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The Gender of Sainthood: Moroccan Hagiography at the End of the XIXth Century

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Abstract: How was gender deployed in narrating saints' lives? What does this tell us about the historicity of gender on the one hand, the idiosyncrasies of sainthood on the other? Based on the analysis of selected entries devoted to women in the *Kitāb salwat al-anfās* by Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar Al-Kattānī (d. 1927), the article asks how gender shapes saintly religious authority and how, in turn, saintly religious authority (re-)configures gender. To highlight the complexity of gender in sainthood, the article foregrounds differences within two groups of women saints that are usually discussed in opposition to each other: women saintly fools (*majdhūbāt*) and women embodying more socially conforming expressions of outstanding piety. It will be argued that generalizing notions of patriarchy are inadequate for capturing the complexities of gender in hagiography.

Keywords: Gender, hagiography, Moroccan religious history, archive, sainthood, religious authority

Introduction

This article engages with the topic of archive and gender by reading hagiographic discourse as a source for Moroccan social and cultural history. Instead of simply adding women to existing accounts, gender is conceived here as a powerful yet malleable system of social distinction and signification that plays out differently against the background of a dynamic and competitive religious field. Considering hagiography as a site for the construction of continuously challenged, partly competing yet interwoven forms of individually embodied and socially effective religious authority, I will look at interrelations between gender and figurations of sainthood. More specifically, the article asks how gender shapes saintly religious authority and how, in turn, saintly religious authority reconfigures gender. It will be argued that gender norms in hagiography, while undoubtedly serving as markers of transgression, are not organized according to fixed and clear-cut binaries. Rather, gender in hagiography is intersectional in historically specific ways. The preliminary results presented below thus demonstrate the productivity of including gender as transversal analytical category in the study of Islam in Moroccan history. Building on findings from critical research that has questioned binary interpretative grids like popular vs. orthodox, rural vs. urban, practice vs. text, the critique of fixed and allegedly universal binaries of sexual difference can further complexify our understanding of a historically situated discursive tradition of Islam.

Several studies on Moroccan hagiography have looked at women saints in more or less detailed ways.¹ Most of the time, sainthood in women is interpreted to express either marginalization or exceptionalism. In his study on Sufism and sainthood, Scott Kugle comes to the following conclusion: “The real transgression of saintly women was not to develop an unconventional personal spiritual practice or experience mystical states; the real transgression was ‘to go public’ and enter the public arena of preaching, teaching, exhorting, and being visible. Only by going public did saintly women break all the cords of the safety net of being ‘a good woman’ in patriarchal society.”² Kugle has identified three “themes” applied to women saints in order to “rationalize” (or normalize) their breaking patriarchal norms: to construct a familial relationship to a male saint (1), to claim a spiritual connection to a male saint (2), or to inverse gender roles by masculinizing women saints (3).³ According to Kugle, the latter is the case of the famous *majdhūba* Sayyida Amīna (d. 960/1552-3) buried in Fez whose entry in the source selected here will be discussed in more detail below.⁴ In contrast to Kugle’s interpretation, I will argue that in spite of the generally hierarchic relationship between men and women, sainthood did not reflect universal decontextualized patriarchy. The specific forms of gendered transgression discernible from portrayals of women saints need to be scrutinized more closely in order to grasp their complexity and their significance.

In what follows, I will look at gender as an intrinsic part of religious discourse in general and hagiography in particular. For this purpose, gender is understood not only as a key element in organizing social relations⁵ but also as a “primary way of signifying power.”⁶ In order to put the source selected here to critical textual analysis, I draw on Jacques Derrida’s observations on archive and on Rey Chow’s inquiry into the limitations of wanting to reveal hitherto

1. Like notably Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 81-121; Jilali El Adnani, “Saintes et Majdūbātes,” in *Cahiers de Recherche Centre Jacques Berques*, III (2005): 37-43; Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino, *Fez et sainteté. De la fondation à l’avènement du protectorat (808-1912)* (Rabat: Centre Jacques Berque 2014; EAN électronique: 9791092046175 DOI: 10.4000/books.cjb.498), 478-506. For a comprehensive review of earlier relevant literature, see El Adnani, “Saintes et Majdūbātes,” 37.

2. Kugle, *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies*, 103.

3. Kugle, *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies*, 108-9.

4. Kugle explains the fact that Sayyida Amīna’s story nevertheless continued to be transmitted in hagiographic literature by the fact that accounts of her life link her experiences by way of miracles to the *jihād* against unbelievers (See Kugle, *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies*, 104-8). While Kugle rightly points to the political role played by “saintly fools,” outstanding political bravery and frankness were in no way limited to women (See El Adnani, “Saintes et Majdūbātes”; Abdelfattah Kilito, “Speaking to Princes: Al-Yusi and Mawlay Isma’il,” in *In the Shadow of the Sultan. Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco*, ed. Rahma Bourquia and Susan G. Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 30-46.

