo- Christian secularist framework, is also not productive when examining the Moroccan context. It is not enough to merely accept that religion can play an important role in shaping the political life of a society, it is also important to understand that religion's relationship to the political sphere can change and develop over time. In certain moments of contested political legitimacy in Morocco, issues of different interpretations of Islam itself were at stake. Religion has also played a variety of different roles with relation to political life in Morocco depending on the particular context of each situation. In order to see the full picture, it is necessary to utilize a conceptual framework that allows for heterogeneity, debate, and renegotiation within a society's cultural, religious, and political institutions.

In the latter two moments this paper will examine, the renegotiation of Morocco's religious and political playing fields stand at the heart of the struggle over political legitimacy. The first of these moments surrounds a conflict between the 'Alawi Sultan

and a group of Berber rebels led by a prominent *marabout* (saint). In this case, the Sultan's *salafi*-influenced interpretation of Islam challenges the authority of the local *murabitin* (saints). This stance leads the Berber *murabitin* to launch an unsuccessful bid to take power from the 'Alawi Sultan. The final moment concerns the interaction between the 'Alawi Sultanate, the more *salafi*-oriented *Istiqlal* party, and the French administration throughout Morocco's struggle for independence. At the time of this contestation, Morocco was undergoing a period of profound political change, and religion was moving to occupy a new place within the Moroccan national identity.

Theory

There is, however, an emerging trend within the international relations community that offers a framework better suited to an analysis of the intersection between religious and political life in Morocco. Since the end of the Cold War, and as we have entered into a period of increased globalization, there has been an increasing turn within the international relations community towards including discussions of culture and identity into IR scholarship. One of the best outlines for this project can be found by Yosef Lapid in *The Return of Culture and Identity to IR Theory*.

In the opening chapter of this work, Lapid discusses how the concepts of identity and culture have undergone a transformation in recent years. He addresses the static, bounded approach to culture utilized by scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington. Now there is an increasing trend towards understanding culture and identity as fluid, emergent, and constructed. Lapid sees the implications of this shift as challenging old conventions which hold that stable actors work to produce a stable and predictable world. These new

approaches, in contrast, necessitate an increased awareness of the heterogeneity and contradictions inherent in our world and within the international community²¹.

Lapid also sees these shifts in understanding as leading to a re-evaluation of the relationship between international relations and social scientific methodology. For much of its history, international relations theory has been heavily wedded to the "scientific method" or positivist approach to social science research. Moving to a type of IR scholarship more focused on culture and identity has presented challenges to this methodological framework. Lapid views the return of culture and identity to international relations as an opportunity for the field of international relations to move towards new theoretical and methodological approaches that will allow for a greater capacity to deal with the complexity and fluidity inherent in the global politics of today²². Lapid states that this will involve moving away from the emphasis on predictability and manipulability currently present in international relations scholarship, and instead towards an examination of processes and the social construction of reality²³.

The questions that Lapid raises surrounding the increased place of culture and identity in international relations, and their implications for international relations scholarship at large, are certainly applicable to the questions about the place of religion in international relations addressed in this research. The emphasis that Lapid places on acknowledging the heterogeneity present in today's international system present an alternative to the dominant laicist belief that there is only one way to understand the divide between the religious and the secular. Furthermore, Lapid's statements with

²¹ Yosif Lapid, "Culture's Ship: Returns and Departures in International Relations Theory," in *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, eds. Yosif Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1996), 7- 8.

²² Ibid, 10.

²³ Ibid, 10- 11.

regards to moving away from essentialist definitions of culture and identity challenge the orientalist, civilizational approaches that Judeo-Christian secularism promotes with regards to the place of religion in political life in non-Western contexts. The questions posed by Lapid begin to offer a more productive framework for examining issues surrounding religion and political legitimacy within the Moroccan context.

Building upon many of the ideas discussed by Lapid in *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Robert M. Bosco establishes a boundary-focused approach to religion that offers a much more useful framework for understanding the role that religion has played in constructing political legitimacy in Morocco. In his work, "Persistent Orientalisms: The Concept of Religion in International Relations," Bosco demonstrates how current approaches to defining and studying religion in international relations, which focus on finding one essential definition for religion, have led to the perpetuation of orientalist paradigms²⁴. In this situation, scholars of international relations are applying essentially Western definitions of religion to situations and circumstances that involve non-Western societies.

Borrowing from a newer trend in the field of religious studies, Bosco advocates for an approach that views religion as a category used to classify and contain parts of the observable world. This approach is more interested in looking at how the category of religion exists as a way to classify and contain parts of the observable world as religious to begin with. According to this boundary-focused approach, examining what gets classified as religious, by whom, and why, is much more important and useful than

²⁴ Robert M. Bosco, "Persistent Orientalisms: the concept of religion in International Relations," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 12 (2009), 98- 100.

attempting to uncover a fundamental definition of what constitutes "religion"²⁵. Bosco thinks that this conception of religion is applicable to the study of religion in international relations, as it presents an alternative way of viewing religion that is less likely to perpetuate orientalist paradigms²⁶.

Bosco's suggestion of conceptualizing religion as a category offers a much more productive method for studying the interaction between the religious and the political within the Moroccan context than either the laicist or Judeo-Christian understandings of secularism. As discussed above, the distinct separation between the religious and the secular expressed through the laicist understanding of the secular leaves questions about the resources used in establishing political legitimacy in Morocco unanswered. By viewing religion as a constructed category, it is not possible to develop a universal understanding of the place of religion vis-à-vis public or political life. The boundary between the two is inherently contingent upon the social and historical context of the situation that is being examined, and is constantly subject to renegotiation.

A boundary-focused approach opens up space for increased variety in defining the relationship between the religious and political²⁷. By focusing on the deployment of religion as a category instead of a strict definition of religion, religion can mean different things at different times. In this way, the category of religion is understood as tied to shifting historical and cultural contexts. This understanding makes it possible to examine how religious resources were deployed in different ways in specific instances throughout Moroccan history as Moroccan society has been constantly engaging with its own relationship between the religious and the secular.

²⁵ Bosco, "Persistent Orientalisms," 104.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 105.

Bosco's conceptual framework is also valuable in that viewing religion through a boundary-focused approach allows for an increased ability to understand discussion within religious traditions²⁸. In this approach, religion is understood to be a fluid category that is constantly being constructed and engaged with, as opposed a static, closed entity. With this understanding of religion, it is possible to uncover a more complete picture of how different groups within a society can struggle to redefine the specific boundaries of religion in order to achieve their desired objectives, some of which are decidedly political in nature.

In two of the instances examined in this work, issues of political legitimacy were at stake, but so were issues concerning different interpretations of Islam itself. Viewing religion as a category that can shape the discourse surrounding issues of political legitimacy and definitions of political identity certainly allows for greater understanding of the dynamics at play in these two situations. Through this approach it is possible to examine how the struggle to redefine the boundaries of religion in each situation was intimately linked to the struggle for political legitimacy.

²⁸ Bosco, "Persistent Orientalisms," 105.

Empiric Section

Brief Outline of Morocco's Political History

Islam has been a presence in Morocco since the 7th century when the first wave of Muslim forces under the command of general ‘Uqba ben Nafi reached the Maghreb²⁹.