5. See Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination Masculine* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

6. Joan W. Scott “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in *The American Historical Review* 91 (5) (1986): 1053-1075; 1067.

concealed truths. According to Derrida,⁷ there does not exist unmediated and so-to-speak transparent access to an origin or original, but rather open-ended processes of (re-)reading and (re-)rendering. It is the inescapably unclear and unreliable character of the archive together with our drive to searching for it “right where it slips away”⁸ that cause the fever or the trouble for which Derrida has coined the expression *mal d’archive*. Thus, breaking the “pact of authenticity” in accessing historical material, Derrida has opened up new grounds for textual analysis. Looking more specifically at the theoretical dilemmas of studying the marginalized “other-as-oppressed-victim”⁹ in a postcolonial perspective, Chow points to the conundrum of representation in endeavors to uncover or resurrect a supposedly authentic native and/or female voice. Building on these critical interventions, instead of aspiring to reconstruct a comprehensive picture of the life stories less so the experiences of saintly women, I determinedly limit the ambition of my investigation to examining the textual production of gendered and gendering forms of sainthood as part of processes of negotiating religious authority.

1. Sainthood and the specter of “Moroccan Islam”

My choice to focus here on a major biographical work by the famous Moroccan scholar and Sufi Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Kattānī (d. 1927) devoted to the lives of venerable persons buried in the city of Fez,¹⁰ raises additional questions as to the issue of critical contextualization – both in terms of historical background as well as in terms of existing conceptual repertoires and paradigms.

As any study on Moroccan religious history, the present article risks being haunted by the specter of “Moroccan Islam.” This is all the more true since it was a figure of sainthood, the *murābiṭ* or rather the *marabout*, that was seen to epitomize the allegedly locked and parochial type of Islam prevalent in Morocco. While dating back to the French colonial period,¹¹ the idea of Moroccan Islam, even when nuanced or partially if not wholly rejected, continues its ambivalent

7. See Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, “Archival Fever: A Freudian Impression,” in *Diacritics* 25 (2) (1995): 9-63.

8. Derrida and Prenowitz, “Archival Fever,” 57.

9. Rey Chow, “Where Have all the Natives Gone,” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory. A Reader*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 326.

10. Muḥammad b. Ja‘far b. Idrīs Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās wa-Muḥādathāt al-Akyās bi-man Uqbira min al-‘Ulamā’ wa-ṣ-Ṣūlahā’ bi-Fās*, ed. Abdallāh al-Kāmil b. Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭayyib al-Kattānī, Ḥamza b. Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭayyib al-Kattānī and Muḥammad Ḥamza b. Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Kattānī, I-III (Casablanca: Dār ath-Thaqāfa, 2004).

11. Alfred Bel, *La religion musulmane en Berbérie: Esquisse d’histoire de sociologie religieuse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Octave Depont and Xavier Coppolani, *Les confréries religieuses musulmanes* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1897); Émile Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l’Islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954); Georges Drague, *Esquisse d’histoire religieuse du Maroc* (Paris: Peyronnet, 1951).

afterlife in studies of Islam in Morocco.¹² Debates on how to deal with the legacy of colonial knowledge production and its post-colonial reception do not diminish – neither in Morocco nor in international academic circles. Re-reading colonial as well as later works together with original sources from different periods of Moroccan religious history in a perspective of *longue durée*, Mohamed El Mansour (2020) pleads for a historicization of findings and paradigms. Focusing on the modern and contemporary period, Edmund Burke¹³ points to the colonial invention of Moroccan Islam. He thereby once more rightly underlines the important role played by colonialism in orienting studies on North Africa. Yet, the metaphor of invention might be misleading here. On the side of the colonizer, Moroccan Islam was indeed a powerful discourse supported not only by epistemic, but also by political, administrative, and military devices. On the side of the colonized, Moroccan Islam took shape over time as an imagined community in the sense of Benedict Anderson's definition of nation.¹⁴ Recent studies based on primary sources have convincingly argued that social cohesion and novel forms of political mobilization before and after the imposition of the French and the Spanish protectorates in 1912 were in effect enabled and mediated through Islamic legal debates and religious scholarship.¹⁵ Hence, from the perspective of social and cultural history, Moroccan Islam has to be understood as a contingent, highly complex and contested phenomenon. The problem thus consists less in dealing with historical particularities than in an explanatory model that, based on essentializing and/or culturalizing assumptions, de-historicizes and de-contextualizes its object of study.

A related question that needs to be at least briefly tackled is the status of textual sources and their interpretation – especially since studies of Islam in

12. See for instance Dale F. Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976); Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed. Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968); Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple. The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Zakaria Rhani, "Le chérif et la possédée. Sainteté, rituel et pouvoir au Maroc," *L'Homme* 190 (2009); and *Le pouvoir de guérir. Mythe, mystique et politique au Maroc* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

13. Edmund Burke, *Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

14. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

15. For instance, Sahar Bazzaz, *Forgotten Saints. History, Power, and Politics in the Making of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Bettina Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2018); David Hart, "The Saint and the schoolmaster, or Jbala Warlord and Rifian Reformer Revisited: Conflicting Views of Islam in a Confrontation and Power Clash in Colonial Northern Morocco, 1924-25," in *The Journal of North African Studies* 6 (2) (2001): 29-60; Sanseverino *Fez et Sainteté*; Emilio Spadola, "The Scandal of Ecstasy: Communication, Sufi Rites, and Social Reform in 1930s Morocco," in *Contemporary Islam* 2 (2) (2008): 119-38; Ety Terem, "Redefining Islamic Tradition: Legal Interpretation as a Medium for Innovation in the Making of Modern Morocco," in *Islamic Law and Society* 20 (4) (2013): 404-54, and *Old Texts, New Practices: Islamic Reform in Modern Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

Morocco tend to be strongly influenced by anthropological approaches that privilege oral forms of expression and observable practices. Anthropological research, as comprehensively explored by Burke,¹⁶ often builds on French colonial interpretations though in critical ways.¹⁷ Drawing on Talal Asad's notion of Islam as discursive tradition set out in his article "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam"¹⁸ proves helpful for bringing texts back in. In this essay, Asad reviews some of the most influential references for studies of Islam in Morocco pointing to the problematic conceptual presuppositions that determine interpretation of motifs, meanings and effects related to religion.¹⁹ In this context, Asad challenges Ernest Gellner's notion of "Muslim society"²⁰ for its mode of interpretation that moves from supposedly opposed preconceived types of social order (urban vs. tribal) to corresponding forms of Islam (scriptural orthodoxy vs. popular Islam) and of religious styles (doctor vs. saint). Another major work from anthropology critically examined by Asad is Clifford Geertz' *"Islam observed."*²¹ In this case, according to Asad, the mode of interpretation moves from an all-embracing worldview and a motivating structure to locally specific expressions of Islam. To put it simply, the main point of Asad's critique is the following: if religion is interpreted to express a reality beyond itself – a specific form of social organization or a worldview – Islamic behavior appears as "*drama*"²² or "*readable gesture*"²³ that needs to be deciphered in light of predefined models of society or worldviews. Asad is equally critical of historian Abdallah Laroui's²⁴ study of Moroccan religious culture in the XIXth and early XXth centuries inspired by ideology critique – again producing a dichotomy between social reality (or history) and religious discourse (or ideology). In contrast, Asad emphasizes the socio-historical and political nature of religion itself. "A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to *a past (...)* and *a future*

16. Burke, *Ethnographic State*.

17. On the reception of colonial knowledge in the anthropology of Moroccan Islam see also Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*, 35-54.

18. Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," in *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, ed. John A. Hall and Ian Jarvie (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), 381-403.

19. Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 395. For other critical examinations of major anthropological contributions to the study of Islam in Morocco see Abdallah Hammoudi, "Segmentarité, stratification sociale, pouvoir politique et sainteté. Réflexions sur les thèses de Gellner," *Hespéris-Tamuda* 15 (1974): 147-79 and also its "Segmentarity, Social Stratification, Political Power and Sainthood: Reflections on Gellner's Theses," *Economy and Society* 9, 3 (1980a): 279-303; Henry Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1993).

20. Gellner, *Muslim Society*.

21. Geertz, *Islam Observed*.

22. Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 388.

23. Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 389.

24. Abdallah Laroui, *Les origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme marocain: 1830-1912* (Paris: Maspéro, 1977).

(...) through *a present* (...).²⁵ According to Asad, there exists a plurality of traditions in or rather of Islam: “A practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims whether by an *‘alim*, a *khatib*, a Sufi *shaykh*, or an untutored parent.”²⁶ Again, according to Asad, “(...) orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power.”²⁷

Building on Asad, Islamic discourse is understood here to consist of hierarchically organized social relations with texts and practices being interwoven in multiple ways. Texts expose and organize the specific cultural as well as social capital of religious scholarship.²⁸ While intervening in contentious debates inside the religious field, scholarly texts also appeal to a larger public they seek to instruct thereby creating bonds beyond the confines of the learned elite. Thus, they create support for socially effective forms of religious authority to emerge across different realms.²⁹ Explicitly connecting and engaging with both, highly complex issues of scholarly concern and widespread practices, hagiography offers itself as an excellent source for studying the intricacies in the making of religious authority. Hagiography strongly resonates with struggles over controlling the mobilizing force of religious discourse in moments of protest and/or crisis in the period under consideration.³⁰ Connecting socially established forms of saintly behavior to scholarly standards of orthodox validity, it played a crucial role in articulating and organizing religious authority. Given the importance of Islamic discourse for the mediation of power in pre-protectorate Morocco, debates about religious authority were of immediate societal and political concern, especially under conditions of colonial expansion.³¹ What is so far largely lacking is a discussion of the role played by gender – not as separate topic but as an intrinsic dimension of Islamic discourse in general and hagiography in particular.

As far as the history of the latter is concerned, Vincent Cornell’s study “*Realm of the Saint*,” based on an extremely rich collection of Moroccan original sources, has powerfully debunked the colonial vision of the so-called *marabout*. According to Cornell, the widespread phenomenon of venerating saints, far from resulting from the resilience of pre-Islamic traditions, was actually part of developments in mainstream Sunni Sufism inspired by the model of emulating the prophet Muḥammad (or the “Muḥammadan Way”).³² Consequently, contrary

25. Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” 398.

26. *Ibid.*, 399.

27. *Ibid.*

28. For the notion of capital see Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 81-93.

29. Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*.

30. Bazzaz, *Forgotten Saint*; Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*; Spadola, *Scandal of Ecstasy*.

31. Dennerlein *Religion als Reform*, 57-90.

32. Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 196-229.

to earlier accounts that portrayed developments since the 15th century as a period of religious decay, Cornell has demonstrated that the emergence and evolution of sainthood and Sufism in Morocco were actually shaped by orthodox scripturalist traditions and supported by a dynamic scholarly network reaching out to the learned centers of the Muslim world.