The arrival of Islam had a profound effect on religious and political life in Morocco. To this day almost all of Morocco’s citizens, be they of Arab or Berber heritage, profess to be Sunni Muslims who follow the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence.

In the late 8th century, Idris I arrived in Morocco after escaping the massacre of his family in the eastern caliphate, and established Morocco’s first Arab Dynasty. Idris claimed to be a *sharif*, or descendent from the Prophet Mohammed, a claim which provided him with substantial political legitimacy in the eyes of many of Morocco’s primarily Berber-speaking tribes³⁰. Following the disintegration of the Idrisid Dynasty, Morocco was ruled by a series of Berber dynasties. The Almoravids, and later the Almohads, rose to power primarily through military might and a religious zeal aimed at returning Morocco to a more pure form of Islam³¹. The Almohads were succeeded by the Marinid and later, the Wattasid Dynasties who also drew support from Morocco's Berber populations³². The next rulers of Morocco, the Sa'adian Dynasty, arose from the south and, like Morocco's first dynasty, claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammed.

²⁹ Dale F. Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976): p. 17.

³⁰ Ibid, 18.

³¹ E.W. Bovill, “The Almoravids” in *The Amazigh Studies Reader*, ed. Michael Peyron, 93- 103 (Rabat: Imprimerie el Maarif al-Jadid, 2006). Originally Published in *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, (Princeton: M. Winer, 1999).

³² Vincent J Cornell, “The Logic of Analogy and the Role of the Sufi Shaykh in Post-Marinid Morocco,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 1 (Feb 1983), 71.

Moment I- The Collapse of the Sa'adian Dynasty

Religious and Political Landscape of the Pre-Protectorate Era

Morocco's political situation began to undergo a series of important changes throughout 15th and 16th centuries. The central authority of the Sultanate was not nearly as well ordered or strong as it had been during the previous centuries, under the rule of the Almoravid and Almohad Dynasties. The Marinid Dynasty was in definite decline and under serious threat from Spanish and Portuguese invaders looking to Morocco to expand their commercial interests³³. When the Marinid Dynasty finally collapsed, the Wattasids who succeeded them were unable to keep the same level of centralized control over the country. Instead of ruling like an absolute monarch, the Wattasid Sultan was much more like a patron and protector of the tribes that supported him, gaining their allegiance through marriage and the granting of land use rights³⁴.

In practicing politics this way, the Wattasid Dynasty established the foundation for the political system that would define Morocco until the advent of the protectorate period. This system is that of the *bled-makhzen* and the *bled-siba*. In this system, the Sultanate was not the absolute center of power and legitimacy in the country. Instead it was one of many competing centers of power in the Moroccan political field³⁵. Tribes who swore allegiance to the Sultan, paid taxes, and/or provided troops for the Sultan's armed forces, were considered to be part of the *makhzen*³⁶. Tribes that refused to pay taxes and recognize the administrative authority of the Sultan made up the *siba*. These

³³ Cornell, "The Logic of Analogy and the Role of the Sufi Shaykh in Post-Marinid Morocco," 70.

³⁴ Ibid, 71.

³⁵ Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 20.

³⁶ Waterbury, John Waterbury, *Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite, A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 16, A tribe that provided members for the Sultan's army often received tax exemptions or some other economic incentive as a reward.

tribes could still recognize the religious authority held by the Sultan as a descendent of the Prophet, but remained outside the central government as they would not submit to the Sultan's fiscal or political authority³⁷.

This situation of outside threats from Christian European powers and lack of strong central authority had a profound effect on Morocco's religious sphere as well. For Morocco's rural populations, religion had played a consistently key role in ordering social, political, and economic life. In these societies saints, or *murabitin*, helped to maintain a level of political stability in what is conventionally understood to be an anarchic tribal system of social ordering³⁸. These men (and occasional women), are defined by Ernest Gellner in, *Saints of the Atlas*, as:

“one who is descended from the Prophet...and is thus a *sherif*, is visibly a recipient of divine blessing, *Baraka*, mediates between men and God and arbitrates between men and men, dispenses blessing, possesses magical powers, is a good and pious man, observes Koranic precepts...is uncalculatingly generous and hospitable and rich, does not fight or engage in feuds...³⁹,”

From this description it is important to note that these saints do derive their legitimacy from religious grounds. As Gellner states, the saint possesses a sort of divine blessing, or *Baraka*. *Baraka*, however, is not a static personal characteristic or attribute. The saint has the ability to transmit this *Baraka* to others⁴⁰. This phenomenon places the saint in a position where they are uniquely suited to serve as an intermediary between

³⁷ Waterbury, *Commander of the Faithful*, 17.

³⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 88.

³⁹ Ibid, 74.

⁴⁰ Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 158.

God and the people of their community, passing divine blessing along to their clients⁴¹.

The possession and ability to transmit *Baraka*, personal characteristics, such as generosity and hospitality, and the neutrality lent to their position by the inability of saints to engage in feuding, are all factors that helped saints rise to occupy positions of political and social importance within their communities.

The issue of *sharif*-ian descent also emerges again in this description. Descent from the prophet Mohammed could act as a powerful source of legitimacy for saints, but being a *sharif* was not strictly necessary to qualify a person as a saint⁴². Men who distinguished themselves in the *jihad* against the Christian forces sometimes gained the standing needed to become a *marabout* after successful campaigns⁴³.

Unlike saints in Christianity, these *murabitin* were worshipped while they were still alive, because of their possession of *Baraka*. Before a saint died, he would transfer his *Baraka* his successor. This was usually a close male relative, such as a son, but could also be a trusted friend or disciple⁴⁴. After death, the saint was buried in a shrine and this shrine in turn became a place of worship. Some saints attracted a small following and their shrines are only visited by local communities, while others gained regional or even national recognition.

The situation of weak central control that characterized Moroccan politics throughout the Marinid and Wattasid dynasties created an environment where local saints and religious brotherhoods were able to flourish. For this reason, the period in Moroccan history from the 15th century to the 17th century has been termed by some as the

⁴¹ Ibid, 159.

⁴² Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 24.

⁴³ B.A. Mojuetan, "Legitimacy in a Power State: Moroccan Politics in the Seventeenth Century during the Interregnum," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 3 (Aug 1981), 347.

⁴⁴ Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 25- 26.

“Maraboutic Crisis”⁴⁵. As mentioned earlier, local saints had the ability to draw together people from various tribes in times of trouble⁴⁶. Throughout this era, the Sultanate was unable to face the threat of Portuguese and Spanish invasion on their own, and the local *murabitin* were the ones to organize the resistance movements needed to push the Europeans back⁴⁷.