On the level of concepts, Cornell has identified eight ideal types of sainthood that emerge from hagiographic literature: the *ṣāliḥ* (representing ethical authority), the *quḍwa* (representing exemplary authority), the *watād* (representing juridical authority), the *murābiṭ* (representing social authority), the *shaykh* (representing doctrinal authority), the *ghawth* (representing generative authority), the *imām* (representing religio-political authority), and, last but not least, the *quṭb* (representing inclusive authority).³³ According to Cornell, several of these notions were usually employed jointly to describe individual saints, a fact that indicates not only the complexity and the composite character of sainthood but also the inclusive nature of hagiography as a learned tradition. For the urban context, Cornell has specifically stressed the central role played by the *ṣāliḥ*: “As a member of society, the *ṣāliḥ* is a morally upstanding and socially constructive individual who performs visible acts of piety and works for the betterment (*iṣlāḥ*) of himself and his fellow believers.”³⁴

Over the centuries, the *ṣāliḥ* seems to have continued to represent a key figure of embodied religious authority as indicated by the full title of the source selected here which reads “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās wa-Muḥādathāt al-Akyās bi-man Uqbira min al-‘Ulamā’ wa-ṣ-Ṣulaḥā’ bi-Fās.*”³⁵ At the same time, the spectrum of naming and classifying sainthood varies over time and according to place being accompanied by contentious arguments over the legitimacy of certain types of sainthood or saintly behavior. This situation continued to produce polemical writings on the issue well into the period under consideration here.³⁶ Controversies often opposed supporters of strict compliance to Islamic law and legal scholarship to those who also approved of other forms of discernment acquired by non-discursive means and the specific forms of authority attached to them. A particularly contested figure in this respect was the saintly fool (*majdhūb/majdhūba*) or senseless saintly fool (*majdhūb bahlūl/majdhūba bahlūla*). This figure, whose exceptionality was seen to result from her or his divine attraction (*jadhb*), was closely associated with all kinds of flagrant transgression of legal as

33. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 277-85.

34. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 6.

35. Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*. For a comprehensive analysis of this text see Dennerlein, “Asserting Religious Authority,”; Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*, 171-84.

36. Sanseverino, *Fez et sainteté*, esp. 478-506; Dennerlein, “Asserting Religious Authority in Late 19th/Early 20th Century Morocco. Muḥammad b. Ja’far al-Kattānī (d. 1927) and his Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās,” in *Speaking for Islam. Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, ed. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*, 160-185.

well as social norms – not least those delineated by gender.³⁷ However, as will be demonstrated below, gendered transgression was in no way restricted to specific types of sainthood.

2. Gendered transgression in saintly performances

In order to more closely explore the role played by gender in sainthood, I will now turn to first findings from a close reading of entries devoted to women from the “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*.”

How was gender as a historically situated system of social distinction deployed in narrating women saints’ lives? How did gender (re-)orient readings of sainthood? Obviously, sexual difference was one of the basic forms of hierarchically organized social distinction in pre-colonial Morocco. Moreover, gender clearly determined both access to the religious field as well as the position of venerability an individual could acquire. In the source selected here as in comparable collections, entries devoted to men exceedingly outnumber those devoted to women (50 out of a total of 1881). According to the “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*,” certain forms of authority, notably those linked to formal education in the discursive sciences and/or to manifestations of political power expressed by figures such as the *faqīh*, the *ghawth*, or the *imām*, were apparently unattainable for women. Also, entries on women from the “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*,” while varying among themselves in length between some lines to slightly over a page, generally occupy less than the average space reserved for male religious figures. In addition, women are recurrently portrayed as serving male religious authorities – especially inside the house. Yet, practicing and displaying submission to an established master could also be a means for men as well as for women to enhancing their own prestige.³⁸ Furthermore, patterns of sainthood for women were not confined to roles of serving. As in the case of men, the “*Kitāb salwat al-anfās*” documents a rich variety of figurations of religious authority embodied by women.

Women saints were not a homogeneous group. Entries from the “*Kitāb salwat al-anfās*” clearly indicate a correlation of social status (descent from a venerated lineage as opposed to humble or unknown origin) with specific types or sub-types of religious authority that in turn entailed specific forms and degrees of gendered transgression among saintly women. Women from acknowledged families were more likely to display forms of religious authority that did not openly infringe upon requirements of Islamic law and accepted gender norms. This observation ties in with findings from El Adnani’s study on female saints in Moroccan hagiography. El Adnani has especially focused on the contrast between the figure of *majdhūba* and more sober manifestations of sainthood represented

37. Sanseverino, *Fez et sainteté*, 505-510; El Adnani, “Saintes et Majdhūbātes,”; Kugle, *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies*, 103-16.

38. Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple*.

by learned and/or Sufi women.³⁹ However, specific types of sainthood were by no way limited to women from particular social groups. Moreover, religious venerability enhanced the position of individual women thereby altering their status in society. Differences between women in the religious field are already apparent from the ways in which they are addressed in the “*Kitāb salwat al-anfās*.” Apart from the widely used term of *sayyida* found in a large majority of entries devoted to women, the terms *lallā*, *sharīfa*, and *al-mar’a* also occur. Concepts employed more specifically to distinguish different forms of religious authority range from *ṣāliha* (representing socially constructive ethical authority) and *‘ālima* (representing knowledge in the discursive sciences, usually transmitted by male kin) over *‘arīfa* (representing mystical authority acquired most of the time yet not exclusively either through male kin or through unrelated male saints) and *waliyya* (representing closeness to God) to *majdhūba*. Typically, as is the case for male saints, several concepts are used concomitantly.

As far as the author selected here is concerned, I have elsewhere exposed the dynamic yet meaningfully organized plurality of forms of religious authority that emerges from his work more generally.⁴⁰ Hagiographical and biographical texts in particular, while extensively drawing on earlier sources and following established standards of genre, allowed al-Kattānī to finely nuance and adjust notions of authority cutting across dichotomous schemes such as orthodox vs. popular, refined vs. parochial or reformist vs. traditionalist as they are often applied in studies on Islam and religious scholarship in Morocco. This complexity is mirrored by the profile and itinerary of the author himself. A famous *‘ālim* and *muḥaddith*, Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Kattānī, was born in the city of Fez in 1857/58 into a family of prominent Idrissid descendants from the Prophet Muḥammad (*shurafā*).⁴¹ His father, Ja‘far b. Idrīs, was a highly estimated scholar who belonged to the first rank of leading authorities of his hometown. Al-Kattānī himself, while having been well-connected to a broad range of Sufi brotherhoods both locally and transregionally, joined the scholarly elite of Fez at a very early age. In addition, he maintained strong familial as well as spiritual ties with the influential yet at times notorious *Kattāniyya* Sufi brotherhood but personally stood aside from the political conflicts concerning the latter. Al-Kattānī travelled extensively and spent the last part of his life first in Medina and then in Damascus before returning to Fez shortly before his death. Given the complexity of his profile and itinerary, the image drawn of the author in existing research is somehow contradictory. Characterizations range from representative of Moroccan traditionalism⁴² to early modernist *salafī*.⁴³ In official biographies

39. El Adnani, “Saintes et Majdhūbātes.”

40. Dennerlein, “Asserting Religious Authority”; Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*.

41. On the life and work of the author see Dennerlein, *Religion als Reform*, 127-36, 148-60.

42. According to Abdallah Laroui, *Les origines sociales et culturelles*, 109.

43. According to ‘Abdelilāh Balqazīz, *Al-khiṭāb al-iṣlāḥī fī l-Maghrib: At-takwīn wa-l-maṣādir 1844-1918* (Beirut: Dār al-Muntakhab al-‘Arabī, 1997), 152.

written by members of his family, al-Kattānī is portrayed as both a religious reformist and a constitutionalist.⁴⁴

The text under consideration here was first published as a lithograph in 1316 (1898/1899) only three years after its completion. The full title of the book – “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās wa-Muḥādathāt al-Akyās bi-man Uqbira min al-‘Ulamā’ wa-ṣ-Ṣulahā’ bi-Fās*” – already points to the author’s ambition to give proof of his mastering the refinements of a highly elaborate and erudite scholarly genre. Al-Kattānī is said to have worked on it over a period of fifteen years. As clearly conveyed by the extensive introduction on the veneration of saints, with this book al-Kattānī intervened in ongoing contentious debates over moral decay and “blameworthy innovations” (*bid‘a*). The introduction treats at length earlier discussions on the legitimacy of visiting the tombs of saints and other venerable persons while explaining in detail Islamic legal concerns and rules to be observed on this occasion.⁴⁵ Having arranged the entries according to the location of tombs proceeding from the mausoleum of Idrīs II at the center of the old city, al-Kattānī not only inscribes the urban space of the city of Fez into saintly landscape. He thereby also reaffirms the dominant position held by Idrissid *shurafā’* to which his family belonged. What remains so far unexplored is how gender is deployed in al-Kattānī’s panoply of sainthood guiding its cultural readability.

Entries devoted to women follow the same logic of topographical order and narrative structure as those devoted to men. Generally speaking, the biographical accounts in the “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*” set out a vast conceptual spectrum of religious authority in order to translate popular accounts of all sorts of saintly behavior into the idiom of learned scholarly discourse. Quoting numerous earlier sources, al-Kattānī loosely joins reports and anecdotes about individual figures relaying information about descent, dates of birth and death as well as localities if known. In order to highlight the complexity of gender in sainthood, I will more systematically look at differences *within* two groups of women saints that are usually discussed in opposition to each other: women saintly fools (*majdhūbāt*) on the one hand, women embodying more socially conforming expressions of outstanding piousness on the other. Due to the lack of studies on gender relations and gender ideology in pre-colonial Morocco, gender norms can only be approximately measured against standards of Islamic law as expressed in religious legal texts.

The famous *majdhūba* Sayyida Āmina (d. 1552/3)⁴⁶ shortly mentioned in the introduction, came from a respected family. Reports relate that she has been repeatedly put under pressure by her kin to quit her way of life as a saint and

44. Muḥammad b. Ja‘far b. Idrīs Al-Kattānī, *Naṣīḥat ahl al-islām. Taḥlīl islāmī-‘ilmī li-‘awāmil suqūf ad-dawla al-islāmiyya wa-‘awāmil nuḥudihā*. ed. Idrīs al-Kattānī (Rabat: Maktabat Badr, 1989), 3-17; 19-81.