In addition to local saints, trans-tribal religious brotherhoods, or *zawiya*-s also began to expand their political role during this period. Sufism gained prominence in the Moroccan religious scene from the 13th century onwards, and increasing numbers of Sufi *shaykh*-s began creating their own religious practice and establishing *zawiya*-s through the collection of members⁴⁸. Some of these brotherhoods, such as the Nasiriyya based out of southern Morocco, were primarily concerned with economic interests⁴⁹. These types of brotherhoods generally maintained if not friendly, neutral relationships with the central governing power and did not try to mobilize their substantial membership for the purposes of directly challenging the rule of the Sultanate. They limited their political activities to arbitration in economic issues such as water disputes⁵⁰. Other *zawiya*-s did take on more political roles and in some cases acted as arbiters between the *makhzen* and other local political or economic groups⁵¹. These *zawiya*-s tended to be conceived as

⁴⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁶ Elaine C. Hagopian, “The Status and Role of the Marabout in Pre-Protectorate Morocco,” *Ethnology* 3, no. 1 (Jan., 1964), 48.

⁴⁷ Mojuetan, “Legitimacy in a Power State: Moroccan Politics in the Seventeenth Century during the Interregnum,” 347.

⁴⁸ Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 24.

⁴⁹ Gutelius, David P. V., “The Path is Easy and the Benefits Large: The Nasiriyya, Social Networks, and Economic Change in Morocco,” *The Journal of African History* 43, no. 1 (2002), 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁵¹ Amal Vinogradov, and John Waterbury, “Situations of Contested Legitimacy in Morocco: An Alternative Framework,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 1 (Jan 1971), 37.

more of a threat to the *makhzen* powers, as they had the potential to become dissident and challenge the central government⁵².

Sa'adian Dynasty

Morocco's Sa'adian Dynasty rose to power in the middle of the 16th century. The Sa'adi family had its origins in the village of Tagmadert in Morocco's southern Draa Valley. Over time, the family became known as prominent *shurufa* in the area, and two sons gained additional renown through their success in *jihad* against Christian invaders⁵³. When the Sa'adian leader Muhammed al-Shaykh rose to challenge the Wattasid rulers, one of his greatest claims for legitimacy in ruling was his family's status as descendants of the Prophet Muhammed⁵⁴. This success, in turn, ushered in a new trend of Arab lineage as a justification for ruling power.

This emphasis on religion as a source of legitimacy provided something of a conundrum for the Sa'adian Sultanate in their dealings with saints and *zawiya*-s. No small number of saints or *shaykh*-s claimed *sharif*-ian descent of their own. All of these actors, regardless of their status as Berber or *sharif*, claimed the same legitimacy on the basis of possession of divine grace, or *Baraka*. Thus, it was difficult for the Sultan to attack the ideological basis for *marabout*-ism, even though saints and *zawiya*-s could potentially command the influence, political legitimacy, and sheer numbers necessary to present a serious challenge to the ruling power⁵⁵. As such, tensions remained high between the *makhzen* and popular religious institutions, particularly those considered powerful enough to serve as a viable threat.

⁵² Mojuetan, "Legitimacy in a Power State," 347.

⁵³ Cornell, "The Logic of Analogy and the Role of the Sufi Shaykh in Post-Marinid Morocco," 74.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁵ B. A. Mojuetan., "Legitimacy in a Power State: Moroccan Politics in the Seventeenth Century during the Interregnum," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 3 (Aug 1981), 347.

The Sa'adian Sultanate managed to maintain tenuous control over Morocco's political situation until the death of Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur in 1603⁵⁶. The Sultan's death kicked off a massive struggle for succession between his three sons, which led to a bloody civil war and a crisis of political legitimacy. The conflict ended in 1609 with the Sultan's son, Zidan, ascending to the throne, but much of the Sa'adian's political legitimacy had been lost in the battle⁵⁷. Without the central control of the Sultanate, religious actors, such as *murabitin* and *zawiya*-s, began to move towards a greater assertion of their political power. Of these groups, the Dila *Zawiya* was the one that posed the greatest single threat to the Sa'adian Dynasty.

The Dila *Zawiya*

The Dila *Zawiya* was founded in the 16th century by a *shaykh* named Abu Bakr ibn Muhammed. The *zawiya* quickly rose to prominence, in part, because of their vast pool of human resources. The Dila initially enjoyed the support of the Sanhaja Berbers of the Middle Atlas region and gained more followers as it spread beyond the Middle Atlas⁵⁸. As the *zawiya* grew, it began to expand its economic interests far beyond the homelands of the Sanhaja. At the pinnacle of their economic power, the Dila controlled important commercial centers such as Salé, Fez, and Tetuan, as well as the rich agricultural grounds of the Sais plain and the Gharb⁵⁹. It was under the leadership of Mohammed al-Hajj in the period of 1640- 1660 that the Dila *Zawiya* achieved the height of their political and economic power⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ Mojuetan, "Legitimacy in a Power State," 348.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 350.

⁵⁹ John Chiapuris, *The Ait Ayash of the High Moulouya Plain: Rural Social Organization in Morocco*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Regents of the University of Michigan, the Museum of Anthropology, 1979), 18.

⁶⁰ Mojuetan, "Legitimacy in a Power State," 351.

The decaying Sa'adian Sultanate was not best pleased with the amount of political power that Mohammed al-Hajj was beginning to amass, and felt particularly threatened by his efforts to raise a regular army⁶¹. When confronted by the central government, al-Hajj, realizing the political weakness of the Sa'adian Dynasty, professed his respect for the Sultan's status as a *sharif* but refused to recognize their right to rule on the basis of their failure to establish a stable government⁶². After growing increasingly concerned by the Dila's ever-widening sphere of influence, and blatant refusal to acknowledge their political power, in 1638 the Sa'adian Sultan Muahmmmed al-Shaykh II sent his army to bring the Dila back into submission. The Dila forces defeated the army of the Sa'adian Sultan in the ensuing battle⁶³.

Instead of pursuing a total victory of the Sa'adian forces, al-Hajj backed down out of respect for the Sultan's religious authority. In doing so, al-Hajj gave up the best chance that the *zawiya* ever had of challenging the central authority⁶⁴. By refusing to pursue total victory over the Sultan's forces and instead acknowledging the status accorded to the Sultan as a *sharif*, al-Hajj also allowed the Sultan to hold onto what political legitimacy he still possessed among the rest of Morocco's tribes and continue as the official ruler of Morocco.

This situation is striking because there was a very clear moment when the Dila *Zawiya* had the opportunity to seize control from the ruling government. At the time of the battle between the Dila and the forces of Muhammed al-Shaykh II, the Dila were approaching the height of their political and economic power. The *zawiya* commanded

⁶¹ Chiapuris, *The Ait Ayash of the High Moulouya Plain*, 18.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Mojuetan, *Legitimacy in a Power State*, 351.

⁶⁴ Chiapuris, *The Ait Ayash of the High Moulouya Plain*, 19.

resources clearly superior to that of the decaying Sa'adian Sultan, whose direct sphere of influence did not extend far beyond their southern imperial base in Marrakesh. The sheer physical area over which the Dila exerted influence, in contrast, encompassed much of the central and northwestern part of Morocco and included major trade routes and commercial centers. Furthermore, the military power of the Dila *zawiya* was clearly superior to that of the Sa'adian Sultanate, as is evidenced by the decisive outcome of military engagement between the Sa'adian forces and the Dila.