45. Dennerlein, “Asserting Religious Authority,” 142 ff.

46. Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*, 251.

return to ordinary forms of life. In the “*Kitāb salwat al-anfās*,” she is portrayed as *waliyya* granted with divine chosenness or “distinctiveness” (*khuṣūṣiyya*). In her relationship with her *shaykh*, the *majdhūb* Sīdī ‘Ālī aṣ-Ṣanhājī, she is designated as his servant (*khādima*) and bedfellow (*dāji‘a*). During this relationship, her behavior blatantly infringed upon acceptable social norms in several respects. She is said to have once refused eating a meal prepared by her family throwing it in the direction of a dog to express her contempt for her family’s disregard of her bond with aṣ-Ṣanhājī. On another occasion, her family took her home by force putting her in chains to keep her apart from her *shaykh*. However, upon hearing his voice calling her, though he was far away, she miraculously broke her chains and returned to him. After this manifestation of saintly power, her family is said to have finally left her alone. Al-Kattānī furthermore mentions reports about Sayyida Āmina having exhibited inexplicable bleedings insinuating that they were connected (again in miraculous ways) to *jihād* against the Portuguese. After the death of her *shaykh*, Sayyida Āmina is said to have married her cousin, thus permanently returning to her former life. In this case, as most visibly yet not exclusively expressed in terms of gender, breaking conventional norms can be seen to have marked the passage from the realm of the ordinary to the realm of sainthood. At the same time, in both realms, Sayyida Āmina was associated socially as well as sexually with a male figure embodying the respective kind of symbolic capital in which she successively shared: saintly authority on the one hand, familial pedigree on the other. Besides, the passage from one realm to the other was obviously reversible – with agency being projected onto the workings of divine attraction (*jadhb*) as clearly illustrated by the futility of the family’s initiative to force Sayyida Āmina to abandon her life at the side of her master.

The second example of a *majdhūba* to be discussed here is the entry devoted to another Sayyida Āmina who died in 1750/51.⁴⁷ The “*Kitāb salwat al-anfās*” presents her as “senseless saintly fool” (*majdhūba bahlūla*) and as *ṣāliha*, venerated by the elite (*khāṣṣa*) as well as the common people (*‘amma*). As a consequence of her divine attraction (*jadhb*), she is described to have been seized by “permanent absence” (*ghā‘iba dā‘ima*) exempting her from requirements of Islamic law (*sāqiṭat at-taklīf*). She is said to have exclusively spoken in allusions full of references to the Quran. Moreover, she is portrayed having been able to predict precise events to happen in the future. Women, as well as men, are reported to have passed by to see her at any time presenting their worries. Purportedly, Sayyida Āmina was equally respected by leaders (*ru‘asā’*) who are not specified in the entry. Indicating her saintly behavior, she is described to have sealed herself off from time to time, to have banged doors and uttered curses. In addition, Sayyida Āmina is depicted dressed invariably in a green *qashāba* and wearing a beard (*lihya*) “like (the beard of) men.” As in the previous case, gender here serves as a key marker of transgression ascribed to the power of divine

47. Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās* I, 350-1.

“attraction.” Yet, Sayyida Āmina is characterized by inversed gendered behavior and outward appearance. She seems to have independently incorporated saintly authority without being attached to male kin or figures of authority.

The third and last example from the group of *majdhūbāt* to be discussed is the entry devoted to Sayyida Ṣafiyya (d. 1784).⁴⁸ Sayyida Ṣafiyya is presented as *al-mar'a aṣ-ṣāliḥa al-waliyya al-fāliḥa al-majdhūba as-sālika*, thereby blending rather heterogeneous forms of ethical authority with closeness (to God) and blessedness as well as with attraction (to God) and progression on the path (of the Sufi towards higher states). It is reported that before being attracted, Sayyida Ṣafiyya lived from manufacturing small prayer rugs – a fact designating both humble origin and self-reliance. After experiencing *jadhb*, Sayyida Ṣafiyya started to utter senseless sounds and ended up quitting her commercial activities in the centre of Fez. Upon returning to the city, she is said to have spoken alternately in comprehensible and incomprehensible ways. She began to uncover her private parts and got herself a dog – both blatant infringements upon social and Islamic legal norms. Yet, according to reports, no one took offence with her conduct. In addition to predicting the future, she is described as having frankly and fearlessly rebuked not only the ‘*ulamā*’ of her time but also the sultan for policing religious scholarship as well as for other injustices. According to the “*Kitāb salwat al-anfās*,” Sayyida Ṣafiyya was equally known for her nocturnal disturbances preventing people from sleep – indicating by the same token her own habit of renouncing any convenience. In this case again, divine attraction and passage to the realm of sainthood are marked by transgressing gender norms. At the same time, Sayyida Ṣafiyya is depicted as *sālika* – a notion strongly resonating with the voluntarism of the “Mysticism of personality” as defined by Annemarie Schimmel⁴⁹ suggesting her active involvement in spiritual advancement. No attachment to a male master or a saint is mentioned. The socially constructive dimension of sainthood embodied by Sayyida Ṣafiyya is most clearly expressed by her outstanding courage to fault the powerful. Even if admonishing the ruler was a trope in Moroccan reports on saints,⁵⁰ the gendered and sexualized forms of transgression of *majdhūbāt* can also be read to more specifically mirror moments of socio-political turmoil.⁵¹

The complexity of configurations of gender in sainthood is just as clear when looking at different examples from the second group of women saints who at first sight displayed more socially conforming forms of piousness.

Coming from a well reputed family, ‘Ā’isha bint ‘Alī Būnāfi’ (d. 1763/1764), married to a *mu’adhdhin* of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque and mother of his sons,

48. Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās* II, 13-14.

49. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen des Islam. Die Geschichte des Sufismus* (Köln: Diederichs, 1985), 18-9.