If political, economic, and military dynamics were the only ones at play in the interaction between the Dila *Zawiya* and the Sa'adian Sultanate, then Muhammed al-Hajj would not have hesitated in pursuing total victory over the Sultan's forces. If this had been the outcome of the battle, then Muhammed al-Hajj would have been able to extend his *zawiya's* control over the areas directly under the dominion of the Sa'adian Sultanate, and he could have replaced Muhammed al-Shaykh as the new Sultan of Morocco. This scenario was certainly within the realm of possibility. The previous four dynasties to rule Morocco had all grown out of militarily powerful, Berber-supported groups. The Berber-oriented Dila *zawiya* could have conceivably followed in the same path. However, when al-Hajj was presented with the opportunity to seize power from Muhammed al-Shaykh II, it was the Sultan's position as Morocco's supreme religious leader, a position he could claim by virtue of his *sharif*-ian descent, which prevented al-Hajj from taking this critical step.

It was ultimately because of the important intersection between religious and political legitimacy in Morocco at the time of the Sa'adian dynasty that it was impossible for a *zawiya* of primarily Berber origins to wrest control of both Morocco's political and

religious spheres from the Sa'adi Sultan. Muhammed al-Hajj certainly carried his own share of both religious and political power through his role as *shaykh* of an important *zawiya*. However, the ascent of the Sa'adian dynasty and their reliance upon their status as *sharif* when establishing their political legitimacy had changed the playing field of Morocco's political sphere. In this new climate, the status accorded to a Berber *shaykh* was considered to be less than that of a *sharif*, no matter how politically, economically, or militarily powerful that *shaykh* was. Indeed, it was only another militarily powerful *sharif* who was able to take command as the supreme political and religious leader of Morocco, and thus bring the country under a more stable central control.

In the years following the engagement between the Dila and the Sa'adian forces, Moulay Rachid of the 'Alawi family from the region of Tafilalt decided to step into the power vacuum left by the collapse of the Sa'adian Dynasty and establish himself as ruler of Morocco. The 'Alawis, like the Sa'adis had already established themselves as an important family of *shurufa* in the south of Morocco before attempting to make a bid for the Sultanate⁶⁵. In 1668, Rachid met the Dila forces and achieved a decisive military victory against the *zawiya*. Rachid then razed the *zawiya* to the ground, effectively destroying their political base, and continued to unify Morocco under his new dynasty⁶⁶. In the end, it was only another *sharif*, a man with the requisite military/political and religious superiority, who was able to succeed where the Dila failed and unite Morocco, once again under a central governing authority.

⁶⁵ Mojuetan, "Legitimacy in a Power State," 349.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 353.

Moment II- The "Berber Revolts"

The Religious and the Political in the 'Alawi Dynasty

The ascent of Moulay Rachid to the Sultanate and the establishment of the 'Alawi Dynasty served to stabilize the Moroccan political system to a certain degree. Even so, the 'Alawi Sultanate from the mid-17th century up through the period of the French protectorate, was still not exactly analogous to the absolute monarchies of Europe or other parts of the world. Throughout the reign of the 'Alawi Sultanate, the fluid system of the *bled makhzen* and the *bled siba* still existed. Furthermore, the Sultan's legitimacy rested on both his ability to serve as the country's undisputed political and military leader, and his ability to maintain the status of Morocco's foremost spiritual authority.

In terms of the Morocco's political situation, upon ascending to the throne, every new Sultan would have to renegotiate alliances with tribal leaders once he came into power, regardless of the relationships these same tribes held with his predecessor⁶⁷. Then, once these relationships were reconstructed, there was no real guarantee that the tribes would stay within the *makhzen* fold for the Sultan's full reign. A good example is the case of Massa, a city in the Sous region of Morocco. In the year 1835, Massa rebelled against the Sultan after an attempt to dramatically raise the annual taxes paid. The people of Massa won a decisive victory against the forces that the Sultan Moulay Abd al-Rahman sent to collect the taxes owed, with the end result being that for the short term, at least, Massa no longer had to pay taxes⁶⁸.

⁶⁷ Waterbury, *Commander of the Faithful*, 17.

⁶⁸ S.B.B.M. Al-Massi, "Massa, Tazerwalt, and Tamgrout," in *The Amazigh Studies Reader*, ed. Michael Peyron, 137- 142 (Rabat: Imprimerie el Maarif al-Jadida, 2006). Originally Published in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, March 1837, 138- 139.

Not only did the new 'Alawi Sultan have to prove himself the new undisputed military leader of the country after coming to the throne, he also had to gain recognition as the country's supreme religious leader. All 'Alawi Sultans carried (and still carry) the title Commander of the Faithful. One reason for this, as has been previously discussed, was due to the Sultan's status as a *sharif*. Additionally, though, when a new 'Alawi Sultan came to power, it was also necessary for him to obtain a *bey'a*, (oath of allegiance) from Morocco's *ulema*, or community of religious scholars⁶⁹. This oath of allegiance served as a sort of endorsement and provided further legitimacy for the Sultan as the foremost figure of religious authority in the country.

Although the Sultan officially embodied the highest spiritual office within Morocco's religious sphere, there was still plenty of opportunity for other religious actors such as *murabitin* and *zawiyas* to exercise their political authority. This was especially true of tribes and communities in the *siba*, who refused to acknowledge the political and administrative authority of the Sultanate.

There are also stories that have become part of Moroccan folklore which feature saintly persons challenging or protesting against the acts of 'Alawi Sultans. The most frequently examined of these is the story of the *marabout* Lyusi and his interaction with the second 'Alawi Sultan, Moulay Ismail. In the story, Lyusi, while staying as a guest in Moulay Ismail's palace, chastises the Sultan for mistreating his workers. The Sultan then orders Lyusi out of his city, and Lyusi goes to camp out in a graveyard, claiming that he is in God's city. The angry Sultan attempts to chase Lyusi down, but the saint draws a line in the sand and when the Sultan tries to cross it, his horse sinks into the ground. The

⁶⁹ Burke, Edmund III, "The Moroccan Ulema, 1860- 1912: An Introduction," Published in *Saints, Scholars, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, edited by Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1972), 102.

Sultan begs for mercy from Lyusi and the saint lets him go after asking for a written record proclaiming Lyusi a *sharif*⁷⁰.

In general though, most *murabitin*, *zawiyas*, and *sharif*-ian families were content to recognize the religious authority of the Sultan and the Sultan, in turn, did not inhibit the actions of saintly figures and religious brotherhoods. In the early 19th century however, one 'Alawi Sultan, Moulay Sliman, took action that ran counter to this trend by directly opposing the Moroccan tradition of saint worship. This action sparked of a set of confusing events that have since been termed the "Berber Revolts" and very nearly resulted in Moulay Sliman losing his throne and his life⁷¹.

Moulay Sliman's Reformism

Moulay Sliman became Sultan in 1792⁷². In addition to his status as *sharif*, Moulay Sliman was also widely respected as a true *alim*, or scholar of Islam. For the first years of his reign, Moulay Sliman demonstrated good relations with important *murabitin* and a general tolerance for his country's *marabout*-ic practices⁷³. In the early 19th century, Moulay Sliman, under the influence of Moroccan pilgrims and ambassadors returning from Mecca, decided to embrace the reformist spirit present in the Wahhabite doctrine of Islam⁷⁴.