50. Kilito, “Speaking to Princes.”

51. El Adnani, “Saintes et Majdhūbātes,” 39-41.

is presented as *al-‘ālima as-sayyida*.⁵² She is described as having been of high morality (*akhlāq*), treating her husband softly. Her enduring character and quietness are specifically underlined. She is said to have patiently and without complaint borne the loss of close kin (her mother, children, and an uncle). The “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*” mentions that she devoted most of her time to practicing remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and reading the Quran. It is related that she visited highly esteemed scholars of her time and participated in their learned circles (*majālis*). Towards the end of her life, she purportedly engaged in ceaseless ablution and prayer – either at Qarawiyyīn or at the grave of Mawlay Idrīs II. In this case, religious venerability played out partly in the realm of everyday life and largely in conformity with more conventional gender norms. Passage from the realm of the ordinary to the realm of sainthood is marked less by transgression than by mitigation. Outstanding piousness and knowledge in the discursive sciences (*‘ilm*) seem to have allowed expanding the perimeters of acceptability as expressed in Sayyida ‘Ā’isha’s devotion to reading the Quran, studying and practicing *dhikr*.

Illustrating intrinsic tension between conventional norms and sainthood, the next example sheds further light on the workings of gender in socially conforming outward behavior of women saints. Sayyida Fāṭima whose date of death is said to be unknown is presented in the “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*” as *al-mar’a al-waliyya aṣ-ṣāliha adh-dhakiyya*, thereby combining closeness to God with ethical authority and intelligence.⁵³ Sayyida Fāṭima is further accredited with belonging to the category of *ṣāliḥāt ‘arifāt* insinuating her advanced knowledge of things beyond the reach of discursive or text-based forms of cognition (i.e. higher truths). At the same time, Sayyida Fāṭima is described as having shown special reverence to her husband and as having been eager to fulfill his wishes and cater for his demands. Her fame as a saint is mainly based on a report attributed to the saint and Sufi Sīdī Ibrāhīm az-Zawāwī (d. 1553/1554). According to this report, az-Zawāwī once fell ill on a journey from Tunisia to Morocco. On his sickbed, by way of miracle (*‘alā sabīl kharaj al-‘āda*), Sayyida Fāṭima appeared to him. She cured him and, upon being asked by him, told her name and place of residence. On a later visit to Fez, az-Zawāwī went to her dwelling and knocked on her door wanting to find out about her. Sayyida Fāṭima opened and let him in. As guest in her house, az-Zawāwī witnessed her serving her husband, wearing typical women’s clothes, and being excessively dedicated to carrying out her everyday duties. Astonished by this behavior, az-Zawāwī asked her how she could possibly be distinguished by what God has awarded her (meaning her power to appear in faraway places and to heal sick persons) while living her life as she did. Sayyida Fāṭima is recounted to have replied that serving her husband’s right (*ḥaqq az-zawj*) was part of serving God’s right (*ḥaqq allāh*). In this case, the performance

52. Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās* II, 211-2.

53. Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās* I, 153-4.

of saintly power through miracles was accompanied by ostentatious obedience to established gender norms in executing exigencies of normal life. However, for the latter behavior to become readable as an expression of sainthood obviously required elucidation.

Other examples from the same group of women saints highlight the ambiguous and potentially transgressive nature of executing duties apparently sanctioned by conventional conduct. This is the case of the entry devoted to Sayyida ‘Ā’isha bint Shaqrūn al-Fakhkhār (d. 1647).⁵⁴ Sayyida ‘Ā’isha’s pedigree is discernable by the fact that her close kin including her mother, but also her husband, her son, and one of her daughters are likewise mentioned in the “*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*.” A bearer of blessedness (*baraka*) and endowed with honorable morals (*akhlāq karīma*), Sayyida ‘Ā’isha is said to belong to the *ṣāliḥāt qānitāt*, thus stressing her ethical authority combined with firm obedience to God. The entry devoted to her specifies that Sayyida ‘Ā’isha treated her parents and the companions of her husband with utmost respect and only spoke to tell the truth. Reports recount that she cooked in a tiny used pot from which she fed all members of the household as well as guests. Never did she change the pot or prepare more than it could contain. Moreover, she would not allow anyone else to cook. Her husband is reported to have once suggested that he hire a servant to assist her but she continued as she did before. In this case again it is not transgression but a specific move to tweak gender norms as defined by social status that mark Sayyida ‘Ā’isha’s leaving the realm of ordinary life behind. In addition, providing miraculously abundant food in unassisted ways can be seen to re-code the activity of cooking transposing it into the realm of sainthood.

Yet a different example is the case of another saint known as Sayyida Ṣafiyya (d. 1681/1682). While being described as particularly well-behaved, modest, and chaste,⁵⁵ Sayyida Ṣafiyya is also said to have exemplified *murū’a* – chivalry or distinctive sense of honor, usually attributed to men expressing an ideal of manliness often directly linked to power.⁵⁶ It is reported that Sayyida Ṣafiyya once noticed a stranger who had intruded into her house gazing at her. She right away cursed him to go blind and, according to transmitted accounts, he indeed did go completely blind only a few days later. The entry clarifies that this episode counts among the miracles Sayyida Ṣafiyya has performed. Apart from that, Sayyida Ṣafiyya is described as having spent her life remote from everything familiar or convenient (*māalūf*) to ordinary people – most notably from marriage and childbirth. The notion of remoteness from what is usually considered convenient (*māalūf*) resonates with descriptions of Sufi exercises of self-disciplining by relinquishing conventional forms of conduct and comfort. In

54. Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās* II, 329-30.