The Wahhabi school of Islam is a *salafi* school that advocates for a return to a more "pure" form of Islam, as practiced by the Prophet Muhammed and the first four Rightly Guided Caliphs. Wahhabite Islam takes a firm stance in opposition to any *bida'*,

⁷⁰ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 33-35.

⁷¹ Chiapuris, *The Ait Ayash of the High Moulouya Plain*, 32.

⁷² Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 41.

⁷³ Ibid, 42.

⁷⁴ Mohamed el-Mansour, *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman* (Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England: Middle East and North African Studies Press Ltd., 1990), 141.

or innovation, in religious practice. Many elements involved in Morocco's traditional religious practices, such as dancing, singing, clapping, and the mixing of men and women at religious festivals were considered to be *bida*⁷⁵. As a result, Moulay Sliman wrote a treatise expressing his belief that *marabout*-ic practices went against the official tenets of Islam, and issued a proclamation forbidding *marabout*-ic festivals and the practice of visiting saint shrines⁷⁶.

Moulay Sliman's reformist efforts represented a serious attempt to renegotiate the boundaries of Morocco's religious sphere. By the time Moulay Sliman began to seriously challenge Morocco's traditional religious institutions, the heterodox practices of saints and *zawiya*-s had been the defining fixtures of Moroccan religious belief and practice for centuries. Although the Sultan, as the Commander of the Faithful, had a great deal of religious authority, his attempt to single-handedly alter the contours of Morocco's religious sphere was ambitious.

The saints, *shaykhs*, and other *sharif*-ian families who also occupied seats of religious authority within Morocco's religious sphere were not going to let go of their interpretation of Islam easily. The rich system of Sufi practices that had defined Morocco's religious sphere for centuries all served as means through which these religious leaders were able to assert their political authority. Festival like the ones that Moulay Sliman attempted to cancel were important staples of tribal economies, and the practices of venerating sainted ancestors and passing down *baraka* allowed families to maintain their positions as tribal leaders for generations⁷⁷. Moulay Sliman was not just attempting to shift the religious ideology of Morocco with his turn towards orthodox

⁷⁵ Henry Munson Jr., *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 85.

⁷⁶ Eikelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 42.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 158- 163.

Islam. The Sultan's efforts to redefine Islam in Morocco presented a direct challenge to the political legitimacy and social status of Morocco's other myriad religious leaders.

The "Berber Revolts"

Moulay Sliman's turn towards *salafi* orthodoxy helped to set the stage for a series of interactions that would occur between the *makhzen* forces and a system of Berber tribes, once again, from the Middle Atlas region. In 1818, Boubker Amhaoush, a *marabout* from the Middle Atlas and the *zawiya* of Ayt Sidi 'Ali gathered the Ayt Oumalou and the tribes of Ayt Seghoushen n-Sidi 'Ali and Marmousha to defend their institution of saint worship from the threat put to it by Moulay Sliman. Two other tribes, Idrassen and the Gerwan, who had been co-opted into the imperial army after suffering defeat at the hands of the *makhzen* forces defected as they were unwilling to fight against the *marabout*⁷⁸.

The culmination of this situation was the battle of Lenda, where Moulay Sliman was captured and many of his close companions, including his son, were killed. While this could have been the end of Moulay Sliman, the Sultan's status as a *sharif* was actually enough to guarantee him gentle treatment at the hands of the Amhaoush supporters. The Sultan was released a few days later in respect to his role as Morocco's primary religious leader⁷⁹.

The Berber forces rose again, however, in 1820, and this time Amhaoush was aided by two powerful *zawiya*-s, the Derkawiya and the Wazzaniya, who had been formerly allied with the *makhzen* but cut off ties due to Moulay Sliman's hostility

⁷⁸ Chiapuris, *The Ayt Ayash of the High Moulouya Plain*, 32.

⁷⁹ Waterbury, *Commander of the Faithful*, 27.

towards religious brotherhoods⁸⁰. This insurrection actually attempted to place a new Sultan on the throne. Their prospective Sultan was Moulay Yazid, a relative of the previous Sultan. This revolt ultimately failed due to the capture of the Derkawi *shaykh*. The Derkawi adherents refused to do anything that could endanger the life of their spiritual leader. As a result, Moulay Sliman held onto the man as his bargaining chip. This story ends rather anti-climactically with the death of Moulay Sliman. His successor, Moulay Abderahman, freed the *sheikh* and backed down from the *salafi* doctrines, thus reestablishing the status quo⁸¹.

The example of this particular revolt is interesting because, in this case, the crisis of legitimacy was brought on by the Sultan himself in his efforts to renegotiate the boundaries of accepted religious practice in Morocco. In challenging the dominant structure of religious belief and practice, the Sultan put himself in a position where he was no longer viewed as a legitimate ruler. In fact, his actions precipitated several tribes directly removing themselves from the Sultan's political authority. One would have expected this situation to lead to a crisis of religious legitimacy, whereby the Sultan would have lost his authority as Morocco's supreme religious leader. This, however, was obviously not the case as the rebel forces continued to treat the Sultan with the respect accorded to him as a *sharif* and Morocco's chief religious authority.

The conditions of possibility that opened up during the first engagement between Amhaoush and Moulay Sliman bear a striking resemblance to those created during the conflict between the Dila *zawiya* and the Sa'adian Sultanate. Once again, a primarily Berber supported force was found to be militarily superior to the *sharif*-ian central

⁸⁰ Chiapuris, *The Ayt Ayash of the High Moulouya Plain*, 32.

⁸¹ Ibid.

governing authority. Once again, Berbers from the Middle Atlas region had the opportunity to depose a Sultan. In this situation, however, had Amhaoush taken the steps necessary to pursue total victory over Moulay Sliman, either by killing the Sultan or ousting him, it is likely that a new 'Alawi, one without the *salafi* ideology, would have been placed on the throne⁸².

This result would have been advantageous to Amhaoush and the tribes that supported him as they would have been allowed to withdraw from the *makhzen* completely. This would have meant the return of political autonomy to tribes such as the Idrassen and the Gerwan who had been unwillingly co-opted into the Sultan's forces, and a significant weakening of the *makhzen's* central authority as they were forced to deal with the loss of the Middle Atlas tribes. It would also have meant an affirmation that Amhaoush and his supporters were able to practice Islam according to their own interpretation, without interference from the Sultanate.

Instead of pursuing the more politically-advantageous solution, Amhaoush and his supporters instead opted to keep Moulay Sliman alive and in power. The Berber forces were militarily superior to the Sultan's and it was decidedly in their best interest to allow another Sultan to ascend the throne. In the end, however, it was the traditional interpretation of Islam held by Amhaoush and his supporters that allowed Moulay Sliman to hold onto his position as Sultan and live to fight Amhaoush another day. Even though Moulay Sliman had rejected Morocco's traditional religious beliefs, the tribes who still adhered to them understood the Sultan's power to be both political and religious, given

⁸² At this time, Amhaoush and the tribes he supported were not looking to directly overturn the *makhzen* system. The 'Alawi Sultanate had a perennially contentious relationship with the Berber tribes in the Middle Atlas. For the most part, these tribes did not have aspirations on the Sultanate itself, they mostly wanted to be left to their own systems of governance and not forced to submit militarily or pay taxes to the *makhzen*.

the Sultan's status as a *sharif*. It was acknowledgment of this religious power in the eyes of the rebel forces that allowed Moulay Sliman to escape with his life and throne.

In the 1820 revolt it is more difficult to imagine what the course of Moroccan history would have looked like had the *shaykh* not been captured. Moulay Sliman commanded a more powerful military force at this time, and it is conceivable that he could have defeated the rebel forces outright⁸³. In this case, the political power wielded by Amhaoush, as well as the Wazzani and Derkawi leaders, would have been greatly diminished and the Middle Atlas tribes would have been brought back into the *makhzen*. Had the rebel forces succeeded, however, they would have been able to place a Sultan more sympathetic to their understanding of Islam on the throne who would have enjoyed the support of two popular *zawiya*-s with far-reaching political influence. Instead of taking this risk, Moulay Sliman chose the safer route and exploited the interpretation of Islam held by the dissenting forces to assure his own security by holding the *shaykh* hostage. Thus a tentative stalemate was maintained until the Sultan's death.

It is telling, however, that Moulay Sliman's successor decided to drop the issue of religious reform. Clearly, even though the Sultan was the most significant actor within Morocco's religious sphere, his position was not strong enough to allow him to unilaterally change the shape of religious belief and practice in Morocco. Traditions such as saint worship and the particular practices of *zawiya*-s carried enough political and cultural weight within Moroccan society to stand up and resist change by Morocco's primary religious figure.

⁸³ Mansour, *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman*, 199- 201.

Moment III- Independence

The Protectorate

Morocco's political and religious spheres underwent a massive restructuring simultaneously during the period of the French protectorate. Morocco officially became a protectorate in 1912, but French and Spanish commercial interest had been growing in Morocco for decades before the colonial apparatus was formally established. With the establishment of French colonial rule in Morocco, the old system of the *bled makhzen* and the *bled siba* came to a definitive end⁸⁴. For the most part, the French were much more successful at implementing a central governing authority than any Moroccan dynasty ever had been. In this new system, tribes and religious institutions lost their ability to challenge the central governing authority or to opt in and out of government control⁸⁵.

In this new colonial arrangement, the 'Alawi Sultanate underwent a series of very significant changes. In the Treaty of Fez, the document signed by the Sultan Abdelhafid in 1912 effectively handed over Moroccan sovereignty to the French under the establishment of the protectorate. The first section of the treaty reads:

"The government of the French Republic and His Majesty the Sultan agree to institute in Morocco a new regime that will allow the administrative, judicial, educational, economic, financial, and military reforms that the French government will judge useful to be introduced into the Moroccan territory...This regime will safeguard the religious conditions, the respect and traditional prestige of the

⁸⁴ Waterbury, *Commander of the Faithful*, 35.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Sultan, the practice of the Muslim religion and the religious institution, particularly religious endowments⁸⁶."

This section of the Treaty of Fez is significant in that it shows how the two aspects of the Sultanate, the supreme political leader of Morocco and the supreme religious leader, were driven apart through the French colonial administration. Throughout the tenure of Morocco's first Resident-General, Louis Lyeutay, the Sultanate was essentially stripped of all real political and administrative power. Decisions regarding Morocco's economy, educational system, military, and governmental structure were all placed in the hands of Morocco's colonial administration⁸⁷. In this respect the 'Alawi Sultan became little more than a figurehead for the French protectorate; a way to show that Morocco had not completely handed over their sovereignty to the French colonizers⁸⁸.

At the same time, however, the Sultan's other role, Commander of the Faithful, was not taken away by the French administration. While the Sultan's real political authority was diminishing under the auspices of the protectorate, his religious power, one of the key factors underpinning his legitimacy as a ruler, was being encouraged⁸⁹. The French practice of claiming to leave religion alone, while actively managing political life in Morocco, was to have a profound effect on the shape of Morocco's independence movement and the role of the 'Alawi Sultanate in the struggle to end France's colonial presence.

⁸⁶ C.R. Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830: A History*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 154.

⁸⁷ Waterbury, *Commander of the Faithful*, 39.

⁸⁸ Pennell, 154.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 158.

Islam and the Early Independence Movement

The impact of the French protectorate on Morocco's religious sphere is important to note. As Clifford Geertz discusses in his work, *Islam Observed*, the colonization process was a traumatic event for Moroccan society in that it completely upended traditional centers of legitimacy. When faced with the French colonizers, people who came from a completely foreign cultural context, Moroccans had to renegotiate their own social identity. In this process, religion was paramount. Before colonization, nearly every Moroccan had been a Muslim, but with the arrival of the French protectorate, that religious confession became an increasingly central aspect of identity to many Moroccans⁹⁰. This phenomenon can best be demonstrated in the rise of *salafi* ideology and the Moroccan response to the Berber Dahir of 1930.

Many of the men who would become leaders of Morocco's independence movement began their opposition to the French protectorate with the adoption of *salafi* ideology. As in other Muslim countries, such as Egypt, when faced with the reality of colonial rule and the crisis of legitimacy that it involved, Moroccans turned towards the *salafi* ideology for an answer about how to deal with the colonizing "other"⁹¹. The *salafi* ideology was particularly attractive because its advocacy for a return to a more "pure" form of religious belief and practice that harkens back to the glorious early days of Islam where the Islamic faith and the Muslim people were an unstoppable force⁹². For many *salafists*, their political struggle against the French was inexorably tied up in the rhetoric of religion. It was through Islam, through the words of the *Qur'an*, the *hadith*, and the *shari'a* that these men called for freedom, justice, and self-determination for Morocco.

⁹⁰ Geertz, 65.

⁹¹ Religion and Power 79.

⁹² Ibid.

This rise of *salafist* ideology was particularly prevalent among young men from the urban bourgeoisie class who had the opportunity to be educated in important centers of Islamic learning, such as Fez's Qarawiyyin University, or abroad⁹³. Many of these young men began to reject or criticize the traditional religious institutions of Morocco, the *murabitin* and the *zawiyas*, who had lost power or been co-opted by the French through the process of colonization⁹⁴. *Salafi* ideas seemed to offer a more appropriate way to address the issue of how Islam should be lived and realized in a modern world than the older, more traditional institutions of Moroccan Islam. Thus, the *salafi* roots of Morocco's nationalist movement also presented the potential for a renegotiation of Morocco's religious sphere.

It was out of the minds of these young *salafi* scholars and activists that Morocco's independence movement was born. Most of the early members of Morocco's fledgling nationalist movement were members of the urban elite from cities such as Rabat and Fez. Some of the initial leaders were more attached to the *salafist* discourse than others, and most had historic family ties to important *zawiya*-s or *murabitin*⁹⁵. The nascent nationalist movement grew in Morocco's important urban centers throughout the 1920, but it was not until 1930 that the nationalist-minded *salafi*-s were provided with an issue to truly rally around⁹⁶.

The events surrounding the Berber Dahir of 1930 marked the first time that Morocco's nationalist movement attempted to inspire any collective action against a

⁹³ Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830*, 205.