55. Al-Kattānī, *Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās* II, 332.

56. Bichr Farès, “Murū’a,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), Consulted online on January 17 2020. URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5555

this case, typically female characteristics such as modesty and decency combined with *murū'a* and renouncing marriage and childbirth as self-imposed practice mark Sayyida Ṣafīyya off from the realm of ordinary life. Differently gendered qualities are merged and re-coded in narrating her life to reflect specific features of sainthood.

The last and, at the same time, least spectacular example from the second group of women saints is the entry devoted to Sayyida Āmina bint Sīdī 'Abdarrahmān al-Fāsī al-Fihri (d. 1722). Belonging to one of the most renowned families of her native town, Sayyida Āmina is depicted as *aṣ-ṣāliḥa al-baraka al-qānita dhāt al-'aql wa-z-zuhd* – merging exemplarity with charisma, piousness, reason and abstention. She is portrayed as having been uninterruptedly occupied by acts of piety and as having devoted most of her time to remembering God. Equipped with large prayer beads, Sayyida Āmina is reported to have followed the rites of the most recognized Sufi masters inspired by al-Jilānī, Ibn Mashīsh and ash-Shādhilī. She is said to have exclusively assembled female followers. Having herself only rarely spoken, she ordered her followers away when they spoke too much. In this case, displaying exceptional piousness did not openly infringe upon established standards of acceptability. Yet, voluntary abstention and being unremittingly involved in religious duties clearly set Sayyida Āmina apart from gendered routines of ordinary life. Thus, facets of conventional behavior like gender segregation as indicated by her uniquely female following can be read to have been geared towards requirements of the kind of saintly authority she was seen to embody.

Concluding remarks

Despite the obvious existence of strict hierarchies between men and women, the close reading of entries devoted to women saints from the "*Kitāb Salwat al-Anfās*" shows that gender in hagiography is not limited to reflecting generalizable patriarchal norms. It therefore seems insufficient to interpret saintly women simply as expressing marginalization or exceptionality. Also, transgression in the case of women saints cannot be reduced to violating immovable gender norms. While marking and upholding social hierarchies, gender appears itself to be modulated not only by social status but also by figurations of sainthood. The role played by gender norms in sainthood is multidimensional. Gendered transgression is differently expressed and narrated reflecting the complexities of the realm of sainthood as well as of social structures more generally. As a system of signifying relations of power, gender serves to negotiate different kinds of contested and shifting boundaries beyond sexual difference – including those between saintly performance and ordinary life, between legitimate and non-legitimate figurations of religious authority, and between social groups. At the same time, the variety and fluidity of gendered behavior allows for multifaceted and ambiguous figurations of sainthood that can be read and appropriated in different ways. Accordingly, gender in Islamic discourse needs to be contextualized and understood as

historically situated and malleable. In this respect, results presented here also speak to discussions on the role played by gender in the pre-colonial Muslim world more broadly – discussions that often revolve around the highly contested and politicized issues of sexuality or sexual identity.⁵⁷

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العنوان: النوع الاجتماعي للولاية. الهاجيوغرافيا (علم الأنساب) في المغرب عند نهاية القرن التاسع عشر

ملخص: كيف تم استخدام النوع في الحديث عن سيرة حياة الأولياء؟ ماذا يجربنا ذلك عن تاريخية النوع من ناحية، وخصائص الولاية من ناحية أخرى؟ بناء على تحليل مجموعة مختارة من المقالات المخصصة للمرأة في كتاب سلوة الأنفاس لمحمد بن جعفر الكتاني (توفي عام 1927)، يدرس المقال كيفية تشكيل النوع لتجربة الولاية وكيفية تأثير تجربة الولاية بدورها بتشكيل النوع. ولتسليط الضوء على تعقيد النوع في حقل الولاية، يوضح المقال الاختلافات الموجودة داخل مجموعتين من صلحاء النساء اللواتي عادة ما يتم فحص حالتهن في معارضة لبعضهن البعض: المجذوبات والنساء اللواتي يجسدن تعابير التقوى أكثر تمشياً مع مطالب المجتمع. ويمكن القول إن المفاهيم غير الواقعية للنظام الأبوي تظل عاجزة عن فهم تعقيدات النوع في الهاجيوغرافيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النوع الاجتماعي، الهاجيوغرافيا (علم الأنساب)، التاريخ الديني المغربي، الأرشيف، الولاية، السلطة الدينية

Titre: Le genre de la sainteté: L'hagiographie marocaine à la fin du XIX^{ème} siècle

Résumé: Comment le genre a-t-il été déployé dans la narration de la vie des saints? Qu'est-ce que cela nous apprend sur l'historicité du genre d'une part, et les particularités de la sainteté d'une autre? En se basant sur l'analyse d'une sélection d'articles consacrés aux femmes dans le *Kitāb salwat al-anfās* par Muḥammad b. Ja'far Al-Kattānī (d. 1927), l'article analyse la manière dont le genre façonne les expressions de la sainteté et comment, à son tour, la sainteté (re)configure le genre. Pour mettre en évidence la complexité du genre dans le champ de la sainteté, l'article met l'accent sur les différences au sein de deux groupes de femmes saintes qui sont généralement examinées en opposition les unes aux autres: les saintes folles (*majdhūbāt*) et les femmes incarnant des expressions de piété plus conformes à la société. On montrera que la généralisation des notions de patriarcat ne permet pas de saisir les complexités du genre dans l'hagiographie.

Mots-clefs: Genre, hagiographie, histoire religieuse marocaine, archives, sainteté, autorité religieuse