⁹⁴ Waterbury and Pennell both discuss this issue, detailing how the French colonial authorities, in primarily Berber areas, often granted official control over territory to *murabitin* or the leaders of *zawiya*-s in exchange for loyalty to the protectorate. This was especially true in the south of Morocco.

⁹⁵ Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, 106.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 103.

French policy. The Berber Dahir was an edict, crafted by the French and signed by the Sultan, that explicitly removed Morocco's rural Berber populations from the jurisdiction of *shair'a* law and instead placed them under a system of customary law. For all practical intents and purposes, this dahir just reinforced the existing judicial structure. Berber tribes had long established their own juridical practices and were rarely subject to the *shari'a* courts used by Morocco's more urban, Arabized population⁹⁷. The independence movement, however, saw the edict as an attempt to interfere in Morocco's religious affairs and a move on the part of the French to co-opt the Berber population.

The Berber Dahir was a situation tailor-made to unite *salafi* and nationalist sentiments. Here was an instance where it was very easy to frame the situation in terms of a colonial "them" and a Muslim "us." The *salafists* jumped on the Berber Dahir as evidence that the French colonial authorities were trying to convert Morocco' Berber populations to Christianity, and framed the struggle to get the dahir repealed as a fight for the life of Islam in Morocco⁹⁸. The use of this discourse by the *salafi* nationalists was very effective because most Moroccans were not yet at a point where they could be said to have internalized any sort of Moroccan national identity. In rural areas especially, people were still more deeply tied to their identity as constructed through family and tribal connections than their dedication to the Moroccan nation. The one identity that was shared by all Moroccans, Arab or Berber, rural or urban, was their Muslim identity. The Berber Dahir could be viewed as an assault on this identity, and thus it was easy for the nascent nationalists to rally Moroccans around the cause⁹⁹.

⁹⁷ Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, 103.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 102.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

In order to respond to the Berber Dahir, the nationalist movement organized a number of protests. The most successful of these was centered around Morocco's mosques. The nationalist leaders encouraged the *imam*-s of important mosques to incorporate a prayer known as *latif*, which is most often used during times of great disaster or sorrow, thus elevating the Berber Dahir to the status of a national emergency. The successful protests eventually led to the repeal of the dahir and the unification of Morocco under one judicial system in 1934¹⁰⁰.

The *Istiqlal*

Aside from the successful mobilization around the Berber Dahir, the independence movement was unable to expand their reach much beyond their urban centers of influence. Most of Morocco's primarily rural population was uneducated, deeply tied to their traditional religious institutions, and unlikely to support or understand a more *salafi*-oriented message¹⁰¹. As the independence movement began to grow, they needed to confront these issues. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, the independence movement began to support and establish "free schools." These schools were a reaction to the educational system put in place by the French, in which Moroccan students were heavily discriminated against. In these "free schools" students were taught in Arabic and given basic religious instruction along with their regular school subjects¹⁰². The independence movement also attempted to make their message more approachable by adopting the organizational structure of a *zawiya*¹⁰³. This decision ran counter to the

¹⁰⁰ Waterbury, *Commander of the Faithful*, 46.

¹⁰¹ E.G.H. Joffe, "The Moroccan Nationalist Movement: Istiqlal, the Sultan, and the Country," *The Journal of African History* 26, no. 4 (1985), 294.

¹⁰² Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830*, 186.

¹⁰³ Joffe, "The Moroccan Nationalist Movement," 294.

primary *salafi* philosophy, but it does show how prevalent the Sufi institutions remained within the Moroccan social consciousness and religious sphere.

The independence movement finally coalesced into an official party in 1944. This group, named *Istiqlal*, or independence, began to openly call for Moroccan independence from the French protectorate¹⁰⁴. Unfortunately, their message was still not well-received outside of their educated, urban context. The leaders of the *Istiqlal* began to realize that they would need to change their approach in order to get their message out to a wider Moroccan audience. Members of the *Istiqlal* who worked in close contact with the palace began trying to win the Sultan, Muhammed V, over to their cause¹⁰⁵.

The efforts of the *Istiqlal* were ultimately successful when on April 10, 1947, Muhammed V gave a speech in the city of Tangier where he omitted the customary praise to the French protectorate in his speech, and instead called for a unified Morocco. This move showed that the Sultan had decided to unequivocally ally himself with the independence movement¹⁰⁶.

This action was exactly what the *Istiqlal* needed to take off. While Muhammed V clearly did not possess the political power or legitimacy held by his 'Alawi ancestors, his status as a *sharif* and the nation's Commander of the Faithful still carried a large amount of weight with Morocco's rural, more traditionally-oriented populations. Thus began the highly successful and somewhat unlikely alliance between the *salafi* independence movement and the Sultan whose main remaining source of legitimacy was the *baraka* accorded to him by his ancestry, the epitome of traditional Moroccan religious belief and practice.

¹⁰⁴ Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830*, 264.

¹⁰⁵ Joffe, "The Moroccan Nationalist Movement," 302- 303.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 289.

***Istiqlal*, Muhammed V, and the End of the Protectorate**

Muhammed V's overt support of the *Istiqlal* spelled the beginning of the end for the French protectorate. The French colonial administrators, because of Morocco's status as a protectorate and not an official colony, needed the support of the Sultan to remain in control of Morocco's government. When Muhammed V withdrew his support from the protectorate and granted it instead to Morocco's independence movement, the French began to lose all pretense of preserving Morocco's sovereignty. In this respect, the Sultan's political legitimacy was just as sought after by the colonial administration as it was by the *Istiqlal*.

This situation came to a head in 1953 when the French dethroned Muhammed V and sent him and his family to exile, first in Corsica and later Madagascar. After deposing the legitimate Sultan, the French tried to replace Muhammed V with his cousin, Muhammed ben Arafa¹⁰⁷. Unfortunately for Muhammed ben Arafa, in the eyes of the Moroccan people, he possessed neither the political legitimacy nor the religious legitimacy usually accorded to an 'Alawi Sultan. The French tried to rectify the latter situation by forcing Morocco's *ulema* to provide a *bey'a* for Muhammed ben Arafa, and under coercion, many of them did¹⁰⁸. Several important figures, however, refrained from signing the document, most notably the '*alim* Muhammed bin al-'Arbi al-'Alawi who reportedly said "[ben Arafa] should be killed in accordance with our *Shari'a*, which says that if *bey'as* are made to two *khalifas*, the second one should be killed because he is a devil," when the French authorities asked him to sign the new *bey'a*¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, 106.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, 107.

The opposition to the new Sultan also took a religious shape. *Imam*-s refused to include the name of the new Sultan in the traditional Friday prayer. Some *imam*-s would just say "Muhammed" or cough on the latter part of the name, since both of the Sultans were called Muhammed. Others refused outright to invoke the name of the new Sultan¹¹⁰. Meanwhile, fervor for the return of the rightful Sultan reached almost hysterical levels throughout the whole of Moroccan society. Protests for Muhammed V's return were frequent occurrences. Significant portions of the population claimed to see the exiled Sultan's face in the moon¹¹¹.

Muhammed V had officially become the symbol of the independence movement. The French protectorate administration had painted themselves into a very tight corner. In the Treaty of Fez they claimed to respect the Sultan as the country's primary religious leader and in keeping this part of his legitimacy to rule intact, they were able to undermine Moroccan political sovereignty. When the Sultan withdrew his symbolic legitimacy from the protectorate, they lost all claim to political authority in Morocco. They were unable to regain this legitimacy, even through their attempts to replace Muhammed V with another 'Alawi Sultan. Muhammed ben Aafara was not accorded the same religious legitimacy that Muhammed V was in the minds of the Moroccan people.

In rejecting the French protectorate and granting his support to the *Istiqlal*, Muhammed V was also taking an important step to reassert the traditional political legitimacy accorded to the position of Sultan. The *Istiqlal*, from the very beginning of their dealings with the Sultan, presented Muhammed V as the true ruler of Morocco and constantly called for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy with Muhammed V

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830*, 284.

as king¹¹². Thus, when Muhammed V was allowed back to Morocco in 1955 and reinstated as Sultan, he was able to take the lead in negotiations between the *Istiqlal* and the French colonial authorities. In 1957, Morocco gained independence from France and Muhammed V became Morocco's first king.

When Morocco's first constitution was officially adopted in 1962, by Muhammed V's son Hassan II (Muhammed V died in 1961), it created a system where the 'Alawi monarch was once again presented as the sole legitimate political and religious leader for the country of Morocco. In this constitution, the Moroccan government was declared to be a hereditary monarchy, and specified that this form of government was immune to constitutional revision. Additionally, the monarch was named both King and Commander of the Faithful, thus enshrining the dual roles of the 'Alawi Sultan in the Moroccan political system for future generations¹¹³.

This triumphant emergence of the Moroccan monarchy from the protectorate period was not a foregone conclusion, although the seeds for this outcome were sown in the very first days of French colonial rule. The Treaty of Fez, with its language preserving the traditional religious legitimacy of the Sultanate, left the door open for future Sultans like Muhammed V to realize that an important source for political power was still in place, even though the instruments of government had been taken away from the Sultanate. Had the French decided to make Morocco another department, in the style of Algeria, without even maintaining a pretense of Moroccan sovereignty, the Sultan's religious source of legitimacy would have been cut off as well, and it would have been

¹¹² Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830*, 246.

¹¹³ Ibid, 321.

difficult to find another avenue through which French authority could be directly challenged.

Additionally, it is conceivable that the *salafi*-oriented nationalists of the *Istiqlal* would have decided not to risk an alliance with the Sultan. As mentioned before, the *salafi* nationalists often opposed the traditional institutions of Moroccan religious belief and practice. For all its talk about emphasizing the early days of Islam, *salafi* ideology of the *Istiqlal* was very oriented towards moving Morocco into the modern world¹¹⁴. The *Istiqlal* envisioned a post-protectorate Morocco where the boundaries between religious and political life would have looked very different than they did in the pre-protectorate time of the *bled-makhzen* and *bled-siba*. They did not want to see ultimate religious and political authority vested in the institution of the Sultanate. Even though the *Istiqlal*'s official position was that Morocco should remain a monarchy, their political platform grew out of the ideas of economic and political modernization, including a separation of powers that they say as sanctioned under the *shari'a*¹¹⁵. In the official *Istiqlal* manifesto issued in 1944, the party acknowledged that Muhammed V would become king after independence, but also demanded that he create a democratic system¹¹⁶. If the *Istiqlal* had not pursued a deep alliance with the sultan, this vision might have been realized.

The deciding factor in shaping Morocco's political system post-independence independence was truly the role of the Sultan. The *Istiqlal* needed the figure of Muhammed V, the rightful king and supreme religious leader as a symbol around which the discourse of independence and the shape of Moroccan nationalism could be constructed. Additionally, the figure of the Sultan gave the *Istiqlal* grounds through

¹¹⁴ Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830*, 246.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 265.

which they could directly challenge French rule. By making Muhammed V the symbol of the independence movement, the *Istiqlal* was able to claim that France was violating Morocco's sovereignty through colonial rule, and demand that they return political power to the rightful hands of the Sultan. Muhammed V was only able to be in a position to serve this function for the nationalist leaders because of his traditional religious legitimacy.

When the *Istiqlal* established Muhammed V as the symbol for Morocco's independence movement, they fell into the same trap that the French colonizers did. By allowing the Sultan to maintain his religious legitimacy, they left him in an incredibly powerful position with regards to constructing the boundaries of Morocco's political and religious spheres in the post-protectorate era. Even though the *Istiqlal* was the original political leader behind Morocco's independence movement, by choosing to make Muhammed V, not their own party the symbol of this movement, they left the door open for Muhammed V to assert his traditional legitimacy, which rested on primarily religious grounds. This in turn allowed Muhammed V to emerge from the struggle for independence not as a symbolic figure, but as an absolute monarch who remained firmly in control of both religious and political life in newly-united Morocco.

Conclusion

It is clear from the three moments examined in this paper that religion, and its relationship to the political, has consistently played a decisive role in establishing, promoting, and supporting political legitimacy within the Moroccan context. It was the Sa'adian Sultan's status as *sharif* that allowed him to maintain the throne in the face of

political challenge by the Dila *zawiya*. In the Berber Revolts of the early 19th century, Moulay Sliman's political legitimacy was challenged because of his efforts to renegotiate Morocco's religious field with his *salafi* ideology, but the religious legitimacy accorded to him as *sharif* prevented the rebels from deposing him. Finally, in Morocco's struggle for independence, the *salafi*-oriented independence movement was only able to achieve real support and present a serious challenge to the French colonial authority once they had co-opted the religious legitimacy of Muhammed V. This act, in turn, allowed Muhammed V to emerge from the protectorate era as the supreme political and religious leader of Morocco.

This consistent and profound linking between political and religious legitimacy within the Sultanate, this linking that has now been made law within Morocco's constitution, has serious implications for the way Morocco's political situation should be understood in today's world. In the climate of reform and revolution sweeping through the Middle East and North Africa, it is perhaps tempting to suggest that recent protests by Moroccan youth might gather steam and result in a situation like that of Tunisia or Egypt where an autocratic ruler is overthrown by popular force.

When one takes into account the specific religious and political context of Morocco, however, it appears that this scenario is rather unlikely. When examining the current calls for reform in Morocco, they are just that, calls for reform. There are very few groups that outright call for the ouster of the king. Most leaders of the opposition interviewed claim to desire reforms that expand the role of parliament and other popularly-elected bodies¹¹⁷. There are a variety of reasons why this might be, but it

¹¹⁷ See stories such as, Sarah Rainsford, "Is Morocco Next in Line for Mass Uprisings," *BBC* 12 April 2001, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13054358>

would not be wise to overlook the role of religious resources in examining Morocco's response to the Arab Spring. Muhammed VI's status of Commander of the Faithful continues to grant him a unique place within the Moroccan social consciousness and accords him the respect and reverence of the majority of Moroccan citizens.

Because of the political and religious nature of legitimacy in the Moroccan context, it is much more productive to turn analysis towards how the relationship between the religious and the political can be renegotiated with respect to the current climate of reform. In order for the protesters' calls for democratic increases to be met, the king would have to choose to give up his political power, but could conceivably maintain his religious authority, and thus a significant position of symbolic importance within the Moroccan political system.

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